The Handweavers of Modern-Day Southern Appalachia: An Ethnographic Case Study

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The Handweavers of Modern-Day Southern Appalachia: An Ethnographic Case Study

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Department of Appalachian Studies East Tennessee State University In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Appalachian Studies

by Cathryn Washell December 2016

Ron Roach, PhD., Chair Tess Lloyd, PhD. Patricia Mink, MFA

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ABSTRACT

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by

Cathryn Washell

One of the most prominent traditions associated with the Southern Appalachians is the art of weaving. Extensive research has focused on the history of Appalachian weaving, but there is little on the current weaving community. Today, the region still serves as an axis for weaving, and many practicing weavers, weaving instructors, and learning institutions can be found in Southern Appalachia. The core of this study is the interviews with ten weavers that reside and practice their work in Appalachia. Using concept coding, the transcripts of the interviews led to the development of four major themes that highlight the weavers’ discovery of their weaving passion, what continues to be a source of motivation for weaving, how today’s weavers use weaving as a source of income, and how weaving continues to be deeply connected to Southern Appalachia’s art and craft making traditions.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the past, present, and future weavers of Southern Appalachia.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the participants of this study, who took the time to share their passion for weaving with me. Edwina Bringle, Karen Donde, Jessica Green, Sharon Grist, Pam Howard, Jo-Marie Karst, Susan Leveille, Barbara Miller, Tommye Scanlin, and Jan Turner—this work would be nonexistent if it were not for your insightful contributions. I would also like to thank Cassie Dickson and MaryGrace Walrath, two weavers who, while not participants of this study, have discussed weaving with me and given me a better understanding of the craft. Not only have you all helped this work come to fruition, but you have all helped make me the weaver and fiber artist I am today.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For over a century, the Southern Appalachian region has been linked to the practice of a range of arts and crafts, weaving being one of the most prominent. Weaving in Appalachia rests on the shoulders of the people who wove in their homes even though mill-produced fabric became accessible throughout the mountains by the mid-nineteenth century, and also benefitted from the involvement of mountain workers who saw economic and aesthetic value in the art of weaving in the late nineteenth century. This tradition continued to evolve as women, children, and men took up weaving as a way of supporting their families in the early twentieth century, and adapted to changing times and different needs in the hands of the many artists and craftspeople that have worked as weavers and instructors in the region throughout the twentieth century to today.

According to the author and leading figure in the Appalachian crafts revival, Allen Eaton, “handspinning and weaving were at the foundation of the revival of handicrafts in the Southern Highlands” (92). Weaving certainly captured the attention of many missionary women, who, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, developed cottage industries and sought ways to market woven goods to buyers living outside the region. The cottage industries have come and gone, with art and studio craft-oriented schools, regional colleges, universities, and guilds providing weaving education, networking, and selling opportunities. To this day, weavers continue to recreate old patterns and innovate with new designs, as well as generously sharing their knowledge with those who wish to learn more about the art. Just as the
generosity of past weavers in the region led to the recurring successes of the region’s various weaving revivals, weavers today continue to spread their passion, imbuing local communities with artistry and fine craftsmanship as well as bringing new weavers into the fold. Weavers continue to be driven to work away on their looms, and to share their successes, discoveries, and learning experiences with their community, just as weavers have done for generations.

As a fiber artist and weaver, I have read with great interest about the history and development of the weaving revival of the early twentieth century with the hopes discovering the voices of the people, predominantly women, who wove to support their families, providing their children with clothing and higher education through their weaving skills. It was the lives of these women I wanted to learn the most about, specifically about their experiences as weavers in their own words. Many of the resources available focused more on the leaders in the craft revival movement—those who established the weaving centers and cottage industries and tapped into the growing consumer demand for quality handmade goods. While their history is indeed very important, I was disappointed to find that there was not as much devoted to the lives of the many weavers who worked for the cottage industries and weaving centers and had made the Southern Appalachians known for its handmade textiles. Two major exceptions were the works of Philis Alvic and Kathleen Curtis Wilson, who interviewed handweavers and the descendants of handweavers, who in turn provided a rich and nuanced historical look at handweaving in Southern Appalachia.

After learning what I could about the early weavers of the region, I reflected on the current state of weaving in the region. I have had the opportunity to learn how to weave from
those who practiced the art in Southern Appalachia. This region is home to many people who continue to create through weaving and share their passion with others who carry on the craft. This realization has sparked a desire to document the living, breathing weaving community that still makes artistic and economic contributions to the region. The thesis uses an ethnographic case study approach to develop an understanding of today’s handweaving community in Southern Appalachia.

One of the first challenges of the study was to answer the question, who are the handweavers of modern-day Southern Appalachia? Handweavers in the region are professional artists and craftspeople who regularly sell their work as well as people who weave purely for the enjoyment of it. In between, there is a range of people whose weavings provide some form of income. Weavers can be self-taught, or learn from friends, family, workshops, local guilds, craft schools, or universities. Many weavers may have received education from a number of different sources and instructors. Some weavers might focus on more historically traditional designs, while others create more contemporary works. There are weavers who are native to the region, and others who are transplants. Depending on these different elements and more, a weaver may have drastically different reasons behind their work and experiences.

All the participants in this study reside in the Southern and South Central Appalachian subregions as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission. In particular, the participants live in northeast Georgia, western North Carolina, and northeast Tennessee, areas which have especially strong historical connections to earlier weaving revivals. Although all the participants
are weavers, their roles as weavers and their involvement with their communities vary, which leads to a variety of perspectives on the craft.

**Research Objectives**

The goal of my work is to illuminate how handweavers of modern Appalachia define their own work, their values, and their role in the community. Specifically, this study is designed around four research questions: What is it that motivates and inspires people to weave, and in what way does it give meaning or add benefit to their lives? How do weavers define their work and what does it mean to be a weaver in Southern Appalachia? What are the issues they deal with, and in what ways is the weaving community today different or similar to the weaving community of yesteryear? What role does weaving play in Appalachia today?

Because the participants are experts on their own lived experiences, this study emphasizes their words and provides direct quotes from the participants’ interviews to illustrate the themes presented in the study. Much of the research done on weaving in Appalachia revolves around the historical weaving of the region, particularly revival weaving, and many primary sources are advertisements and other forms of promotional material. Letters, journal entries, and interviews provide much more nuanced glimpses into the lives of past weavers in Southern Appalachia. Today’s handweavers have multiple outlets through which they can share their views about their own work, especially if they have internet access. However, while websites, blogs, and social media provide opportunities for weavers to share their experiences, interviewing allows me to learn from weavers who may not have a strong online presence.
Interviews with weavers of the Appalachian region will shed light on weavers’ lived experiences, their thoughts and ideas about weaving, and their values as handweavers. I have taken an ethnographic approach, and along with the interviews, have supplemented my research with data collection from site visits and weaving-related texts, such as books, pamphlets, websites, blogs, and other resources handweavers regularly use.

From January to March, 2016, I interviewed weavers across the Southern Appalachian region, focusing primarily on western North Carolina, north Georgia, and east Tennessee, which, as noted above, is the region with the most historical connection to the weaving revivals and which to this day is home to many weavers and other artists and craftspeople. The interviews were approximately sixty to ninety minutes long and were semistructured. This interview style has a mix of structured questions that are flexibly worded (Merriam 90). There were questions that I felt were relevant to my research, but since my focus is on the individual weavers I wanted to provide enough space for them to provide insights and guide the interview in a way that best suits their own experiences. The aim is for the interview questions was to serve as jumping-off points from which the participants could delve further into their lives and relationship with weaving. The interview guide was only to provide focus, and the interviews themselves veered somewhat away from the guide when participants brought up noteworthy topics that were not covered in the guide (Seidman 94).

After interviewing and transcribing, I then began the process of coding. Because of my lack of experience with CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis) coding, which uses computer software to organize and filter codes, I relied on manual coding and using
Microsoft Word for my data analysis (Saldaña 29). The coding process enabled me to determine core beliefs, experiences, and ideas within the weaving community.

One factor that helped me greatly in my research is my own experience as a weaver and textile artist in the Appalachian region. I received my B.A. in Studio Art with a focus in textiles from the University of North Georgia in 2010. I therefore have an understanding of the processes of weaving, dyeing, handspinning, and numerous other textile-related skills. I am already familiar with the technical language surrounding each field. Most importantly, I am already acquainted with textile artists in the region who have provided assistance with my thesis, both through interviews and by serving as informal gatekeepers to other weavers. My experiences make me straddle between the emic and etic; emic from my own past involvement with the community, and etic because of the role of researcher that I am now adopting (Merriam 29; Creswell 92).

Also, the inspiration for my thesis has stemmed from my own experiences as a textile artist. I have witnessed firsthand the way people perceive weaving and other fiber arts to be more suited to craft rather than art. As a demonstrator, visitors have consistently referred to my work as a “dying art,” though considering my own age and my experiences with and observations of the weaving community I hardly think weaving and other traditional arts will die out anytime soon. I believe it is important to document the living and thriving handweaving community in Southern Appalachia, which may help to sever handweaving’s perception as a dying art.

At the onset of the study I believed that weavers would tend to lean towards either creating contemporary or historically-based work, and depending on those demographics, would
have very different experiences. Contemporary weavers would deal more with the hierarchical structure between art and craft, struggling with their work being viewed as not-quite-art and not-quite-craft. Weavers who create works with more historical influence would instead face more of the narrative that has developed surrounding the Appalachian weaving revival, in which they are viewed as carrying on an unbroken mountain tradition.

Of particular interest was whether the three goals of the settlement workers that Philis Alvic identified—preservation of weaving, income for mountain women, and character development—still resonate with today’s weavers. Although these goals, particularly the goal to improve the character of mountain women, reveal the paternalistic and elitist mindset that many missionary women had, they still made an impact on the development of weaving in the region. I have revisited these goals almost a century later to see how the role of handweaving in Appalachia has evolved since the missionary-led weaving revival.

Concerning the divide between historic weaving and contemporary weaving, as well as the divide between art and craft, the participants’ interviews were far more nuanced and reflected more of a gradient than a binary. The distinction between the two categories is one that many of the participants did not seem overly concerned about. Rather than focusing on semantic musings, weavers would rather be deeply engaged in creating, regardless of what the end product may be categorized as. Throughout the study I refer to the “art” of weaving and the “craft” of weaving interchangeably, because weaving can simultaneously occupy both categories quite comfortably. As for the goals of the settlement workers—preserving weaving, deriving income from weaving, and using weaving for personal growth—these same goals have persisted, though maybe evolved
to better suit today’s weavers. For example, saying modern weavers are preserving handweaving is not quite accurate—rather, weavers continue to breathe life into the craft. In fact, a closer look at weaving’s history shows that while certain things remain the same, the purposes of weaving and the weavings themselves have always been adapted to suit the needs of each generation.

There were a few setbacks I encountered when carrying out my work. Interviewing people across three states necessitated transportation, which quickly becomes costly. I made my best attempt to coordinate schedules in a way that suited both interviewer and interviewee. The weavers who agree to be interviewed are doing me a great favor, and I tried to be as flexible as I could to their needs. Depending on a weaver’s availability and accessibility, some interviews needed to be done over the phone. Even with careful planning, unforeseen events like blizzards can leave one conducting a phone interview while stranded in a hotel room a few miles from a participant. I am very thankful to the weavers who have agreed to participate, taking their time to engage in interviews, answer follow-up questions via phone or mail, and provide photographs of their work to be used as examples in the study.

As a weaver myself, I had to make sure I fought the tendency of influencing my interviewees’ responses with the way I framed my questions. I needed to make sure that the way I asked my questions did not put words in anyone’s mouth or pressure the interviewees into giving certain kinds of responses. My goal was incorporate the weavers’ points of views as often as I could, allowing the interviewees to shape their own story.
Why Is Modern-Day Handweaving in the Region Important?

The story of modern-day weaving is a vital in the continuation of the art and craft legacy of Appalachia. Craftspeople still contribute to the local economy in the region, and handweavers are still an integral component of the larger crafts community (Dreyer 38). Even overlooking the economic contributions local weavers make to the region, weaving continues to captivate and consume with its never-ending combinations of patterns, colors, and uses. Regardless of whether or not it’s a source of income, for many people, weaving is an act of love.

This study also highlighted another important part of the history of fiber art: its role as both a creative outlet and a source of income for women. Cottage industries in Appalachia have used handweaving as a way of providing money to local women, and today weaving is still largely carried out by women. This study contributes to our understanding about one of the ways women in the region continue to create for both personal enjoyment as well as work as professional weavers, and the economic impact weaving has on the lives of these artists and craftswomen.

Overall, I am hopeful that I have used my work to both add to the ongoing documentation of weaving in Southern Appalachia and to keep the weavers of the region central to that history. The end result should serve as a resource to the weaving community and those interested in learning more about weaving in Southern Appalachia. It also contributes to the greater body of work on artists and craftspeople in Appalachia, the regional craft revival movement, and women’s labor history. Lastly, through learning about the importance of weaving from today’s working weavers, we may gain a lens through which we can better understand the meaning.
weaving had in the lives of weavers past. Although the historical context was radically different, it is not far-fetched to wonder if earlier weavers felt the same meditative experience and an awe for cloth making that weavers today feel.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Background

Although the focus of this thesis is on modern-day weavers, we must acknowledge just how ancient the art of weaving is, and the role that weaving has played in society during this vast expanse of time. Weaving, and the larger body of textile arts such as spinning and sewing, have traditionally been the job of women (Barber 29-31). The task is repetitive and relatively safe, which are necessities if it is to be done in the presence of small children. Because it fit well with child rearing, providing the family with cloth was a job well suited for women, who were the primary caregivers. Along with serving very functional purposes of providing warmth and protection, weaving has been used for decorative and symbolic reasons. Evidence of weaving in the form of impressions on clay show that the process had already been developed by the Neolithic period, and continued to grow in complexity as weavers innovated and passed down their knowledge (Barber 78).

According to historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, as weaving grew more commercial in Europe, the labor of cloth production became divided, and by the late fourteenth century, commercial weaving was a predominantly male occupation (37, 51-53). Weaving guilds often excluded women, accepting only apprentice-trained men as members. In the 1630s, as colonists settled in the New World, weaving began to shift back to being a woman’s job as the craft was taken up for home production, although colonists still relied on male professional weavers and imported English fabric (Ulrich 37; 85). In the 1670s, reliance on home spinning and weaving
gained traction when colonists turned to boycotting English goods in retaliation to Parliament’s taxation attempts.

Industrial advances such as refined spinning wheels and water-powered carding machines also led to the rise of home cloth production, because they made the process less labor-intensive (Ulrich 37-38). Then, in the early 1800s, industrial textile production came to the U.S. with the construction of the country’s first integrated cotton mill, based on English technology, just outside of Boston (Stewart 46). Unlike the British textile mills, that relied on an impoverished workforce, Francis Cabot Lowell, a businessman and leading financier of the new integrated mills being developed in the U.S., chose instead to hire young women from rural New England (Stewart 46). These young women were paid decently and housed in dormitories created solely for mill workers. Lowell died in 1817, but his business partners followed Lowell’s example and built larger mill complexes, the largest and most well known being in Lowell, Massachusetts, which was named after Francis Lowell (Stewart 46). Recruiting wagons rode through rural villages and young women and girls flooded mill towns like Lowell for work.

The mills had strict regulations for their women mill workers, and the corporations argued that mill work was saving these women from poverty and combating idleness (Stewart 46). Still, for many Americans the thought of hordes of young unmarried women could only lead to moral decay. Others feared that the lives of American textile mill workers would more closely resemble the notoriously horrendous conditions of mill work in Britain. Even with the better working conditions at Lowell, workers still dealt with dangerous equipment and working twelve to fourteen hours inhaling cotton dust (Stewart 46). By the 1830s, mill executives were already
assigning workers to more machines for less pay. In 1834, Lowell mill girls protested wage cuts by walking out (Stewart 46). By the mid-1800s, immigrants, many from Ireland, were replacing the New England farm girls as mill workers. These workers, who were men, women, and children, were simply grateful to have a job and were far less likely to protest wage cuts and poor working conditions (Stewart 46).

Even as the process grew more mechanized, in the 1850s some people living in the remote regions of the rural North and South still relied on spinning and handweaving to produce cloth (Ulrich 38). Although people in Appalachia did not live in complete isolation, prior to the Civil War some families who lived in more rural regions may have found it more economical to weave their own cloth instead of saving money and traveling great distances to purchase fabric. Still, by the mid-1800s reliance on factory-made cloth was already common throughout the nation, rural Appalachia included. As Gordon McKinney pointed out in his essay, “Economy and Community in Western North Carolina, 1860-1865,” in the early 1860s, western North Carolina businessmen were seeking government support to build a textile factory near Asheville (172). Families in Appalachia turned to factory-made calico fabric for clothing, though some women continued weaving to create blankets and coverlets for their homes.

The Cherokee, although adopting the loom-based cloth weaving of white settlers, also created finger-woven bands that they used as belts and garters (“Finger Weaving”). The technique predated the arrival of white settlers, with the Cherokee using buffalo hair or various plant materials to create their weavings. Theda Perdue, in her book, *Cherokee Women*, notes another art form closely related to cloth weaving that the Cherokee practiced both before and
after the arrival of colonists was basketry; Cherokee women created intricately designed baskets and mats from strips of rivercane (Perdue 32). Before the adoption of loom-made cloth, Cherokee women made clothing from deerskins, buffalo fur, and barks like mulberry. These materials provided both protection from the elements and physical adornment. Once white colonists began settling on Cherokee land, Cherokee men engaged with the settlers as traders, providing deerskins and other animal pelts, which the settlers highly valued, in return for fabric and garments (Perdue 117). By the late 1700s, Cherokee women were already growing cotton, raising sheep, and spinning and weaving their own cloth (Perdue 117). When factory-made cloth became more prevalent through the 1800s, more Cherokee began relying on its production, much like the rest of Appalachia’s people.

After the 1850s, local color writers visited Appalachia to mine the region for story fodder, and weaving was among the many things they wrote about to add mystique to the people who lived in the mountains (Alvic 1). For example, the east Tennessee author, Emma Bell Miles, wrote in detail about watching an elderly woman, Aunt Genevy, setting up her loom to weave a coverlet (46-55). In one passage Miles wrote,

Now we were ready to “beam” the warp. At first Aunt Genevy turned the heavy beam, and I, crouching behind the loom, held the strands taut as they uncoiled and spread themselves evenly on the slowly revolving beam, the rake combing them out like hair. We changed places as we tired. In spite of precaution, a tangle would arise at almost every turn of the beam, and often a thread would snap, and the broken ends have to be diligently sought out and tied, for an error of a thread
or two here meant a flaw in the finished pattern. It was slow work, and required some patience, but at last the whole eighteen feet was wound on the beam, all but the half yard or so that she left dangling over the rake. (49-50)

For those who know the process of weaving, it is clear that Miles is familiar enough with the steps of setting up a loom, as well as the hindrances that often occur in the midst of the process. Miles also seemed to believe that describing the minutiae of placing a warp on a loom would have been of interest to her readers, and it very well may have added an element of authenticity to her work.

This fascination with the Appalachian South was part of a larger national habit of more urban Americans romanticizing rural life. The agrarian lifestyle represented a reliance on hard, honest work, piety, and a lack of rigid class hierarchy (Ulrich 17, 21). For colonists, this championing of the model agrarian lifestyle was a means to establishing independence from and form of rebellion against England’s taxes and expensive imports (Ulrich 37). For nineteenth century Americans, rural work was viewed as a healthy alternative to increasingly industrial city life, which was seen as a force that rendered human labor unnecessary and encouraged idleness, yet somehow also a source of unhealthy drudgery for those employed in factories (Stewart 46; Ulrich 21).

As writers developed stories of mountain life in the South, outsiders began to view Appalachia as an exotic place where people of primarily Anglo-Saxon descent lived radically different lives, defining it as a region distinct from the rest of the U.S. With this image of Appalachia as a place that lagged behind the rest of the nation, it wasn’t long before missionary
workers started trickling into the region intending to uplift and Christianize the mountain residents (Shapiro 32). Beginning in the 1880s, Protestant missionaries, predominantly from Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Congregationalist churches in the North came to Appalachia to establish churches and schools (Shapiro 32-33).

According to Jane Becker, who details the role Southern Appalachia’s craft revival had in the construction of the U.S.’s national identity and folk heritage in her book, Selling Tradition, most of the missionary workers were young, white, middle-class women who had received a college education (56). At the time, higher education was opening up to women, but the opportunities available to these college graduates were still limited. Many women found a purpose in going to the mountains to improve the lives of the locals, choosing culture, i.e., customs, artistic practices, aesthetics, and beliefs, as their sphere of influence—one of the few areas acceptable for women in the nineteenth century (Whisnant 13). The missionary women went into the mountains with the goal of educating the local people, and were confronted by a culture that was significantly different from their own. These mountain workers set to sanitizing the aspects of Appalachia culture that they considered unfit and romanticizing other qualities, like crafts and ballad singing (Becker 58).

Many missionaries were particularly impressed with the handweaving that was still being carried out by some women in the mountains. However, by the end of the 1800s, when missionaries and progressives were establishing settlement schools in Appalachia, handmade fabric was being replaced by mill fabric, which was now more accessible due to the increasing interconnectedness of the region, largely due to the construction of railroads, that coincided with
the rise of extractive industries like coal and timber (Becker 45). Noticing that the number of weavers in Appalachia was dwindling, missionaries felt the urge to preserve the skill. Women missionaries also believed that handweaving could be used to the benefit of local women, who could use supplementary income it would provide and develop character and satisfy artistic sensibilities through weaving (Alvic 5-6). Philis Alvic, a weaver and historian who researched Appalachia’s weaving revivals extensively, identified three goals that were commonplace amongst the missionary women—the preservation of the art, generation of income, and growth of character (5). These goals had served as the reason for the various cottage industries begun by missionary women. Handweaving also was a task that could be carried out in the home alongside other duties associated with domesticity, like child rearing and maintaining the home (Becker 17-18).

One of the early founders of a weaving-based cottage industry was Frances Louise Goodrich. Goodrich was born in Binghamton, New York in 1856 and raised in Cleveland, Ohio (Miller and Schillo 13). Her father was a Presbyterian minister, and her religion continued to play an important role in her life and career choices (Davidson 9, 15). As a young woman, Goodrich attended the Yale School of Fine Arts, where she received a certificate of attendance because Yale had yet to give women degrees (Miller and Schillo 13). After attending Yale, Goodrich lived in New York where she worked as an artist and continued her studies (Davidson 15). While in New York, she was exposed to urban social settlement work through friends and acquaintances.
In 1890, Goodrich moved to Riceville, North Carolina to assist Evangeline Gorbold, an instructor for the local school, which was sponsored by the Women’s Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church USA (Davidson 19; Miller and Schillo 13). In 1892, Goodrich and Gorbold went to start a new settlement in Brittain’s Cove, after a minister was found for the Riceville community (Davidson 21). Along with a day school, there was a building called the Library where Goodrich held Bible readings, cooking and hygiene lessons, and provided a space for women to congregate to sew and share recipes, news, and other important life events (Davidson 21; Miller and Schillo 13-14). In a meeting at the Brittain’s Cove library a local woman, Mrs. Davis, gifted Goodrich with a double bowknot coverlet and its written draft to show her gratitude (Goodrich 21-22; Miller and Schillo 14). Goodrich was struck by the beauty of the coverlet as well as its similarity to the colonial era coverlets of New England (Davidson 23-24). Realizing there was a market for such coverlets in New England, Goodrich began collecting drafts and establishing connections with local families who still remembered the weaving process. She initially hired the Angel family who lived on the Paint Fork of the Ivy River to weave coverlets for her. Lucy Catherine Ray Angel, and her daughters, Nancy Jane and Clarissa Cordelia, wove three coverlets in three weeks, which Goodrich then sold (Davidson 25). This, along with the rag weavings that were easily made by new weavings, was the beginning of Goodrich’s cottage industry (Davidson 23-25). Then, in 1897, Goodrich helped to establish Allanstand, North Carolina as the next mission station. By 1902 a log cabin in Allanstand housed weavings and other crafts for sale, and in 1908 Goodrich opened a salesroom called the Allanstand Shop in downtown Asheville, North Carolina, which marketed the weavings to the
many visitors who came to the town (Davidson 28-29). When visiting Allanstand, North Carolina, in 1909, Olive Dame Campbell stopped in to visit Louise Payne, a weaver for Goodrich. Campbell noted that the woman made a dollar per yard of linsey she wove, and questioned the feasibility of the industry when linsey could be purchased at a store for only fifty cents (Davidson 29-30).

Another example of weaving being utilized in the Appalachian craft revival can be found in the history of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School and Arrowcraft, their cottage industry. During a 1910 convention, the women of the Pi Beta Phi collegiate fraternity decided to begin a mountain settlement school as their philanthropic work (Alvic 56-57). That same year, Emma Turner, May Lansfield Keller, and Anna Pettitt, three Pi Beta Phi members, traveled through Appalachia in search of the future site of the school. During her travels, Pettitt stopped at Allanstand and saw the log cabin crafts salesroom for Allanstand Cottage Industries (Alvic 57). It was there that the seed for future craft endeavors may have been planted.

Keller visited the town of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, which became the site for the future settlement school that opened in 1912 (Alvic 56-57). In 1915, the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School began a crafts program under the guidance of Pi Phi teacher Caroline McKnight Hughes (Alvic 58-59). Students learned to weave at the school and local families sold their weavings and other crafts, like basketry, to the Pi Phi school (Alvic 58-60). The success of the program grew steadily, then rapidly under the guidance of Winogene Redding, a weaving instructor who joined the school in 1925 (Alvic 60). Within that year, Redding already had thirty women weaving for the craft program. Redding designed several new items for the weavers to create, and traveled to
their homes to instruct the weavers in new skills (Alvic 61). Then, in 1926, the Pi Phis opened a shop for the craft program called The Arrow Craft Shop, after the Pi Beta Phi symbol of the arrow (Alvic 61). The Arrow Craft Shop soon shortened its name to Arrowcraft, and together with a catalogue, the Pi Phis marketed local crafts to tourists and other sorority members.

The basic formula for developing a cottage weaving industry began with leaders of the program, usually settlement workers, learning weaving from local women who still remembered the process, from other institutions that provided weaving instruction, or, in some cases, from both. Then settlement workers and local weavers offered weaving instruction to local women in the surrounding area and provided them with weaving supplies. The local women then wove in their own homes, and were paid for their finished pieces. After receiving the weavings, it was the task of cottage industries, like Berea’s Cottage and Fireside Industries, the Allanstand Cottage Industries, and the Penland Weavers, to market and sell these pieces.

Although it is now known for its classes in a variety of subjects, including but not limited to arts, crafts, and music, the John C. Campbell Folk School was originally designed to provide primarily agricultural education (Whisnant 143-150). In 1925, Olive Dame Campbell, along with Marguerite Butler, an instructor at Pine Mountain Settlement School, developed the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina (Alvic 120). Named after Olive Dame Campbell’s late husband, a missionary and mountain worker, the John C. Campbell Folk School was modeled after the Danish folk schools that Olive Campbell and Marguerite Butler had visited in 1922 (Alvic 120; Whisnant 106-107). Campbell and Butler wanted the school to serve as a form of post-secondary education for the young adults of the community, with a model farm,
farm-related co-ops, farming cooperatives, and classes in crafts and leisure activities (Alvic 121; Whisnant 143). In 1927 they formally dedicated the school, offering the very first course that December, and in 1929 they had developed a school craft guild, with a craft shop already underway (Whisnant 142, 157). In 1930, Olive Dame Campbell helped found the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, and Marguerite Butler was the first president of the guild (Whisnant 161-162). The guild marketed the crafts produced at the John C. Campbell Folk School and the many settlement schools that offered work-study and craft programs for their communities (Whisnant 162). While the agricultural program was designed to be the core of the Folk School, the Great Depression, TVA construction jobs and the development of an aluminum plant in Andrews, North Carolina made the agricultural focus less profitable and beneficial to the community, and the crafting ventures increasingly grew more important to the school (Whisnant 150-151). Woodcarving became the Folk School’s main source of craft production, though weaving did have a continued presence (Alvic 121).

When textile mills moved into the Southern Appalachian region, the threat of drawing women outside of the home to work in the mills weighed heavily on the minds of settlement workers and other craft enthusiasts. In the early twentieth century, the American middle-class had grown jaded with the rise of industrialism, which was seen as sterile, impersonal, unwholesome, and devoid of culture (Becker 16). This fear of industrialism destroying the fabric of America, which had been present since the development of the first integrated textile mills of the early eighteenth century, gave culture workers all the more reason to preserve skills like handweaving and provide an economic alternative to mill work. The move to preserve the arts
and crafts of Appalachia was part of a larger cultural trend in the Arts and Crafts movement that originated in England, which was inspired by the ideologies of William Morris and John Ruskin, who eschewed the machine-made in favor of the craftsperson-made (Boris 175).

Part of the reason why the task of preserving handweaving was carried out in Appalachia was because of the misconception that the people who lived in the region were of pure, Anglo-Saxon heritage, descendants of early American settlers (Becker 25, 61-62; Whisnant 87). Waves of immigrants came to American and established communities, and nativism took hold of many Americans who believed they came from respectable families of Anglo-Saxon descent. They then turned to Appalachia and the people who inhabited the mountains, who, with the proper education that emphasized Northern and middle-class assimilation, would join the ranks of their Anglo-Saxon brethren (Becker 41).

Despite the fascination with the supposed Anglo-Saxon heritage and traditional lifestyle, culture workers still believed the mountain culture needed to be reshaped and polished to fit middle-class sensibilities. Even the traditional crafts that needed preserving were redesigned so they could be better marketed to middle-class outsider tastes (Becker 38). This, of course, may seem counterproductive if the goal was to preserve handweaving in the mountains, but since the purpose of the cottage weaving industries was also to provide income, marketing the woven goods to a demographic with funds to purchase them was necessary. Luckily, the market for handmade goods was growing as more consumers turned away from mass-produced commodities (Becker 38).
Although the handweaving revival that began in the late 1800s and developed momentum through the 1930s can be viewed as a construction of tradition developed by outsiders, there were local women who were either leaders within the revival or praised for their weaving skills. Lucy Morgan, founder of the Penland Weavers, was a native of Western North Carolina (Alvic 75). Like many mountain workers, she grew enamored with weaving and saw its economic potential. She learned to weave at Berea College and then taught local women how to weave, modeling her weaving program after the Fireside Industries at Berea College (Alvic 77). Morgan was also ahead of her time with the development of the Weaving Institute at Penland, which was later renamed as the Penland School of Handicrafts in 1935 (Alvic 89). The Weaving Institute began in 1928, when Morgan invited Edward Worst, a nationally known weaver and the director of manual training for the Chicago school system, to Penland, where he demonstrated linen weaving to local weavers (Alvic 81). Morgan had previously traveled to Chicago to improve her weaving skills under Worst’s tutelage. In 1929 Worst returned for another summer to provide weaving demonstrations, and in 1930 he agreed to teaching a one-week weaving institute (Alvic 85). Morgan invited weavers from across the region to attend the summer class, and soon Penland’s reputation for offering craft education expanded beyond Appalachia. Edward Worst continued to teach weaving each summer at the Penland Weaving Institute, with students from Appalachia and across the U.S. In 1932, Penland began offering other summer craft courses, with both local and visiting instructors teaching a range of students from Appalachia to visitors traveling to Penland from as far away as Canada (Alvic 86-87, 91). Lucy Morgan’s Penland School of Handicrafts stood out as an institution offering craft education that was internationally
recognized, where local and visiting instructors and students shared and expanded their expertise in weaving and other art and craft mediums.

Another noteworthy local Appalachian weaver was Allie Josephine Mast. Mast, from Watauga County, North Carolina, was highly skilled, and sold her work as well as taught others to weave (Robinson 484-485; Wilson 84, 90). Allie Josephine Mast was also commissioned by First Lady Ellen Axson Wilson to create a rug for the White House’s “Blue Mountain Room” (Wilson 84). Elmeda Walker, a weaver from Tennessee but within miles from Allanstand, set the bar for quality at the Allanstand Cottage Industries and also wove the upholstery fabric for the Blue Mountain Room (Davidson 30; Miller and Schillo 15).

It is worth noting that, while many non-local mountain workers may have felt that the local sense of aesthetics was lacking and needed the guidance of educated instructors who carried out most of the design work, craftspeople and artists of the region were already making design choices informed by personal and regional tastes and values. For example, while Frances Goodrich insisted on woven coverlet panels being sewn with straight, matching seams, it was originally common for local women to have crooked seams in their woven coverlets (Davidson 2-3). Firstly, before loom advancements it would have been very difficult for a local weaver to weave even patterns on a bulky and unwieldy loom. Secondly, the crooked seams may have also stemmed from the seams being undone in order to wash the coverlet panels separately, and after washing the panels would be sewn together in a different order so the fabric would wear evenly (Davidson 2). And lastly, the crooked seams were not seen as an aesthetic blunder, but embraced as a valued aspect of the woven coverlet. Local women described such a seam as an “honest
seam,” a seam that “throws the devil off your track” (Davidson 2-3). Along with carrying out aesthetic choices that are steeped in local and family traditions, people in Appalachia have expressed their creativity through originality and inventiveness in otherwise-practical utilitarian objects (Martin 51). This creativity is expressed in artistic and unique barn architecture, or innovatively designed items made from a hodgepodge of parts from other cast-off objects that have outlived their usefulness (Martin 51-53). Quilting, weaving, and other textile objects also follow the structure of individual creativity embedded into functional objects, with color choices or particular patterns tailored to a maker’s personal aesthetic preferences.

While settlement workers focused the development of cottage industries and craft education for the mountain whites, in other regions of the South, similar programs had developed for African American women. Fiber artist, living history interpreter, instructor, and author Liz Cherry Jones’ research on African American handweavers led her to uncover the history of the student weaving program at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia, which was a boarding school for African Americans and Native Americans (Jones 16). The school was founded in 1868 under the guidance of the American Missionary Association, in an area that was home to many African American refugees of the Civil War. Beginning in 1876, weaving became part of the school’s labor program (Jones 16). Originally, students wove rugs as a way to pay for their educational expenses. The school also had a large collection of African textiles that students were encouraged to study (Jones 22). At some point during the late nineteenth century, the weaving program halted, but in 1900 the head of the Domestic Science department, Jessie Ada Weir, reinstated weaving (Jones 20). Weir had taken the previous year
off to study the handweaving done by locals in Appalachian North Carolina (Jones 20). Later on in the early 1900s, home economics instructor, Sarah White, taught the girls to weave and sew. White was originally from North Carolina, and searched her state for old weaving drafts to share with her students (Jones 20). Eventually, more handwoven goods were added to the students’ repertoire; in one letter dated April 15, 1915 from the Hampton University archives, a student says she wove “rugs, pillows, and bags” (Jones 17).

Outside of the school labor programs and cottage industries, handweaving began to capture the interest of women across the United States. One woman who fell in love with weaving and shared her passion and knowledge through books, articles, and correspondence courses was Mary Meigs Atwater. Atwater was born in 1878 and educated at the Art Institute of Chicago as well as the Chicago Art Academy (Rossbach 24). While living in Basin, Montana during World War I, Atwater decided to take up handweaving and start a weaving-based cottage industry to provide local women with extra income during the war (Rossbach 24). She then moved to Camp Lewis, outside of Tacoma, Washington, and worked as an occupational therapist in the Army, utilizing weaving in her work with wounded veterans. After Atwater’s husband died in 1919, she moved her family to Seattle, Washington, where she worked as an occupational therapist for psychologists at the University of Washington, as well as researching, writing about, and teaching weaving (Rossbach 24). She then founded the Shuttle-Craft Guild, a guild for weavers in America and beyond. Part of her guild worked involved the publication of monthly bulletins, in which she taught the Shuttle Craft Guild Course of Handweaving through correspondence. In 1923 she moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, so she could be closer to
research opportunities like libraries and museum collections (Rossbach 24). In 1928 Atwater published the *Shuttle Craft Book of American Handweaving* as a textbook for her correspondence course, as well as continuing to write articles and answer questions in her guild bulletins (Rossbach 25). Rather than using weaving as an artistic medium, Atwater was a devotee of traditional weave structures, producing meticulous as well as simplified copies of traditional drafts for her students and exposing weavers across the U.S. to weaving traditions from all over the world (Rossbach 22, 25-26). Members of the guild learned about American colonial-style overshot weaving as well as Peruvian doublecloth. For guild members, who were primarily housewives, weaving under the tutelage of Atwater provided a therapeutic pastime that also allowed them to create beautiful and utilitarian objects. Mary Atwater believed in handweaving as an end to itself, rather than a means for designing industrially-created pieces (Rossbach 26). She also believed in the importance of creating utilitarian textiles, seeing little value in weavings that were created purely for art’s sake. As the decades progressed and weaving took on new roles, Atwater’s work and educational output remained very influential in exposing people to weaving and providing them with easy to follow instructions.

Even as more Americans took on weaving as both a form of therapy and as a creative outlet, production-oriented weaving continued in the Appalachians. Garry Barker worked for the Southern Highland Craft Guild, the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen, and the Student Crafts Program at Berea College, and provides the history of craft organizations in the region in his book, *The Handcraft Revival in Southern Appalachia, 1930-1990*. In 1930, the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild was formed under the guidance of Allen Eaton, France Goodrich,
Lucy Morgan, Olive Dame Campbell, Clementine Douglas, and other mountain workers (Barker 15-16). The guild allowed the production centers and craftspeople to organize a cooperative that concentrated marketing efforts, education, outreach, and other resources (Barker 13). Craft production centers, individual craftspeople, and those who wished to support the guild were allowed to join as members. In 1931, Goodrich gifted the guild with the Allandstand Cottage Industries, which included the showroom in Asheville (Barker 19). This, of course, was a great help in providing an outlet for marketing and selling the guild members’ works.

The 1930s also saw the United States in the throes of the Great Depression. This era brought a renewed interest in American folkways and traditional crafts as a means to rebuild a national collective identity and provide an alternative to a lifestyle based on material wealth (Becker 5). This lead to an increase in consumer demand for affordable crafts with which they could decorate their homes. Concerns over the working conditions of the craftswomen in Appalachia lead to Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau to conduct a study of craft production in the region (Becker 126-127). Researchers believed that many women worked in sweatshop-like conditions, receiving little pay for their piecework. In 1933, the research revealed that over ninety percent of women in Southern Appalachia worked for commercial productions, while only three percent worked for the more philanthropic, settlement-school based cottage industries (Becker 127). Along with the philanthropic cottage industries there were small-scale business that functioned in a similar manner, but most of the employment came from large firms paying piece rates to women who worked in the home (Becker 133). These businesses hired women for candlewick tufting, quilting, and chair caning (Becker 134). Supporters of home
work, like the Tennessee Valley Authority and the cottage industry leaders, believed that craftwork was able to provide a form of supplementary income that could fit around an agrarian schedule, or could be done alongside of domestic chores and childcare (Boris 184). The Women’s Bureau, however, thought that centralized workshops encouraged more ethical wages and work practices, with the average wage of a factory worker being six hundred dollars a year in comparison to the fifty-two dollars that over half of the homeworkers earned in the Women’s Bureau study (Boris 184). From 1933 to 1935, the National Recovery Administration, established under the New Deal, created numerous codes that banned industrial homework (Boris 181-182). In 1934, the Division of Self-Help Cooperatives, part of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, recommended craftwork being done in craft centers rather than at home, so workers could be supervised (Boris 183). This placed many craftspeople in a bind, because if craft work was regulated, then their products would no longer be affordable and therefore undesirable in the market. However, if their work was sold at an affordable rate, then the craftsperson was back to making sweatshop wages (Boris 184). Even with the low wages, many women felt that such work was their best, or only option for acquiring money, or simply enjoyed the work and the extra income it provided (Boris 186). When the Women’s Bureau interviewed nineteen households that worked for Arrowcraft and asked if any members would have been able to work in a center, most replied “none” (Alvic 64). This conundrum created an environment where the New Deal encouraged handicrafts while the National Recovery Administration condemned industrial homework.
The 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s saw a steady interest in craft in Appalachia, and by the mid-1960s guild sales spiked (Barker 92). The late 1960s and early 1970s saw another wave of craft revival in Appalachia and nation-wide interest in craft in the mountains (Barker 110). Various craft centers all across the region were benefitting from funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission (Barker 132-134). By this time, craft learning centers had begun shifting to a contemporary studio craft model, where students developed both technique and originality as artists-craftspeople. In 1962, William Brown took the position of director at the Penland School of Crafts (Alvic 94). Brown was a graduate of the Cranbrook Academy of Art, and along with offering two-week long summer classes, Brown developed eight-week long fall and spring sessions (Dreyer 37-38). Penland’s focus became solely its craft education. The Pi Beta Phis had begun offering summer craft workshops in Gatlinburg in 1945; by 1968 the summer craft workshop at the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School became the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts (Alvic 70-71). Like Penland, Arrowmont drew instructors and students from across the country.

This same period also saw the rise of weaving as fine art. “Fiber art” was a term used after World War II to describe the burgeoning wave of textiles made as art pieces (Lunin 697). However, while there was now a category for art that used textile-based mediums, the art world was resistant to seeing textiles in a new light. Art and craft had been hierarchically ordered, with fine art at the top and considered loftier and intellectually richer and craft being more utilitarian and decorative (Auther, “Fiber Art and the Hierarchy” 17, 21-22). Fiber artists were sandwiched between these two realms, and their work was viewed as not quite art or craft (Auther, “Classification and its Consequences” 4-5). The increased visibility of weaving and other
traditional textiles in the 1960s and 1970s with the craft revival further hampered fiber art from being seen as high art (Auther, “Fiber Art and the Hierarchy” 24-25). The gendered nature of textiles and crafts as a whole also led to a bias against taking fiber arts seriously, since women’s work was considered drudgery (Auther, “Fiber Art and the Hierarchy” 28-30).

Along with weavers who recreate or design work inspired by historical patterns, who fit comfortably in the world of craft, Appalachia has been home to weavers who have considered their work art. Black Mountain College, founded in 1933 by John Anders Rice in Black Mountain, North Carolina, was one progressive institution that stands out for its avant-garde, arts-focused education (Whisnant 175). Josef Albers and Anni Albers were two art instructors at Black Mountain College, who helped establish the college as a center for artistic innovation. As Nazi Germany began persecuting artists who did not conform to its ideals, the Bauhaus was forced to close, and Josef and Anni Albers, both Bauhaus instructors, left Germany and came to the U.S. to continue their work at Black Mountain College (“Black Mountain College: A Brief Introduction”) Anni Albers worked primarily with weaving and wrote about the potential of textiles as serious art rather than created for utilitarian purposes (Auther “Fiber Art and the Hierarchy” 27). Anni Albers, however, was also critical of Appalachian craft revival weaving, and saw the repetition of traditional weave structures tired and stagnant (Whisnant 175).

The 1980s saw the completion of the Folk Art Center outside of Asheville, along the Blue Ridge Parkway (Barker 155). A part of the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, the Folk Art Center houses galleries, a library, and the Allanstand Craft Shop where guild members’ works can be purchased. Penland and Arrowmont, both originally settlement schools with weaving-
based cottage industries, now focused solely on more contemporary art and craft classes (Barker 188; Dreyer 38).

The history of handweaving in Southern Appalachia has been documented extensively, with the focus being primarily on the leaders of the weaving revivals and the shapers of tradition. We are lucky that authors like Philis Alvic and Kathleen Curtis Wilson have conducted extensive interviews with the descendants of various weavers across the region, helping to fill in the gaps of weaving history. I hope to add to the body of knowledge on handweaving in Appalachia by centering my work on the words and work of the weavers who keep the art alive in the region today.

**Methodology Literature**

Since the nature of this study is qualitative, it benefits greatly from the body of literature that contributes to the understanding of the appropriate methodology. The study identifies weavers in the region as a “culture sharing group” insofar as all the members are united by a shared passion for handweaving, and therefore is well suited to an ethnographic approach, particularly to an ethnographic case study (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 90; Creswell, *Educational Research* 476; Merriam 27). Historically, in the U.S. ethnography was considered a part of social anthropology, whereas in the U.K. ethnography and social anthropology developed as two interrelated fields (Wolcott 9-10). In 1952 the British social anthropologist A. R. Radcliff-Brown described ethnography as the “descriptive accounts of non-literate people,” while the comparative study of primitive societies belonged to the field of social anthropology (Wolcott 9-11). According to Radcliff-Brown, a meeting of teachers from Oxford, Cambridge, and London
had decided upon this definition of ethnography in 1909. However, by the time Radcliff-Brown
shared this distinction in a letter to the editor of the *American Anthropologist*, ethnography and
social anthropology were already developing in new directions. Social anthropologists began
carrying out more fieldwork, and ethnographers used theoretical frameworks to analyze their
experiences with communities (Wolcott 12). The subjects of ethnographies expanded beyond
“non-literate” societies as well, especially in the U.S., although ethnographers still treated the
people who were the subjects of the ethnographies as Other.

Today, we define ethnography not by the Otherness of the subject matter, but rather as
the “study of a culture-sharing group” (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 90). There is a myriad of
culture-sharing groups in our world, and each of us as individuals may participate in a number of
these groups, for example, through our ethnicity, our profession, our religion, or our hobbies.
Also, rather than carrying out ethnography on some exoticized group in a far-away place defined
as Other, many ethnographers now carry out their work with their own communities (Wolcott
12). As a handweaver who has learned from professional weavers in Southern Appalachia, my
choice to work with a community I am a member of helps to further establish the role of
ethnographer as one that is well suited for an insider of a culture.

Although I have drawn upon ethnographic methods such as interviewing handweavers,
visiting sites that are significant to local weaving communities, reading books, pamphlets,
magazines, articles, and websites that are weaver resources, and writing down my experiences
through the research process, I determined that the research is best fitted for a case study. The
educational ethnographer Louis Smith defined the case as a “bounded system” (Stake 2). A
bounded system might be an individual, an activity, an event, an organization—anything or anybody with a particular way of functioning that is deemed to be worthy of study and exploration. According to Creswell, case studies often focus more on the shared activities of a group rather than on the behaviors they exhibit (Educational Research 476). Robert Stake, the author of The Art of Case Study Research, emphasizes the use of case studies as a way of developing a greater understanding and appreciation of the complexities of a bounded system, or case (16). The end result is valued not for its reproducibility, but for its meaningful interpretation (Stake 135). In a sense, a case study is a “thick description” of a holistically-treated bounded system (Stake 43). Ethnographies and case studies share many similarities; some might say that a case study is a type of ethnography, or rather, that an ethnography is a form of case study (Creswell, Educational Research 476; LeCompte and Schensul 116-117). However, the distinction mainly lies in ethnography’s focus on a shared culture and the behaviors that establish the culture, whereas a case study seeks to explain and understand the selected bounded system.

The process of developing a case study begins with selecting a case, which we deem as an object worth studying (Stake 16). A researcher then begins to hypothesize about the case and tries to establish what kind of issues surround it. These issues can be then framed as statements or questions that help guide the researcher’s work (Stake 17-18). Usually a researcher will begin working on a case with a set of these etic, or outsider, issue questions, and as the case study progresses the participants of the case will bring up their own emic, or insider, issues (Stake 20). The researcher also develops topical questions to answer—these questions allow the researcher to more fully describe the case (Stake 25). Data for the case study is obtained through
observation, participant observation, interviews, and document reviews (Stake 60-68). The researcher is actively engaged in analyzing data as it is being obtained, and further interprets the data by establishing certain patterns that arise, or at least by noting some kind of consistency (Stake 78). Researchers might choose to code their notes or the interview transcripts (Stake 79). Then finally, the data is presented in the form of a report that captures the nuances of the case.

The literature pertaining to ethnography and the process of developing a case study illustrate that such methods can be quite effective when used to research an activity-focused, culture-sharing group like the handweaving community in Southern Appalachia. This literature review also highlights numerous sources that focus on the history of today’s handweaving community. Authors like David Whisnant and Jane Becker focus on the fabrication of the culture surrounding “traditional” crafts in Appalachia, while authors like Philis Alvic, Kathleen Wilson, Barbara Miller, and Deb Schillo focus more specifically on the handweavers of Appalachia. Garry Barker details the development of prominent craft organizations of the Appalachian handcraft revival, illustrating how they evolved throughout the decades. These authors, as well as the many who have focused their work on the various aspects of art, craft, and weaving history in Appalachia and beyond, provide the foundation upon which this study grows. It is my hope that this research on today’s Southern Appalachian handweaving community makes a worthwhile contribution to this larger body of work that provides us with a better understanding of Appalachia’s art and craft heritage.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Developing the Ethnographic Case Study

I have identified the modern-day handweaving community as one worthy of an ethnographic case study not only because of its connection to the textile and craft history of the Southern Appalachians, but because of its current position as a thriving, active group that continues to impact the region. Providing an understanding of the handweaving community allows us to better appreciate this fascinating component of Appalachia. The ethnographic case study explores the experiences that today’s handweavers share, their values, their community roles, and how the issues they face may be similar or different to the issues faced by weavers in the past.

The modern-day handweaving community of Southern Appalachia is a community that is united by a shared interest in the activity of weaving. In addition to engaging in a shared activity, the weaving community has established an activity-focused culture that provides a sense of camaraderie to its members, who often meet at workshops, guild meeting, or other weaving and fiber-related events to learn more about the craft and to share their experiences with others. Weavers even engage in a unique weaving-related vocabulary that revolves around the weaving equipment, the process, and various techniques and cloth structures. Due to these factors, the ethnographic case study is an ideal methodology for this study.

While case studies are often relied on in the fields of psychology, medicine, law, and several other disciplines, the social science case study developed within the fields of
anthropology and sociology (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 97). The goal of the case study is to develop an understanding of the “bounded system,” or case (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 98; Stake 16). The researcher collects the case study’s data through interviews, participant-observation, and through acquiring documents and audiovisual materials that relate to the case (Creswell, *Educational Research* 488). Much of the data is experiential; researchers must pay attention to the data they are presented with, weeding out material that is unimportant and honing in on data that provides information on the case (Stake 49-50). In a case study, the researcher emphasizes understanding the case, rather than answering research questions, which researchers may find no longer applicable as they develop a better understanding of the case (Stake 9). The case study itself is quite descriptive, and the researchers often derive a set of assertions from the cases they study (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 99).

Ethnographic studies are related to case studies, but do have certain characteristics and a slightly different focus that makes them distinct from case studies. In an ethnographic study, the focus is on the culture of a group, often with an emphasis on the shared behaviors and values within that group (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 90). An ethnographer may also spend more time in the study describing the cultural setting of the group and portraying more daily life activities (Creswell, *Educational Research* 488-489). While carrying out fieldwork, ethnographers spend as much time within the community they are studying as possible, establishing strong connections with the community members and building rapport (LeCompte and Schensul 13-15).
Both ethnographic studies and case studies rely on collecting data from a wide range of sources, though ethnographic studies emphasize obtaining data through fieldwork and participant observation within the community being researched. LeCompte and Schensul differentiate between case studies and ethnographic studies, though seem to imply that ethnographic studies are actually a subset of case study which focuses on learning about the culture of a particular group (116). Since an ethnographic study always focuses on culture, it is rare to find a study based on a single individual; however, a single individual may be researched as a bounded system for a case study (LeCompte and Schensul 116). While case studies and ethnographic studies are two different bodies of work, I refer to this study as an ethnographic case study because it is a case study that relies heavily on ethnographic methods, with the research focusing on a culture-sharing group that is united by an activity.

Case studies and ethnographic studies are well suited to research within art-related fields and communities. In general, qualitative research is well-suited to interpreting the complexities that surround the cultural practices of art and craft making because the researcher spends time collecting multiple sources of data in an exploratory fashion, often while engaged in field work that is pertinent to the group or activity being studied, then analyzing and describing the findings in a way that provides a better understanding of the topic (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry* 43-48). Qualitative research allows space for the complexity and subjectivity found in creative work.

While I am not aware of any previous ethnographic studies or case studies on handweaving, there have been studies carried out in similar fields that set a precedent for developing a case study of handweaving in modern-day Southern Appalachia. Isaac Wade
Calvert developed an autoethnographic case study on a traditional craft apprenticeship with a master violin maker (48-59). Calvert engaged in a one-on-one apprenticeship as a field method, using autoethnography as a research methodology by taking extensive reflective field notes throughout the apprenticeship, then analyzing the recorded data collected during the fieldwork process by transcribing the audio and coding the data thematically (50-54, 56-57). Curtis L. Vance developed an ethnographic case study on David Morris, an Appalachian singer-songwriter, educator, activist, and co-founder of The Morris Family Old Time Music Festival (1-10). Vance’s study relies on the use of oral history as a methodology, transcribing interviews he conducted with Morris and analyzing the data he collected through a semiotic lens (38-60). Both Calvert and Vance’s case studies focus heavily on an individual artist or crafts person as the source of much of their data; in Calvert’s case study, he detailed his experiences as an apprentice to a master violin maker, and Vance drew much of his data from interviews with David Morris.

There have also been case studies conducted on art organizations, which can be seen as a form of art community. One case study was on The Seeming, a community art project in Bendigo, Australia (Madyaningrum and Sonn 358). In order to understand the positive outcomes of participating in a community art project, the researchers interviewed ten participants in the project, then transcribed the interviews, coded the transcriptions, and thematically organized the data (Madyaningrum and Sonn 362-363). The TARU project, and artist training project that was funded by the European Social Fund, was the subject of a case study by Annukka Jyrämä and Anne Äyväri (4). To learn about the knowledge-creation process, the researchers and assisting university students conducted two sets of interviews—one set with the participating artists, and
the other with the project employees (Jyrämä and Äyväri 8). The researchers then carried out a content analysis of the interviews, focusing on themes relating to the learning expectations and experiences of the artists and the project employees (Jyrämä and Äyväri 8). These case studies illustrate the way qualitative methodology can be used to interpret data collected from participants in art communities and organizations. While not focused on an art community, Padula and Miller’s case study of four reentry women in a psychology doctoral program also illustrates how case studies are well suited to studying the experiences of individuals that engage in a shared or similar activities. Padula and Miller’s case study highlighted eight themes that emerged from the data, like the participants’ decisions to return to graduate school, their expectations, their frustrations, the effects their studies had on family life, and the rewards of returning to school (334). Again, categorizing these issues thematically, which were previously coded, is a successful way of both analyzing and presenting data.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

It is important to avoid making any broad research assumptions that the handweavers in the region function as a uniform, monolithic group, since a wide variety of individuals are drawn to weaving, and it is this shared interest that unites weavers as a community. With such a potentially vast group, though, it is necessary to outline parameters from which to derive the research. This is necessary in order to establish a bounded system that is appropriate for a case study. In this study, the focus of the research is the people living in and carrying out the activity of weaving in the Southern Appalachian region, and the impact this activity has on the individuals as well as the region. While Central Appalachia also has historically relevant
weaving centers and today is the home to numerous handweavers, Southern Appalachia’s rich craft history and current active weaving community warrants for a case study’s sole focus. Therefore, all the participants in this study are from the Southern Appalachian region.

Defining the boundaries of a region can be difficult. Although there are many different ways of defining both Appalachia and its subregions, I used the Appalachian Regional Commission’s map of Appalachia’s subregions to establish the boundaries for Southern Appalachia (see Appendix A for “Subregions in Appalachia” map). All the participants must live in the subregions defined as Southern or South Central Appalachia. Historically, the South Central subregion has been a hotbed of handweaving programs, though in the Southern subregion, north Georgia has also seen the development of weaving-related cottage industries and school weaving programs. As for the criteria for selecting participants, a set amount of hours a weaver put into their work per week is not a requirement, nor does weaving have to be their sole profession, but the weavers must consider themselves actively engaged in the medium. I have used a maximal variation sampling method to select a wide range of participants to better represent the diversity of the region (Seidman 55-57). The participants are all active weavers, but they use their weaving skills in different roles, and they reside in different cities and counties across the Southern Appalachian region. All the research materials collected either stem from the region, or are readily available and often utilized by weavers in the region. For example, in today’s increasingly interconnected society, websites, books, or nationally-distributed magazines that focus on handweaving would be accessible and meaningful to weavers who live in Southern Appalachia.
This case study relies on an ethnographic approach in hopes to better understand and communicate the facets of the handweaving community as a culture-sharing group. Ethnographic research allows us to learn about a group from a variety of angles, relying heavily on observation, participant-observation, discussions, artifacts, and interviews to identify shared behaviors and beliefs of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 92). The participants’ emic perspective is analyzed with the researcher’s etic perspective in order to interpret and present a well-rounded and holistic picture of the group.

**Preliminary Fieldwork**

Although the handweaving community is bound together through engaging in a common activity, people who are passionate about handweaving have multiple outlets through which to engage in this shared passion with other like-minded individuals. In order to learn more about the diverse handweaving community, I chose to carry out ethnographic fieldwork in settings that are relevant to weavers. Fieldwork consists of working with a group of people in a natural (as opposed to artificial, or laboratory) setting (Fetterman 33). In this study, the “field” would consist of the various locations in the region where handweavers would engage with others in the community, as well as the studios and other environments where the more solitary activity of weaving is carried out. Attending various workshops and classes provide opportunities to expand your knowledge on a subject and facilitate a sense of camaraderie amongst the participants. Guild meetings provide a structured environment in which to share ideas and current projects, while visiting other handweavers’ studios provides a more informal setting to chat and see how a friend’s work is coming along. Supply stores that cater primarily to textile arts are places to stock
up on supplies and see yarns and weaving-related equipment in person. Handweavers may also travel to shows and exhibits in art galleries and museums that feature other handweavers and fiber artists.

As a handweaver and fiber artist, I have been a participant-observer in the handweaving community of Southern Appalachia for approximately ten years. Over this period, I have taken college-level courses in weaving and textile design, taken workshops and classes in various fiber art mediums through local continuing education classes, workshops, and folk school classes, and also supplemented my learning through the assistance of other more knowledgeable handweavers, through books and articles, and through websites and other online educational content. Because of my experience, my perspective often falls into the insider, or emic category.

In research, the emic perspective has its strengths and weaknesses. In ethnographic research, the emic perspective, although it is subjective, is often what explains why certain cultures do what they do (Fetterman 20). An emic perspective allows the researcher to be aware of and accept the “multiple realities” that coexist within and without a community, and better understand the community being researched (Fetterman 21). However, much of what the insider participates in and observes can be taken for granted—when one is a participant in a culture, one may not spend time reflecting on what patterns unite the members as a group, or why actions are done a certain way. This is where the etic perspective of a researcher can step in and bring an awareness to the set of actions and beliefs that make a group distinct. Though, there are also certain problematic aspects of the etic role. A researcher should avoid feeling like their work studying a community gives them the right to be the sole voice of that group, or that their
interpretation is the only way of understanding the community (Creswell, *Educational Research*, 474; LeCompte and Schensul 32). Also, the very act of researching is self-serving—any accolades go to the researcher while the community that was a part of the research may benefit very little, regardless of the contributions the community members made that led to the success of the research. As both a researcher and community member, I made a conscious effort to be aware of the pitfalls found within each role.

Although I have regularly participated in weaving-related activities, from 2014 to 2016, I engaged in such field work as an ethnographer, taking classes, visiting studios, and traveling to locations with a historical connection to weaving. During the fall of 2015 I visited the Folk Art Center in Asheville, North Carolina, which is the current home location of the Southern Highland Craft Guild. The Folk Art Center houses the Allanstand Gift Shop, as well as three galleries and the Southern Highland Craft Guild Library. I also visited the Earth Guild store in downtown Asheville, which is a crafts supply shop many handweavers and other artists and craftspeople travel to from all across Southern Appalachia. That same fall I was able to take a graduate-level fibers class at East Tennessee State University, where part of my time was spent weaving and I had the opportunity to reacclimatize to a textile and weaving studio. While in Georgia I also visited the weaving studio at the University of North Georgia, located at their Dahlonega campus. Through the interview process two of the handweavers welcomed me to their studios, and I was able to see the familiar sight of half-finished projects underway, yarn stashes, and various collections of books and other weaving resources and supplies. I had originally planned for more studio visits, but conducting much of my fieldwork and interviews
during the winter and spring of 2016 unfortunately meant that snowstorms foiled my mountain travel plans on more than one occasion.

Throughout my various experiences I documented my fieldwork through photos and extensive notes. I also reflected on my own learning process and evolution as a weaver during the past ten years, looking back on the people, the environments, and the opportunities and obstacles that shaped my path. It would be dishonest to portray my research as stemming from a purely scientific and objective standpoint. The note taking and journaling process allowed me to pause and analyze how my experiences shaped my perception of the research data. For example, during an interview, I may find another handweaver’s experience and/or beliefs mirroring my own, and journaling provides an opportunity to dissect those moments of heightened connection. Along with such reflections, my notes, together with photos, and artifacts such as exhibition catalogues, informational pamphlets, flyers, resource books, and magazines, helped me better understand the weaving community I was a part of and had now decided to study in-depth.

The Interview Process

From January to February 2016, I reached out via email to handweavers in the Southern Appalachian region. I had been in contact with a few of the participants prior to sending out emails explaining my research ideas, and these handweavers acted as informal gatekeepers, connecting me to other members of the community who could assist my work. I owe much gratitude to Tommye Scanlin of Dahlonega, Georgia, a former instructor and mentor who is very active in both the local and national handweaver community, who not only participated as an
interviewee, but put me in contact with other handweavers whose experiences and knowledge were very beneficial to the study.

Many of the participants in the interviews have had decades of experience weaving in the region and hold respected roles in the community, such as educator, resident-artist, researcher, historian, and business owner. Someone who is involved in the region’s weaving community might quickly recognize the names of the participants. Still, the list of the participants is not to be taken as a “who’s-who” of Southern Appalachian handweavers. While each participant of this study has made an impact in the region’s weaving community, a number of influential handweavers were not interviewed. In order to complete such a task, a more rigorous multi-year study would need to be undertaken. This study would also benefit from more gender, age, racial, and ethnic diversity. All the participants were women, and, while one participant was thirty years old, the majority were over the age of sixty. There were no African American participants, nor, to my knowledge, any participants who were non-white or belonged to an ethnic minority group. From my experience, most established weavers in the Appalachian community are older, white, and women, though that demographic certainly does not represent the entirety of the weaving community. Hopefully, future research will include the experiences of younger weavers, as well as weavers of different genders and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The selection of participants followed a maximal variation sampling structure. The key to maximal variation sampling is to select participants that reflect the variety that is found within the larger population (Seidman 55-56). For the purpose of this study, I used regional and weaving role variety as criteria. I interviewed ten handweavers who reside in Southern
Appalachia. The participants live in counties across the northeast Georgia, western North Carolina, and east Tennessee mountains. They all weave, but they use their weaving in different roles—for example, some are mainly production weavers, creating a set range of products for sale to the general public, while others spend their time experimenting with different weave structures and processes for an art-based end result. Almost all of the participants are educators in some fashion, but they carry out that role in different settings. Some originally lived outside of the region, and others have lived in Southern Appalachia their whole life. Each participant brings their unique experiences and perspectives to the research.

Before beginning the interview process, I developed an interview guide (See Appendix B). The questions were designed to elicit responses about how the participant became a weaver, what continues to motivate them to weave, and other experiences they may have had as a weaver. The interviews were semi-structured, which means that the questions were guided by my interest specifically with the participants’ experiences as weavers in the Southern Appalachian region, but there was no set order, and the questions were flexibly worded (Merriam 89-90). Depending on the topics the participants brought up, the interview would shift course to pursue these topics further, rather than adhering strictly to the guide. I approached the role of interviewer as one of a learner, and the interviewee as one of educator. The interviewees revealed facets of being a handweaver of which I was heretofore unaware.

During the process of developing a case study, it is common for researchers to adapt their methodology to the case being researched (Stake 9). Through interviewing, there were some questions on the guide that I realized were for me, the researcher to answer, and others that grew
unimportant as the interview process progressed. I began the study with some curiosity about the preconceived notions about weaving that people who were not weavers may have had. Once I started the interview process, I realized that the relationship the interviewees had with weaving and the handweaving community demanded far more attention. Also, questions pertaining to how the weaving community in Appalachia compared with the rest of the nation were not as relevant to someone whose experiences with weaving had developed solely in the region. One question that emerged as particularly important to me was how weaving in the region today compares to weaving during the initial Appalachian weaving revival. Alvic, a handweaver and the author of *Weavers of the Southern Highlands*, had laid out three reoccurring goals amongst weaving revivalists, and those were to preserve weaving, to provide economic opportunities to local women, and to encourage growth in character (Alvic 5-9). Perusing the era’s literature supports Alvic’s claim. For example, in a pamphlet from 1954 on the Penland Weavers, Bonnie Willis Ford wrote, “At the very beginning of the community project, a two-fold purpose was established which was, namely—to perpetuate the native arts and crafts, and through them to provide for the people of the community a more adequate means of livelihood” (10). Through learning about what motivates present-day handweavers to weave, I hoped to learn if such goals were still relevant in their lives.

**Coding the Interviews**

After the interview process, I transcribed some of the recordings using Microsoft Word, and a professional transcription service transcribed the remaining recordings. I edited the transcripts completed by a professional transcription service through Microsoft Word while
listening to the recordings in order to catch any discrepancies. After completing the transcriptions, I read through each interview and developed a biography on each participant, based on the information they provided in their interviews.

I then began coding the transcription text. According to Saldaña, a code is a “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute to a portion of language-based or visual data” (4). Coding and recoding allows the researcher to see the data with different lenses, but the coding process is usually divided into two main cycles. The first cycle of coding summarizes sections of the data, while the second cycle of coding organizes the first cycle of codes into certain themes or a theory (Saldaña 234-236). Together, these cycles are used to analyze data.

Due to my lack of experience with CAQDAS software, I manually coded with hard copies of the transcribed data. The transcripts were double-spaced and also segmented by topic shifts in order to make manual coding easier (Saldaña 19-20). The right-hand margin was used for coding, while the left-hand margin contained any personal notes (Saldaña 22). The codes were then written on index cards, along with the names of the interviewees that the data stems from (Saldaña 22). I then began clustering the codes that appeared similar. One benefit of manual coding is the tactile experience of arranging and rearranging codes into larger groupings, or patterns. I also stored the code lists in electronic files, which were then used to cross-check for codes that were related to each other.

Through the coding process, I aimed to keep the focus on the words of the participants. In Vivo coding, or Emic coding, uses short words or phrases quoted directly from the transcription
as codes (Saldaña 105-106). By using In Vivo coding as one of my first-cycle coding processes, I was able to hone in on meaningful segments of the participants’ responses. Other first-cycle coding methods that were beneficial to the research were process coding and concept coding. Process coding, also known as “action coding,” uses gerunds as codes to capture the essence of observable and conceptual action (Saldaña 111). This method of coding best captures the “routines and rituals of human life” (Saldaña 111). Concept coding uses words or short phrases that captures an idea or underlying meaning of a passage (Saldaña 119). This method relies more heavily on the researcher’s interpretation of a text, and they can also be used to condense other first-cycle codes. Concept coding is more focused on the “big picture” within each topic shift, and encourages further reflection. Out of all the first cycle coding methods, concept coding was most useful in providing a large body of codes from which I was able to establish patterns. This method transitioned into the second-cycle method of pattern coding, which is the development of meta-codes that categorize similar codes together (Saldaña 235-236). The codes that emerged from each transcription were then compared to see if they expressed similar sentiments.

Pattern coding allowed themes to emerge from the set of first-cycle codes. These themes reflect and shed light on shared (and differing) experiences amongst handweavers living in Appalachia. Four of the themes identified in the coding process stood out due to their prominence and frequency in all of the interviews and the way the themes explored vital components of the region’s handweaving community. These four themes were present in all ten interviews, while less prominent themes were not. The themes dealt with the way the participants developed an interest in weaving, what inspires the participants to continue weaving, how the
participants incorporate weaving into their careers, and the role of handweaving in today’s Southern Appalachia. In addition to the four major themes, the coding process identified four subordinate themes. These themes will be discussed in the following chapter.

After identifying the most prominent themes, I read through the transcripts once more, mining for quotes and passages that best captured the heart of each theme. Through this process, the contributions the participants have made to the research were highlighted and interwoven with my data interpretation. The resulting case study provides a detailed look into what it means to be present-day Appalachian handweaver.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The Participants

There were a total of ten participants in the study. I selected the participants using maximum variation sampling, hoping to reflect the diversity of handweavers in the Southern Appalachian region by interviewing participants from different counties across the region who actively engaged in weaving in varying capacities. The regional boundaries defining Southern Appalachia are based on the Appalachian Regional Commission’s map, “Subregions in Appalachia,” and all of the participants are women who weave in the Southern and South Central Appalachian subregions of Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee (see Appendix A for map). The following table shows the town, county, and state where each participant resides, as well as their ages and hometowns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edwina Bringe</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Memphis, TN</td>
<td>Penland, Mitchell County, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Donde</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>California, MO</td>
<td>Asheville, Buncombe County, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Green</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
<td>Little Sandy Mush, Madison County, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon Grist</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Born in New York, NY, raised in Wilmington, MA</td>
<td>Dillard, Rabun County, GA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam Howard</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Erwin, TN</td>
<td>Brasstown, Clay County, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo-Marie Karst</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Forest, IN</td>
<td>Ball Ground, Cherokee County, GA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birthplace and Raising Location</th>
<th>Current Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan Leveille</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Born in Silva, NC, raised in Webster, NC</td>
<td>Dillsboro, Jackson County, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Miller</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Haywood County, NC</td>
<td>Pisgah Forest, Transylvania County, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommye Scanlin</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Born in Asheville, NC, raised in Ivy Log, Union County, GA</td>
<td>Dahlonega, Lumpkin County, GA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Turner</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Washington, DC suburb in Maryland</td>
<td>Jonesborough, Washington County, TN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the data in the table shows, six of the participants live in North Carolina, three of the participants live in Georgia, and one of the participants lives in Tennessee. North Carolina is heavily represented in the study. While there are active weaving communities across Southern Appalachia, western North Carolina in particular is home to many weavers as well as to guilds, craft schools, and other organizations that support the local weaving community. Four out of the ten participants were born in Southern Appalachia; the other participants were born outside of the region, though in the case of one participant born outside the region, Jo-Marie Karst, her family was originally from Union County, Tennessee. As discussed in chapter three, nine out of the ten participants are over 60 years old, except for Jessica Green, who is the outlier at 30 years old.

Interviews with the participants provided the data used to develop themes pertaining to the role of weaving in the lives of handweavers and in the Southern Appalachian region, and to develop biographical sketches for each participant. The biographical sketches showcase the diversity amongst the participants and the different paths they took to become handweavers.
Biographical Sketches

Edwina Bringle of Penland, North Carolina, was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1939 and is a weaver, photographer, instructor, and professor emerita at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Bringle first tried her hand at weaving at the Penland School of Crafts in the early 1960s. She was accompanying her sister, Cynthia Bringle, on a road trip back from Cynthia’s university to their hometown of Memphis, Tennessee. During the trip they took a detour to Penland so Cynthia could assist the director for two weeks. While in Penland, Edwina Bringle met Helen Henderson, a weaver on a retreat at Penland. Henderson showed Bringle how to set up a loom and the basics of weaving, and from then on Edwina Bringle was hooked. At the time, Bringle was working as an x-ray technician, while taking as many classes as she could at Penland to learn more about weaving. Eventually, Bringle was hired as a weaving instructor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where she worked for twenty-four years before retiring with emeritus status. Bringle loves the challenge of weaving, and believes one learns best by doing. Exploring the interplay of color features strongly in Bringle’s work, as does the presentation of traditional patterns like twill and overshot in new or modified forms. Bringle is always taking in the colors of her surroundings, and as a self-taught photographer, has found that her weavings often reflect the same color schemes as her photos. Bringle creates utilitarian pieces, like throws and shawls, as well as wall hangings, and does her work on four- and eight-shaft looms (See Appendix C for photos of Bringle’s work). Bringle is a lifetime member of the Southern Highland Crafts Guild, and is also currently involved with Local Cloth, an organization based in Asheville that aims to support and grow the local fiber economy in the surrounding 100-
mile radius of the city. Edwina Bringle’s work is in numerous public and private collections, including the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, North Carolina, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the North Carolina History Museum, the Greenville County Museum of Art in South Carolina, and can also be seen and purchased at the Bringle gallery in Penland, North Carolina, which is owned by her sister, Cynthia. Bringle has also worked as a resident artist and instructor at the Penland School of Crafts (Bringle).

Karen Donde was born in California, Missouri in 1956 and is a weaver and instructor living in Asheville, North Carolina. Donde learned to weave in 1999, when she moved to Cherry Hill, New Jersey. She saw a weavers’ meeting being advertised in the local newspaper and decided to give it a try. After learning how to weave with this group for a year, Donde was introduced by her instructor to Doris Boyd, a weaver in New Jersey who held a weaving class every Thursday. For ten years, Donde continued to learn about weaving from Doris Boyd, the other weaving class members, and through classes offered at conferences and through guilds. Donde’s interest in weaving then led her to North Carolina, where she enrolled in Haywood Community College’s Professional Crafts program for fiber, which is geared towards providing skills in art and business development to aspiring professional craftspeople. Along with weaving and continuing her own education, Donde is also an instructor. Donde taught weaving out of a studio she ran with with Barb Butler in the River Arts District in Asheville from 2009 to 2014, and currently teaches weaving classes at the Friends and Fiberworks yarn shop in Candler, North Carolina. Donde has also taught workshops for guilds and conferences across the country. In her personal work, Donde loves experimenting with different weave structures and learning new
techniques. Donde constantly finds inspiration for her weaving in the world around her, and sees
the desire to emulate a certain texture in weaving or learning a new technique like solving a
puzzle. Donde creates a range of different weavings, from yardage for clothing and furniture, to
scarves and shawls on her thirty-two-shaft dobby loom and her eight-shaft and four-shaft looms
(See Appendix for photos of Donde’s work). Karen Donde currently serves as the
Communications Chair of Local Cloth, and is a member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild.
Donde also holds a bachelor of journalism degree, and contributes to Handwoven Magazine
(Donde).

Jessica Green was born in Austin, Texas in 1986 and is a weaver and homesteader in
Madison County, North Carolina. Green was raised in Texas by artistically inclined parents.
Many of the women in her family knitted, sewed, and gardened, and Green carries that passion
for fiber and working with the land. Green discovered her calling for weaving in the mid-2000s
while she was working on an urban farm in Brooklyn, New York. One of her jobs involved
working in a natural dye garden and doing natural dyeing for a weaver. The weaver let Green sit
at a loom and learn a bit about the weaving process, and from that moment on Green knew that
weaving had to be a part of her life. In order to learn more, Green traveled to the Penland School
of Crafts to take a two-week class on linen and lace weaving. The instructor, Suzie Liles, sold
Green a small Dorset loom and invited her to work as an apprentice at the Eugene Textile Center
in Eugene, Oregon. After finishing the Penland class and returning to Brooklyn, Green spent a
year learning all that she could about weaving on her four-shaft Dorset loom. Once she felt she
learned all that she could on her own, she began her apprenticeship with Liles in Oregon,
working at the Center five days a week, learning more about weaving, selling and repairing
looms, and teaching classes. Through the Center she also met another weaver, Judith
MacKenzie, who Green ended up apprenticing with and assisting as well. Green assisted
MacKenzie at a class at the John C. Campbell Folk School and, soon after, moved to North
Carolina to homestead with her partner. Alongside homesteading, Green runs a small weaving
business, integrating her life and work by raising sheep, growing cotton, flax, and dyestuffs, and
using the farm raised and grown materials in her work, which often features modern-day yet
historically-inspired designs. Green creates items like coverlets, blankets, throws, wall hangings,
and small framed pieces on her two dobby looms, her twelve-shaft loom, her eight-shaft loom,
and her four-shaft loom (See Appendix for photos of Green’s work). Her handwoven textiles are
primarily purchased by interior designers and sold through home goods retailers. Jessica Green
also teaches on occasion (Green).

Sharon Grist was born in New York City in 1955 and raised in Wilmington,
Massachusetts. She is a weaver, hand spinner, knitter, and natural dyer who lives in Dillard,
Georgia, and works as a resident artist at the Foxfire Center in Mountain City, Georgia. As a
child, Grist loved working with her hands, and enjoyed visiting her grandparents who lived in
Black Mountain, North Carolina. Her grandfather was a member of the Southern Highland Crafts
Guild as a carver, and it was also through the guild that Sharon Grist first discovered weaving.
When she was eleven years old, she saw a handweaving demonstration while attending the
Southern Highland Craft Guild Fair in Asheville with her family. Grist was fascinated by the
weaving and knew that she had to learn the craft. As a young woman, Sharon Grist attended
Warren Wilson College and received her bachelor’d degree in education, but soon came back to her calling of weaving when she began her apprenticeship at Rabun Gap Crafts in 1978. Although it was part of the work-study program at the Rabun Gap Nacoochee School, local women eventually maintained and wove for Rabun Gap Crafts. It was there that Sharon Grist learned the basics of weaving and worked for the center from 1978 to 1979. In 1981, Sharon Grist opened her professional studio, and in 1993 she opened a public studio and retail space. Sharon Grist has taken workshops at the John C. Campbell Folk School and through local guilds like the Georgia Mountain Handspinners Guild and the now-defunct Yonah Mountain Fibre Arts Guild. Grist has worked as a resident artist at the Foxfire Center since 2002, where, along with working as a production weaver, hand spinning yarn, dyeing, and running a retail space, she also demonstrates these processes to the center’s visitors, many of whom are schoolchildren. In the past, Grist has also offered weaving instruction at her various studio locations. Grist weaves items like kitchen towels, blankets, scarves, rugs, and other products for the home and to wear on her two eight-shaft and two four-shaft looms. Sharon Grist is a member of the Scottish Tartan Society and the Tartan Educational and Cultural Association, and was commissioned to design the tartan for her alma mater, Warren Wilson College (Grist).

Pam Howard was born in Erwin, Tennessee, in 1954 and is a weaver, hand spinner, dyer, weaving instructor, and resident weaver at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina. Pam Howard first began weaving in the late 1960s when she was in the seventh grade and her mother gifted her with a rigid heddle loom. Howard’s mother was a home economics teacher, and she taught Pam Howard to weave on the loom and also instructed her in
other fiber arts like sewing, crocheting, and knitting. Howard fell out of the habit of weaving, but took up the craft again in 1980 when she began attending her husband’s blacksmith meetings at the Tullie Smith House in Atlanta, Georgia. Here she met Betty Smith, who demonstrated weaving at the center and also became a weaving mentor to Pam Howard. Howard then took up weaving as a serious endeavor, and would attend group meetings at Betty Smith’s house as well as Chattahoochee Handweavers Guild meetings. In her weaving, Howard enjoys combining and exploring various creative processes, trying different weave structures and hand dyeing her yarn. Often, rather than making pieces to sell, Howard uses her weavings as teaching tools to showcase different structures to her students, showing them the artistic potential in weaving.

Howard is also interested in historic weaving structures, researching their development and doing investigative weavings. Howard often creates many samples, which in turn can become scarves, kitchen towels, or other items (See Appendix for photos of Howard’s work). Howard works on a sixteen-shaft dobby loom, two eight-shaft looms, and three four-shaft looms. Pam Howard has been living in Brasstown, North Carolina since 1999, and is currently a member of the Handweavers Guild of America, the Southern Highland Craft Guild, and the Complex Weavers. Much of Howard’s regional weaving activity revolves around the John C. Campbell Folk School, where she is the resident weaver and teaches many of the weaving classes as well as maintaining the fiber studio, hiring the other fiber arts and beading instructors, scheduling the classes, and doing weaving demonstrations for the folk school. Howard also has a personal studio and has sold her work through craft shows and private galleries. In the past, she has worked for the Handweavers Guild of America as a staff member of Shuttle Spindle & Dyepot,
the guild’s quarterly journal. Howard is currently studying for the Master Weaver certification through Olds College in Alberta, Canada (Howard).

Jo-Marie Karst was born in Forest, Indiana, in 1946 and is a weaver, textile designer, and professor at the University of North Georgia who lives in Ball Ground, Georgia. Many of the women in Karst’s family were quilters and, as a teenager, Karst taught herself to sew from reading pattern instructions so she could create expressive and fashionable clothing to wear. Karst first learned to weave in 1998, while she pursued a degree at North Georgia College and State University (now University of North Georgia). A color theory class led Karst to declare herself an art major, and as she spent time in the art department she was drawn to the mechanical nature of the looms in the weaving room and the walls of colorful yarn. Jo-Marie Karst took both weaving and textile design classes, which satisfied different creative needs. She was drawn to the structure and comfort of the weaving process, with set boundaries you could follow during the planning, calculating, and execution phases. With textile design, particularly with dyeing, Karst loves going with the flow and embracing the “happy accidents.” During a weekend class with weaver and dyer Kathrin Weber Scott at the John C. Campbell Folk School, Karst first dyed her own warps, which brought to light the potential of using weaving and dyeing together. Combining these two elements—the more controllable weaving and the less predictable dyeing—and seeing how they interrelate, is a recurring component of Karst’s work. Another angle Karst is exploring is the how to create three-dimensional woven fabric. Karst has experimented with various weave structures and fibers, finding new ways to create puckers and dimension in fabric. One technique she has explored in recent years involves using sodium
alginate paste as a resist on feltable woven cloth. Depending on where the resist paste is placed, the cloth felts and puckers into an endless variety of shapes. Karst creates more utilitarian weavings, like scarves, as well as wall hangings and framed works (See Appendix C for photos of Karst’s work). Karst owns one twelve-shaft loom, one ten-shaft loom, two eight-shaft looms, and ten four-shaft looms, seven of which are direct tie-up, with the hopes of someday offering classes from her home. Karst continues to take weaving and textile design workshops and classes at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, the John C. Campbell Folk School, the Cloth Fiber Workshop, and the Chattahoochee Handweavers Guild, taking the information she learns and incorporating it into her own work as well as sharing it with her textile design and weaving students (Karst).

Susan Morgan Leveille was born in Silva, North Carolina, in 1949 and raised in Webster, North Carolina, and is a weaver, educator, and fine craft gallery owner in Dillsboro, North Carolina. Leveille grew up in a weaving family and learned to weave at the age of six under the tutelage of a relative who was living with Leveille’s family for a while. The relative was a second-cousin once-removed, Frances Barr Cargill, who wove a set of curtains for the home to express her gratitude. After Barr wove the curtains she set up the loom once more to show Leveille how to throw a shuttle and beat consistently. The cousin ended up marrying a minister, and since they would be moving frequently, Barr left the loom to Susan Leveille’s family, along with enough yarn for Leveille to work with. When Leveille was ten she was allowed to take a one-week long weaving class at the Penland School of Crafts. Children were not allowed to take classes, but an exception was made for Leveille because she was the niece of Lucy Morgan, the
founder of the craft school. Leveille proved to be a well-behaved and good student, so she was allowed to stay at Penland for another week to continue to learn about weaving. As an adult, Leveille went the University of Tennessee intending to pursue a degree in interior design, but found it was a poor fit and switched her major to crafts, spending the rest of her college years instead on weaving and metalsmithing. She also took classes whenever she could at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts. Leveille often weaves functional home pieces, and periodically does more art-focused pieces. She has a deep love for traditional patterns, such as overshot and “M’s and O’s.” Leveille says she loves to weave “things we end up touching,” like shawls, scarves, yardage for clothing, and table napkins, though she also weaves wall pieces on occasion. In her studio, Leveille has nine floor looms, which are mostly four-shaft and a few that are eight-shaft looms, as well as five four-shaft table looms. She has three floor looms at home, one of which originally belonged to her aunt, Lucy Morgan. For over a decade, Leveille owned a weaving shop located in the Riverwood Shops, her parents’ former craft studios in Dillsboro, where she wove, sold weaving looms and supplies, and taught weaving classes. Today, Leveille and her husband own and run Oaks Gallery in the former weaving shop, and she still offers weaving classes. Susan Leveille is a lifetime member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, a recipient of the 2014 North Carolina Heritage Award, and carries on the craft legacy of her family and the region (Leveille).

Barbara Miller was born in Haywood County, North Carolina in 1932, and is a weaver, educator, and historian who resides in Pisgah Forest, North Carolina. Miller had been fascinated by weaving since she was a young girl, watching weavers demonstrating at the Allanstand Craft
Shop in downtown Asheville while her mother went shopping. Despite the early interest, she did not find the opportunity to learn how to weave until she joined the Southern Highland Craft Guild as an embroiderer. Miller met other members whose focus was in weaving, and in the early 1970s was able to take a class taught by Alice Willard at the Opportunity House, an arts and cultural center in Hendersonville, North Carolina. That class provided a basic understanding of weaving, and Miller continued to supplement her knowledge with instructional weaving books, one-week classes at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, and through conferences and spending time with other weavers. One of Miller’s historical interests is the weaving heritage of Southern Appalachia, focusing particularly on the work of Frances L. Goodrich and the women of the local settlement schools and handweaving industries. Barbara Miller has co-authored *Frances L. Goodrich’s Brown Book of Weaving Drafts* with Deb Schillo, the librarian for the Southern Highland Craft Guild. The book contains a selection of the weaving drafts Goodrich collected, reproducing both the original drafts and draw-downs as well as computer-generated versions for modern weavers. Miller currently has a sequel to this book underway, *Frances L. Goodrich’s Coverlets and Counterpanes*, which features the rest of the drafts in Goodrich’s “brown book” and is scheduled to be released in November 2016. Miller weaves a range of different things, like placemats, dish towels, table runners, baby blankets, and wall hangings on seven looms that vary between four and eight shafts (See Appendix C for photos of Miller’s work). Miller is a member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild and volunteers at the Folk Art Center, and continues to be a mentor and “weaving mom” to weavers across the region. Miller
also sells her weavings, creating a range of work, but overshot weaving remains her favorite
(Miller).

Tommye McClure Scanlin was born in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1947 and raised in Ivy Log, Georgia. Scanlin is a tapestry weaver, instructor, and professor emerita at the University of North Georgia and lives in Dahlonega, Georgia. Tommye first began weaving as an art education major in 1972, when her supervising teacher did cardboard loom weaving with her class. As a high school art instructor, Scanlin taught her class how to build frame looms, and continued to learn all she could about weaving from books and magazines, like *Shuttle, Spindle, and Dyepot*, a publication of the Handweavers Guild of America. Scanlin also took workshops sponsored by various fiber guilds, and classes at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, the Penland School of Crafts, and the John C. Campbell Folk School. Scanlin received her Master of Art Education from the University of Georgia, and received her Master of Fine Arts from East Tennessee State University while she worked as an art instructor for North Georgia College (now the University of North Georgia). Scanlin paints and draws as well as weaves, and has always been drawn to the image-making potential of weaving. Her earlier experiments involved warp painting, pick-up weaves, and electronic dobby looms in attempts to create imagery in weaving. Finally, in 1988, Scanlin dedicated herself to learning tapestry weaving, and has since become masterful in the technique (See Appendix C for photos of Scanlin’s work). Scanlin has four high-warp tapestry looms, an eight-shaft loom, and components for approximately fifteen plumbing pipe tapestry looms she uses for her classes. Tommye Scanlin is a member of the Southern Highland Crafts Guild as well as the American Tapestry Alliance and the Piedmont Craftsmen.
Jan Turner was born in 1953 and raised in a suburb outside of Washington, DC, and is a weaver, spinner, and historical reenactor who lives in Jonesborough, Tennessee. Jan Turner wove for the first time in 1979 when she decided to take weaving as an elective at East Tennessee State University while pursuing a degree in land surveying. After that class, Turner’s weaving was put on hold while she shifted her focus to raising her family. Approximately ten years later, Turner took up weaving again, this time sparked by her involvement in historical reenactment. While working at the Rocky Mount State Historic site she met Carolyn DeWitt, a weaver who told Turner about tape weaving, a form of weaving reenactors did at Rocky Mount, and about the Overmountain Weavers Guild, which met in Kingsport, Tennessee at the Exchange Place. The guild offered weaving classes to its members, so Turner decided to join and take a refresher course. Turner has remained active in the Overmountain Weavers Guild, taking workshops and learning from other members with different weaving specialties. Jan Turner also continues to be a reenactor and demonstrator at historical sites. When Turner is demonstrating, she uses a newer loom but explains the history and process of weaving to visitors. As a reenactor, though, she is in first person and does not spend time explaining her work, since that would be breaking out of her colonial persona. Turner often weaves utilitarian pieces like towels and dishcloths for herself and her friends and family. Since there are many reenactors in Turner’s circle of friends, she is careful to make pieces that are historically accurate to the time period being reenacted. One of Jan Turner’s favorite weave structures is overshot, because of it’s
potential to evolve into new patterns with slight changes to the threading and treadling, as well as because of how fun it is to watch the designs grow as they are woven (See Appendix C for photos of Turner’s work). Turner owns an eight-shaft and a four-shaft floor loom, as well as a table loom, an inkle loom and three tape looms. In addition to educating children and adults as a reenactor and demonstrator, Turner also teaches people how to weave (Turner).

Themes

As described in chapter three, several themes emerged from my coding analysis of the interviews with the participants. The following table lists the themes that emerged from the pattern coding, from most to least prominent, along with the key concepts from each theme. The first four themes were selected to be addressed in-depth in this study because of their presence in all ten interviews. The titles of these four themes emerged from comments made by participants as well from my own notes when I organized the code groupings. These prominent themes also encompass aspects of the lesser themes, to a degree.

Table 2: Themes and Key Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Deep Calling</td>
<td>Developing an interest in weaving, instant attraction to weaving, first experiences with weaving, family involvement with art and craft, early exposure to craft and other handwork, personality suited to weaving,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)

| You Can Never Learn It All                                                                 | Drive to continue weaving, lifetime of learning, weaving as a challenge, weaving as a puzzle, weaving and the state of flow, weaving as meditative process, as a form of artistic expression, as a way of processing grief |
| Weaving as Work                                                                             | Working as professional weaver, working as weaving instructor, reliance on other sources of income, weaving as supplementary income, difficulties of weaving for a living, rewards of weaving for a living |
| Weaving in Southern Appalachia                                                             | Connection to other weavers in region, connection to region’s history, weaving connected to regional learning centers, weaving inspired by life in the region |

Minor Themes

| Teaching and Weaving                                                                       | Love of teaching weaving, importance of sharing knowledge, teaching as source of income, knowledge gained from weaving instructors |
| Technology and Weaving                                                                     | Use of weaving software, use or non-use of computerized looms, pros and cons of internet as weaving resource, online weaving community, online marketing and selling |
| Loom Talk                                                                                 | Discussing different looms, loom preferences, loom difficulties, loom collecting, loom ownership |
| Recent Weaving Trends                                                                      | Rigid heddle looms as introduction to weaving, new mothers wanting to weave baby wraps, weaving interest as part of DIY culture |

The first theme, “A Deep Calling,” deals with the instant attraction and sense of belonging that weaving inspired in the participants. The theme also illustrates the various early experiences the participants had with handweaving and other creative, hands-on activities, as
well as personality traits that are suited for weaving. The second theme, “You Can Never Learn It All,” revolves around what continues to encourage handweavers to keep weaving, and for many of the participants it is the boundless learning and challenge that weaving provides. The third theme, “Weaving as Work,” discusses the ways modern-day handweavers utilize their weaving skills as a source of income, and the difficulties of making a living as a professional weaver. “Weaving as Work” also covers the appeal handwoven pieces still carry for their recipients, and the unique skillset that handweavers offer to consumers. “Weaving in Southern Appalachia,” the fourth and last theme, highlights how weaving continues to have an impact on the region, and how the weaving community in Appalachia has been influential in the lives of the participants. These themes deepen our understanding of the way handweavers continue to play a vital role in Southern Appalachia, as well as how the handweaving community in Southern Appalachia and the activity of handweaving itself has enriched the lives of the participants.

A Deep Calling

I trained to be a school teacher. I did my four years of college and nine weeks of student teaching and came out the other end, and looked in the mirror and said I can’t do this for the next thirty years. But the day I sat down at a loom at Rabun Gap, I said this is what I was born to do. This is what I was born to do.

– Sharon Grist

Although the participants in the case study were introduced to weaving at different points in their lives, discovering the craft from a broad range of sources, one element that united the participants was the passion that weaving ignited. As Sharon Grist said, weaving “is what I was
born to do,” a realization she made when she sat at a loom for her very first time. Jessica Green had a similar epiphany, saying that, “…from the second I sat down I felt a deep calling and a very profound sense of homecoming. So I quickly reorganized my life to make weaving a big part of it.” That moment when the process of weaving clicks for the weaver, there is a sense that the weaver needs to find a way of incorporating this newfound passion into their life.

I must note that each participant in the study is very involved in the weaving community, so this fervor is not likely to be present in those who only weave on occasion, or have taken weaving classes and workshops and found the process enjoyable but not worth further exploration. However, for those that do experience a calling to weave, the process of procuring the necessary equipment, tools, and education begins, and the boundaries between weaver, learner, and educator are often blurred as one continues taking workshops, collecting educational books, trying new techniques, and sharing one’s acquired knowledge and passion with others.

What is it that makes some people so instantly attracted to weaving? Many of the participants had early experience with other fiber arts, or were just drawn to very hands-on work. Both Sharon Grist and Tommye Scanlin mention playing with potholder looms as children, and many of the other participants came from families that regularly engaged in artistic and hands-on activities. Jo-Marie Karst came from a large family that originally hailed from Union County, Tennessee, and her grandparents grew cotton that they used for their quilt batting. After moving to Indiana in the early 1930s after the Tennessee Valley Authority built the Norris Dam, which flooded the family property, the women in Karst’s family still carried on the quilting tradition. Karst said, “I remember in high school that the quilting frames came to my house. My mother
had pieced together a quilt top and three or four of her sisters came to visit, maybe. They sat on either side of that quilting frame in the dining room and hand quilted a quilt. That was really special.” Karst herself learned to sew as a teenager, using her mother’s sewing machine and learning to sew from pattern instructions in order to create unique and expressive clothing.

Jessica Green also grew up in a large family with “lots of very crafty ladies” and learned about knitting and sewing at a young age. Tommye Scanlin’s mother sewed and made clothes for her family. Susan Leveille comes from a rich family crafting heritage, being the niece of Lucy Morgan, the founder of the Penland School of Crafts and the daughter of Ralph and Ruth Morgan, who founded the Riverwood Studios in Dillsboro, North Carolina. Susan Leveille learned how to weave at age six from her cousin, Frances Barr Cargill, who had learned how to weave at Penland School of Crafts, where Leveille also continued her weaving education as a young girl. Pam Howard learned the basics of weaving as well as a range of fiber arts from her mother, who worked as a home economics instructor. Sharon Grist’s grandfather was a draftsman and woodcarver as well as a member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, and Grist’s involvement in weaving can be seen as a continuation of the maker tradition in her family.

While not all the participants mentioned an early involvement in fiber arts or growing up in a family with a weaving heritage, having a natural desire to work with one’s hands, paired with an eye for aesthetics and an appreciation for process may predispose an individual to take quickly to weaving. From a creative standpoint, weaving allows artists and craftspeople to immerse themselves in a sensory experience where all the elements of art are utilized in a very
tactile way. Weaving creates an end product that can be touched and interacted with, if that’s what the creator intends. A vital part of the experience with many woven pieces is the tactile component—it’s not just the visual impression a woven piece gives, but also the way it feels. The hand, or feel, of fabric and the way individual threads intertwine to create designs is irresistible to weavers. It’s not unusual to see a weaver gently pick up and scrutinize another weaver’s work. Jo-Marie Karst said, “It’s like as I was told the weaver’s handshake is where you reach out and you touch the other person’s clothing. ‘Oh, what is this, how did you do that?’ We don’t shake hands; we just touch fabric.” Other artists and craftspeople, whether they are painters or potters, may find their medium holds a similar tactile appeal, but weavers are drawn particularly towards the tactile qualities of fiber.

The use of color and texture are two components that weavers get inspiration from on a frequent basis. One of the things that piqued Karst’s interest in weaving was walking past the fiber studio in college and seeing the walls of colorful spools of yarn. Edwina Bringle’s work is very color-driven as well, with color schemes from her photographs and her surroundings making an appearance in her weaving. Tommye Scanlin uses drawing and painting to develop imagery, which she then further develops in the tapestry weaving process. In regards to her interest in woven imagery, Scanlin said, “As I started weaving, I began to try to figure out ways that I could combine my love for making images with woven structure.” Scanlin’s tapestry making involves a lengthy process of working and re-working imagery, making design choices throughout weaving so the images and colors are best suited for the tapestry. Certain shapes may
be easy to sketch out, but are difficult to recreate in weaving and must be adapted to work on the loom.

Handweaving is a creative outlet for the participants of the study, but where exactly do they fall in the art/craft divide, if such a divide does exist? Sharon Grist said, “I look to my grandfather…who was a fine craftsperson. And the highest accolade I have ever wanted was to be called a fine craftsperson.” For Jessica Green, “Being able to kind of meld art, craft, and design in that way, by making pieces that are functional by hanging on the wall and telling a story visually, that started feeling really useful. At my core, I come to weaving as a craftsperson but what I’m most interested is taking the triangle of art, craft, and design and finding the nexus place where all three meet.” Weaving, like ceramics, metalsmithing, or woodworking, can fall under both the categories of craft and art. When trying to categorize these mediums, it’s best to see art and craft as a continuum rather than a binary. Weavers might be more likely to see more utilitarian pieces like scarves, placemats, and blankets as craft, and wall-hangings and tapestries as art, but aesthetically a wall hanging and a blanket may be quite similar, with the only difference being the use of the object. The elements and principles of design can be applied equally to both scarf and a tapestry. A handwoven piece can simultaneously be art and craft. Many of the participants seemed unconcerned with how their work is categorized, though acknowledge it can be an issue. Tommye Scanlin said,

At this point in my life, having retired from an academic field and still in a teaching field, I don’t worry about those distinctions. Although, I know that they very much are out there. I know that they very much can play a role in how what
one does is viewed. I know some people… I know people who struggle with it currently, struggle with it to get their work accepted, viewed and seen by galleries and critics.

Regardless of how handweavers are labeled, the one category that I believe best applies to every participant is maker. Weavers do, weavers create. The medium can be analyzed and cases can be made for the labels of art or craft, but as Edwina Bringle said, “By the time they’ve argued all day long, they’ve missed making a piece.”

Along with an immediate sense of calling, an early exposure to fiber arts and crafts, and an appreciation for aesthetics and the tactile experience of weaving, handweavers also seem to enjoy the technical aspects of weaving. Grist keeps a small tabletop loom available for children to experiment on when they visit the Foxfire Center, and she notes that “…you can see the ones that have the engineer kind of mind. You can already see them trying to figure out new patterns and all.” An engineer scientifically and mathematically designs and creates various structures; it would make sense that an engineering kind of mind would be drawn to the process of exploring various structures and applying them in a tangible way, such as weaving. Jessica Green said, “I was amazed too, when I started assisting teachers, how awesome the women in the room were retired physicists and computer programmers and these incredible minds, who, of course, are attracted to weaving because what a creative outlet for all that languaging.” Green also mentioned that, before becoming involved in weaving, “I imagined that weavers were these earthy, yummy, kind, patient, goddess women. What I didn’t realize is that weaving is so mathematical and so isolating and so control-oriented.” While there certainly is no set “weaver
“personality” and some may fit the down-to-earth personality type, there are very technical facets of weaving that attract a diverse group of people that one may not associate with weaving if one is not familiar with the weaving process. For example, the creator of the Online Digital Archives on Weaving and Related Documents, a valuable resource for weavers and other fiber artists, was Ralph E. Griswold. Griswold received his PhD in electrical engineering in 1962 and made great strides in his field, such as leading the development of various programming languages and founding the Department of Computer Science at the University of Arizona in 1971, where he worked as the department head until 1981 and was later awarded the title of Regents Professor in 1990 (Ralph Griswold 1934-2006). After Griswold retired in 1995 he shifted his focus to weaving, being particularly interested in the mathematical aspect of the art. Griswold serves as one case in which an individual with great technical skill and proficiency used their abilities both in a technical or scientific field as well as in weaving. Karen Donde also brought attention to the mathematical component of weaving, saying, “There’s a good deal of arithmetic involved and spatial planning and visualizing how things are going to work together, and what happens when this thread goes up and this thread stays down?” Drawing attention to the mathematical and scientific side of weaving does not mean that every weaver has a strong background in such fields, but it is a component nonetheless, and one that many acknowledge.

It is also worth noting that the much of the technology from which we have developed our modern computers originated with the innovations of the Jacquard loom. The Jacquard loom was developed in 1805 by the self-described master-weaver and silk merchant Joseph Marie Jacquard in Lyons, France (Delve 98-100). The technology of the Jacquard loom was based on
earlier concepts of using a system of paper cards, needles, and hooks to control the warp on a silk loom to create intricate designs. Jacquard was able to create a working loom by combining various elements of previous attempts, and received the patent for the loom in 1805 (Delve 99-100). Each card had a pattern consisting of rows of punched holes that dictated the weaving pattern. A horizontal row of needles was pressed against the cards. Connected to these rows of needles were the vertical heddles that were attached to the individual threads of the warp. The top of the heddle was a hook. As the cards rotated past the horizontal needles, certain needles would slip through the holes, moving with them the hooked heddles that would catch onto a rod above them that would lift the heddles and their attached warp threads (Delve 100). Before this invention, the raising of individual warp thread and the development of the woven pattern was done manually by a “draw-boy.” Even after the invention of the Jacquard loom, most weavers still created the patterns in the silk weavings manually until Jean Antoine Breton refined the Jacquard loom and made it more reliable (Delve 100). By the mid-nineteenth century, the Jacquard loom was widely used throughout France and England. The technology inspired Charles Babbage, known as the father of the computer, to develop the concept of the Analytical Engine, an algebraic calculator that relied on the Jacquard loom’s punched card technology, in the 1830s (Delve 101; Essinger 81-98). This application of weaving technology to computing led to the development of the binary digit (Essinger 88). Through these connections, one might say that the first computer was a loom.

Although there is a strong connection between weaving and technology, the participants varied in how much they chose to utilize electronic assistance in their work. Karen Donde
mentioned that she “did succumb to the ‘more shafts have to be better’ philosophy after experimenting with a dobby somewhere,” and currently owns a thirty-two-shaft Leclerc Megado dobby along with treadle looms, a table loom, tapestry looms, and an inkle loom. Pam Howard owns a sixteen-shaft dobby loom along with four- and eight-shaft treadle looms, and Jessica Green also works on two AVL dobby looms, as well as twelve-, eight-, and four-shaft treadle looms. Jo-Marie Karst and Tommye Scanlin, while not currently owning computerized looms, have worked with computerized dobby looms and Jacquard looms. Dobby looms and Jacquard looms are floor looms, like treadle looms, but they each have a particular kind of technology that allows for greater warp manipulation and design capacity, and today they are most often computerized. As explained previously, the Jacquard technology can allow for the control of each individual warp thread. A dobby loom originally used a series of pegs inserted into a chain of rods to select the shafts to be lifted in the weaving process. Today’s dobby looms usually rely on an electronic interface that connects to a personal computer containing software with weaving pattern information, which the dobby loom then carries out and lifts shafts accordingly. Since a dobby loom still requires shafts, there is less design potential compared to a Jacquard loom, and the patterns usually are more geometric in shape. Both dobby and Jacquard looms do not rely on foot treadles to control sets of warp threads. Treadle looms, in comparison, usually have far less shafts due to the number treadles it takes to control a loom. An eight-shaft loom, for example, would have ten treadles, and that is a lot of action for a weaver’s feet. Table looms function similarly to floor treadle looms, though the treadles are in the form of hand-manipulated tabs. Then, of course, there are low-tech looms that require neither treadles or computers, like rigid
heddle looms, backstrap looms, tapestry looms, tape looms, inkle looms, and cards for card weaving. Even on a seemingly simple loom, a weaver is not limited to creating simple designs. Weavers have created stunning inlay designs on backstrap looms. Multi-shaft computerized dobby looms and Jacquard looms do, however, allow for the creation of very complex designs in a way that is far less time consuming compared to more manually-created design work.

Like Donde, there are handweavers who enjoy the design capabilities that a computerized loom with a great number of shafts has to offer. Other weavers prefer to stick with treadle looms and other non-computerized looms because of the connection they provide weavers to the actual weaving process. Treadle looms lack the computerized middle-man and therefore physically engage the weavers themselves with each step of the weaving process. In regards to the difference between treadle looms and computerized looms, Susan Leveille said, “I know some weavers who can weave on computer-assisted looms and could not produce yards of cloth on the kind of looms I work on, just because their first introduction was to one that had the computer…I do understand people’s fascination with that, but my perception is that those people are more textile designers, and that’s fine. We need people who can do that.” Edwina Bringle, who also works primarily on treadle looms, said,

Years ago, people said to me, “you need a compu-dobby loom and a Jacquard loom,” and were telling me everything I should do. I looked at them and I said, “When I see things that somebody has done with one of their fancy looms that is beyond what the industry does, then maybe I would be interested.” I said, “I’m
fine.” Four harnesses. I mean, you could never do everything in your life anyway that you could do with four harnesses.

Bringle also creates her designs without the use of weaving design software, like *Fiberworks*, which most weavers rely on to some degree today.

Although handweavers incorporate varying amounts of technology in their work, whether they choose to weave on computerized dobby looms or solely on treadle looms, they still maintain a level of physical and creative control over their work that is different from the experience of industrial/mill weavers. Sharon Grist, who works on treadle looms, said “that’s splitting hairs about if it’s still handwoven” in regards to the difference between computerized looms and treadle looms. Whether your loom of choice is a Schacht Baby Wolf or an AVL Studio Dobby Loom with a Compu-Dobby, it’s simply a matter of personal preference. Many weavers have a love for the machinery of looms; it’s why it’s not unusual for a weaver to own multiple looms and learn about which looms are best suited to which types of handwovens. As Karst said, “Looms motivate me…I just love looms and I like studying how they’re all different, how they all operate.” Some weavers love computerized looms, some weavers love treadle looms, some weavers love both.

**You Can Never Learn It All**

The second major theme that arose from the coding process is about what motivates weavers. What is it that makes weaving so addictive? There are so many facets and different ways of going about weaving, with what feels like an endless amount of subsets to the craft. Therefore, part of the awe that weaving has is its encompassment of what can be a lifetime of
learning and discovery for the weaver. This is one aspect of weaving that appeals to those with an engineering mindset—they enjoy the challenge of weaving. Sharon Grist said, “One of the most intriguing things about weaving is that you can spend one lifetime studying tapestry, like Tommye has, or one lifetime studying rug techniques, like the Collingwoods. Or one lifetime studying lace weaves, or block weaves, or overshot like Barbara Miller has, or tartan like Marge Warren has, and never learn it all.” Even Mary Meigs Atwater, in *The Shuttle-Craft Book of American Hand-Weaving*, wrote that “The hand-weaver has a ‘horizon unlimited.’ This is one of the charms of our beautiful craft. For those who crave adventure there is always something new and untried ahead, with no danger that one will ever come to an end” (21). Edwina Bringle described her own attraction to weaving in a similar fashion, saying, “I think the thing I love about it is when you learn more about it, you realize there is no way you could learn everything that could be presented in the weaving world.”

Bringle then went on to discuss another much-loved aspect of weaving, saying, “I wasn’t exposed to industry or working with industry but what I discovered is the way that I work with color continues to challenge me.” She also stated that, “I get challenged by pattern but also taking that pattern and changing it from what it is.” Part of the fun is definitely the challenge, continuously learning and pushing the boundaries of one’s knowledge. Again, Bringle further illustrates her attraction to challenge, saying,

I’ve done things like give myself a challenge of rag rugs—looks easy to weave but just go try it. I did that for quite a while to understand more about the structure of things. I’ll give myself a project of doing some rugs. I’ve gone and done ikat
warp and do pickup work. I’ve done a lot of things. A lot of people will go around and do workshops, primarily do one thing, and that has never been me.

Even local weaving guild encourage their members to tackle new skills, with Jan Turner explaining, “…we have guild challenges that challenge you. In fact, that’s one of the challenges, to take an overshot pattern and change it, and make it yours. Keep it overshot, but do something different with it.” Weavers seem to enjoy taking on challenge, overcoming the initial struggle of learning new concepts or techniques, and finally experiencing the elation that comes with the “aha!” moment when one has finally acquired the skill and knowledge needed to execute a once daunting task. The appeal of tackling weaving challenges is like a competition with oneself, the rush like beating one’s previous best time during a run. However, any mention of feelings of competition between weavers was absent from the interviews; instead, there were many instances of respect and admiration for the skills of other members in the community.

Karen Donde used another metaphor that was similar to that of a challenge, albeit with a twist, saying, “it’s a puzzle,” when describing the experience of trying a new weave structure. The desire to figure out a structure and see how it works is essentially a form of puzzle solving. Donde also brought up the health benefits of weaving and how the puzzle-like aspect of it may help keep minds active, and said, “That kind of mental stimulation has a lot of potential for those people who like cloth and yet have a need to make the brain work, to learn new things, to manipulate numbers and turn it into something beautiful. I think that’s what keeps it exciting for me, and hopefully that’s what keeps my brain going for the next thirty years. Who knows?” This
hearkens back to the use of weaving in occupational therapy, which Mary Meigs Atwater was a proponent of and mentions in her book, *The Shuttle-Craft Book of American Hand-Weaving* (19).

A vital component in choosing to weave over working on a jigsaw or crossword puzzle is a love of cloth. When weavers look at cloth, they don’t just see the whole fabric. They notice the way threads interact with each other, with different colors and different thread sizes and textures overlapping each other to create the whole, cohesive piece. While a non-weaver may look at a piece of fabric and take note of certain pattern shapes and colors, weavers can hone in on all the different elements and appreciate much more of the cloth. This can lead to weavers deconstructing a fabric in their heads, wondering how things would look if they recreated certain elements but changed the colors, or changed elements of the pattern, whether it’s the threading or the treadling. Or maybe it’s a concept a weaver is curious about exploring the potentials of, like Karst’s interest in creating three-dimensional fabric. So, while the puzzle-like qualities of weaving are part of the continued appeal of weaving, it is grounded in an appreciation for cloth.

Karen Donde also expressed her love for the challenging aspect of weaving combined with a passion for learning, saying “I think that’s what’s so appealing it is that it keeps me learning. There’s always more that I don’t know and that I can continue to learn.” The drive to learn and to search out new challenges go hand-in-hand, with overcoming challenges being a learning process. Learning also is connected to education, as weavers find they are driven to share their own knowledge and experience with others, either through teaching classes, giving instruction one-on-one, or through demonstrations. Weavers find themselves devoting to learning not just because of the challenge, but to become better instructors. Many also find being an
instructor complements a weaving habit that focuses more on trying new things instead of focusing on speed and consistent quality, like a production weaver would. Again, Donde says, I haven’t really settled on one technique or weave structure. I kind of spend some time getting to know one for a while and do several different projects with that, and then something else catches my attention and I jump onto that. That’s not being a successful production weaver, which is maybe why I focus more on teaching than I do production, because when I’m weaving to prepare classes, then I have a reason to learn something new because I can develop a class from it.

Pam Howard also finds a strong connection between her weaving and her teaching, and said, I’m always making things as a teaching tool so that I can create something then show it to my students to inspire them. It’s usually something that is not intricate and involved because I’m usually teaching beginners but it’s beautiful…I’m also kind of now trying to focus myself on weaving things that will show how much knowledge I have, that yes, I am a beginning weaving teacher but I also know a lot more than what you think.

Pam Howard has created many one-of-a-kind pieces for sale, like hand-dyed and woven scarves, but has found that as a teacher, she can focus more on weaving for personal enjoyment, alongside of creating pieces and samples that can be used as educational tools.

Although each weaver may prefer different aspects of weaving, with some preferring the drafting and planning, or the warping process, or the actual activity of weaving by passing the shuttle, or bobbin, as in tapestry weaving, there is a sense of deep fulfillment from the process.
To understand the experience of the weaving process, it helps to know about the concept of flow. The term was coined by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who uses the word “flow” for what he describes as optimal experiences (Csikszentmihalyi 39-41). People who engage in “intrinsically rewarding” activities, such as weaving, are engaging in “flow activities” (Csikszentmihalyi 67, 72). Flow activities are ones that often require the development of a skill, and provide a level of challenge, which in turn requires focus and attention from the person engaged in the activity (Csikszentmihalyi 49-54). The activity may also have a clear goal and some kind of feedback (Csikszentmihalyi 54-57). In weaving, the goal might be to learn a new technique, with the feedback being the way the cloth develops as it is being woven. While engaged in the flow, the participant becomes absorbed in the task at hand, reaching a new level of consciousness where they may lose track of time. Jessica Green’s description of her time spent working in her studio is good example getting into a state of flow. Green said,

I’m happiest in my day in the studio when I can have a couple of processes going at once, like, I have a warp being wound and skeins in the dye pot and a couple of looms going and I can move my body from project to project and allow my mind to, kind of, rest. Each project—because it’s so easy for me in particular-- I get really focused. So if I sit down at my loom I have a very hard time getting up from my loom. I can be sitting there for eight hours, really.

It is this experience of flow that weavers find so addictive, and allows them to lose track of time and become consumed by watching a pattern or image develop, see the way different colors and
textures interplay, or just slip into a meditative state through the rhythm of the shuttle going back and forth.

Tommye Scanlin experiences a particular kind of flow state when working on tapestries that differs from the experience of weaving something more repetitive on a floor loom. Scanlin said, “It’s different than floor loom weaving where you do a lot of mind work when you set the thing up. Sometimes you can get almost in a zone of the shuttle throwing without having to concentrate particularly much then. With tapestry, literally you have to stay engaged the whole time. Your mind, your hands, and your eyes are constantly on alert to make it happen the way it ought to happen.” What Scanlin describes is a kind of hyperawareness that occurs in tapestry weaving when the weaver is continuously occupied by making design decisions throughout the weaving process. This kind of experience is different from, say, that of a production weaver who may enjoy the more meditative zone of weaving, like Sharon Grist, who said that she doesn’t mind the repetition at all. However, even a production weaver like Grist would still own a set of different looms threaded with different projects, which can also be woven with different weft colors. There is no need for today’s handweaver to engage in anything overly monotonous if they do not want to.

Not everyone who tries weaving will enter a state of flow, and what could provide a flow experience to one person can be drudgery to another. Susan Leveille loves to share her passion for weaving through teaching, but explains that the craft isn’t for everyone. Leveille said,

You get a rhythm going that you can just sort of get dissolved into. For me it’s very relaxing. You think, “The whole world should share my passion for this,”
and you realize that it’s not the right thing for everybody. I find it very relaxing to
do a one-shuttle weave. Your body ends up moving in a repetitive way and so
forth, but there are others who do not find it relaxing at all. That was a learning
experience for me, too…I had a woman who came in about the third or fourth
class, and she said, “Take this blanket thing back.” I said, “Well, okay. What’s
happened?” She said, “I don’t know. I thought this was going to be relaxing, and
I’m getting an ulcer.” So, it’s not for everyone, that’s for sure.

The understanding that weaving just is not for everybody is one more reason why, for those who
do fall in love with the craft, it is very much a calling.

Weaving can also serve a deeply therapeutic tool through which to process thoughts and
emotions. The step-by-step weaving process as well as the rhythm of weaving the fabric is
soothing, and can give the mind enough stillness to work through feelings that may be
overwhelming on their own. JoMarie Karst brought my attention to this use of weaving by
sharing her process of creatively working through her grief after the death of her husband. Karst
said,

At that time, I had a 60-inch wide Cranbrook and I thought, you know, I need to
do a piece to process this experience and it was a time where I could just meditate
on him and our life together and so I thought, okay, let’s just weave the fold resist
and so I just put all 60 inches wide and wove two pieces of cloth that were 90
inches long. So far, one I have not put a pattern on. I’m still kind of waiting to see
what I want to say with it, but the other, the other piece, once I got it off the
loom—and it’s white on white and 600 threads wide—I thought, “What is something that was uniquely his?” Whenever he would put his hand on my back, like to escort me through a doorway, or enter a car, or just a sign of endearment, he put his hand on my back, his hands were so big that it like covered my whole back. I thought, you know, I just need to make big handprints all over this piece, so that’s why I stenciled on that, these big, big hands. Then when I felted it, of course they got smaller…I didn’t think about that, but the finished piece is that when I wrapped it around myself it was like I was being hugged. I guess that was something that inspired me to do that weaving.

Although no other participants provided an example of weaving in their lives that came close to JoMarie Karst’s use of weaving to process grief, I find it is a beautiful and noteworthy example of just how healing the act of weaving can be.

Weaving as Work

The third major theme of this study focuses on how weavers use their skills as a source of income, as well the benefits and drawbacks of weaving professionally. For many weavers, weaving goes beyond being a hobby and becomes a lifelong passion. Some weavers might have such a passion for the craft that they choose to take their weaving to a professional level. Most of the participants sold their work in craft galleries, craft fairs, and relied on word-of-mouth and online artist portfolios for commissions. Jessica Green sold her work through home goods retailers as well as through her personal website. None of the participants used Etsy or other online marketplaces as a way or marketing and selling their work.
The decision to turn a passion like weaving into a career is tricky. The economic opportunities for weavers can be either adequate or lacking, depending on the needs of the weaver. When settlement schools and cottage weaving industries served communities in Southern Appalachia, weaving was a means of providing supplemental income to local women. In 2016, the income from handweaving is still regarded as supplemental. It is extremely difficult for weavers to live independently on income solely provided by selling their work. This is part of a larger national trend of the majority of craft artists deriving only part of their income from craft work. In *The Coda Review 2011*, five million Americans earned only part of their income from their craftwork, compared to the 30,000 to 50,000 Americans who considered craftwork their main source of income (2). On average, full-time craft artists in western North Carolina made $24,339, and part-time craft artists made $4,822 (*The Coda Review 2011* 6). None of these figures represent handweavers specifically, though they do fall under the craft artist demographic.

One of the reasons it is so difficult to make money through weaving is because it is such a labor intensive process. Even when a weaver streamlines their work by investing in computerized looms and weave production-style, with each loom warped for a separate product, handweaving takes time. It is a fact that all weavers face. On top of the time consuming process of weaving, there is also the cost of the machinery and the supplies. Although there are good deals to be found on used looms, a new floor loom or table loom can cost several thousands of dollars. For example, a four-shaft thirty-six-inch Schacht Standard Floor Loom costs over three thousand dollars when purchased new (“Schacht Standard Floor Loom”). Of course, an aspiring
weaver who finds the costs of looms prohibitive could easily and cheaply construct a frame loom or backstrap loom and create a range of different handwovens on such looms, but for most weavers in the U.S. the floor loom is the loom of choice. There is also the cost of the materials used. Yarn costs vary greatly, depending on the fiber content and quality. For example, a cotton dishcloth would be less costly to produce compared to a silk scarf.

While acquiring the necessary skill to become a proficient handweaver and purchasing the needed supplies might seem cost-prohibitive, weaving does not stand out as being costlier than working in other creative fields, such as being a photographer, or printmaker, or potter. One of the problems weaving suffers from, as do other art and craft-related fields, is being devalued despite the skill, labor, and materials that go into its production. If a customer is in the market for something purely functional, there is no way a handweaver in Southern Appalachia can compete with Wal-Mart or Target. To make matters more complicated, handweavers themselves often undervalue their work. Edwina Bringle sees this as a hindrance to the overall success of handweaving, saying, “I think it is harder for weavers to make a living because a lot of people who do it at home just want the cost of the yarn out of what they’re doing and the pricing isn’t where it should be.” If a weaver does not rely on selling their work to make a living, they may choose to sell their work at a price that allows them to maintain their weaving habits.

Even if weavers value their own profession, the knowledge that they are creating something that is unaffordable and inaccessible to many people leads to an internal struggle. Jessica Green, whose work is usually sold through home goods retailers, grapples with the desire
to create work that reflects her thoughtful, homesteading lifestyle yet is still affordable to a wider demographic. Green said,

   It’s hard to make a product that you, or any of your peers, couldn’t afford, you know? I could never buy my work. My family could never buy my work. And that’s something that I’m shifting. I’m doing a lot more small work and I’m framing work now, which means that I can take something small and make it affordable and I’m still making money off of it.

The act of weaving and selling becomes a delicate balance of trying to pay oneself fair wages without relying solely on the consumption of the elite.

   Often, this balance necessitates some other form of income. This may come in the form of a “day job” completely unrelated to weaving. Edwina Bringle worked as an x-ray technician for years before being hired as an art professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. If a weaver is lucky, they might be able to make money from a job that ties in with their craft, like teaching. Teaching requires its own set of skills, but sharing the joy of weaving and the desire to see the craft continue makes weaving education a good fit. Weavers in the region may also work as art professors, like Edwina Bringle, Tommye Scanlin, and JoMarie Karst, or they might teach in numerous other settings, like Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, the John C. Campbell Folk School, the Penland School of Crafts, and the numerous galleries, studios, and other art spaces where workshops are offered throughout the region. Among the participants in this study, every weaver had taken on the role of instructor in some form, though not everyone
derived income from the role. In a way, teaching and creating can be seen as two facets of handweaving, both being used as a source of income.

Some weavers may find themselves putting their craft on hold until their lifestyle is better suited to spending time on weaving, like retirement, or their children going to school, or their spouse making enough money to provide the main household income. The supplemental income from weaving may not pay a mortgage or health insurance, but it can prevent the craft from being a drain on the family’s income, even providing extra spending money that can make life more comfortable. Some of the participants mentioned putting family first in their lives, weaving at the studio with a flexible schedule in order to be available to their school-aged children, like Sharon Grist, or fitting in classes around times that work best for their families and taking weekend classes, like Barbara Miller. Although weaving provided only supplemental income, it is still a job that gives weavers the chance to take care of their families. Now, as some of the participants have dealt with the role of taking care of elderly parents, the flexibility of weaving has once again allowed weavers to shift their focus on caretaking and weave however much best suits them. All the participants in this study are women, and the role of caretaker is often relegated to women by default, regardless of their career. Being a handweaver, although not providing a high income, provides more flexibility to those with families—one of the original intentions of the early settlement school women. Still, the pegging of weaving as a way of only making supplementary income does a disservice to upcoming generations of women who, either living independently or with partners, find they need a stable, full-time income in order to survive in today’s world.
Still, even in trying economic times, weaving continues to draw newcomers. When discussing the interest new students have for the weaving classes offered at the University of North Georgia, Jo-Marie Karst said, “Weaving is… I think the interest for that subject increases when our economy drops. I don’t know. I have no statistics or scientific evidence to back that up but it’s almost like people are wanting to get back to being self-sustaining, growing your garden, making your own clothes, starting knitting, picking up those skills for self-sufficiency.”

Interestingly, the economic downturns that make professional weaving increasingly difficult may also be encouraging newer generations to take on crafts like weaving as a way of relying more on personal skill and less on the seemingly unreliable economy.

Whether a weaver chooses to gift or sell their work, they provide something to the recipient or buyer that they cannot purchase just anywhere. Usually the person who purchases handwoven goods is looking beyond mere functionality, instead seeking something they believe is made with skill, has originality, and is aesthetically appealing. The fact that they are buying something handmade instead of mass-produced is an important factor as well. Meeting the person who made the item they bought and learning about the process is an experience that stores cannot provide. In Jan Turner’s case, she is able to provide historically accurate weavings for reenactor friends who appreciate every detail, even when it may not be noticeable to a passerby or historical site visitor. A weaver can create a custom work of art or utilitarian piece that suits the recipient’s tastes and needs.
Sometimes, being a weaver means providing a service so valuable, it cannot be appreciated solely for its economic value. Sharon Grist shared a story about a custom order where her skill and effort lead to the creation of a deeply meaningful item:

I had a young lady working with me for eighteen months when I was having my knee surgery. Before and after my knee surgery. And she’s an excellent weaver. Grace learned to weave at Berea College, and she was so much help to me. When she left I gave her that loom. I used to keep it set up with kilt fabric. And the last special order of kilt fabric I had…now that loom takes four and a half days to thread. That’s one thousand, one hundred, and ninety-two threads on it. It takes an hour to weave one foot of fabric. I had threaded the loom, woven two feet of fabric, so that’s two hours of weaving into it already. And you know that the wider the fabric and the finer the yarn, the closer to the middle the threading error will be. You know, on a six-inch scarf, set up at ten e.p.i., the mistake will be about three threads from the edge. Two hours of weaving after four and a half days of threading before I found the mistake, and it was almost exactly in the middle, and I was only off by an eighth of an inch. So…a lot of people would say, eh! Nobody would know. But it was a special order. And I cut it off, I took the fifth day and moved more than 500 threads over to fix that error, so when I did the twenty yards of fabric, it was right. Now, I don’t always know how that fabric is used… I didn’t find out until quite a while afterwards, that one portion of that twenty yards had been made into a kilt. And one of our service people that was
killed in the Middle East, his family got permission from the Marine Corps to be buried with his Marine tie and his family kilt. And that is why…it needed to be right. In the great scheme of things, making one kitchen towel after another, after another, isn’t that important. But twenty-five years of making one kitchen towel after another, after another, after another, put me in the place where I needed to be, at the time I needed to weave that piece of fabric. And whether I wove another lick ever, or wove for twenty-five more years, there won’t be another piece of fabric as important as that one. It lifted the mundane to the sacred.

Weaving in Southern Appalachia

Times were different then. We would go to Asheville and while [my mother] would go to hat shops and shoe stores, I could go into Allanstand and watch the craftspeople work and always was fascinated by the weavers when there was someone in there at the loom. That’s the first memory I ever had of anyone weaving. – Barbara Miller

The site of Miller’s first weaving memory, Allanstand, is the Southern Highland Craft Guild’s craft shop that was originally located in downtown Asheville, and was founded by Frances Goodrich to showcase the work of the Allanstand Cottage Industries. Miller’s first weaving memory highlights how the cottage industries and weaving centers established by mountain workers, many of which have transitioned to regional contemporary craft organizations, have continued to inspire people to take up weaving. These weavers, in turn, have helped to bring new weavers to the craft, with handweaving adapting to suit the needs of each
generation. The region’s weaving has witnessed many revivals, survived depressed economies, and today’s weavers continue to add to its rich history. There are local weavers, like Susan Leveille, who carry on her family’s history and tradition through her weaving, and Barbara Miller, who remembers watching Allanstand weavers as a child. There are newcomers to the region, like Jessica Green, whose interest in learning how to weave led her to Penland, North Carolina, and Karen Donde, who was also driven by her love of weaving to move from New Jersey to North Carolina so she could further develop her skills through Haywood Community College’s Professional Crafts program. Every participant’s involvement in weaving in Southern Appalachia has been influenced in some way by its history, and in turn each participant in the study is making their own mark in the region and furthering Southern Appalachia’s weaving heritage.

Along with the historical significance of weaving in Southern Appalachia, the region’s abundance of natural beauty continues to inspire the artists and craftspeople who live and create in the mountains. Some of Tommye Scanlin’s most recent tapestries have revolved around the black walnut tree, some involving yarn dyed with variations of black walnut dyes. Scanlin’s work often focuses on details taken from her surroundings. A series of weavings that Susan Leveille is currently working on portrays locations imbued with personal meaning. Leveille said,

I decided that I was going to do five of these little pendant tapestry pieces, and they would all be of vistas here in the mountains that were important to me. One was the view out of my living room window, and two others were of mountains that had been named after my ancestors, mountaintops. One was the view out of
the weaving studio window at Penland, where I had learned to weave. Another is a waterfall named after one of my ancestors.

Even in work showing less of a strong connection to Appalachia as a place, there is still inspiration through the color palette a weaver may choose, or through the materials with which the work is created.

While the mountains themselves hold meaning to weavers and other artists and craftspeople, various organizations have supported the arts and helped crafts flourish. One organization that continues to have an influence on weaving and fine craft in general in the region is the Southern Highland Craft Guild. Six of the ten participants interviewed were members of the Guild. Being a member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild is a sign of technical and artistic achievement, partly because of its history in showcasing the region’s talent and also because membership is juried. Members can sell their work through the Guild’s craft shows as well as through its craft shops and galleries. Being a member also provides one with educational and networking opportunities.

Even more fascinating is the way the Southern Highland Craft Guild influenced two of the participants to explore weaving. Both Sharon Grist and Barbara Miller discovered their interests in weaving by watching demonstrations that were associated with the Guild. To this day, Barbara Miller continues to demonstrate weaving at the Folk Art Center, possibly inspiring new generations of children to try their hand at weaving when they are older. Sharon Grist also demonstrates and provides hands-on learning opportunities to children who visit the Foxfire
Center, and someday in the future we may find weavers who recall their Mountain City visit as the first time they saw someone weaving.

The Southern Highland Craft Guild stands out as a guild that has had an impact on the region, but there are many more guilds specifically for weaving and fiber arts that have provided spaces for learning and community. Pam Howard learned how to weave while living in Canton, Georgia, and attended meetings and study groups through the Chattahoochee Handweavers Guild in Suwanee, Georgia. Suwanee is in Gwinnett County, which falls within the Appalachian Regional Commission’s boundaries for Southern Appalachia. The handweavers guild serves the metro Atlanta and the north Georgia communities, with members driving over an hour to attend the classes and other events. About her experience with the guild, Howard said, “They have a place to meet. It’s a wonderful, wonderful resource because they have the camaraderie of being around each other. Plus, they have a place where they can have classes. They have a library and things like that.” Howard has also been a member of the Nonah Weavers, a weaving co-op in Franklin, North Carolina that is under the guidance of Fran Barr Cargill, the niece of Lucy Morgan and cousin as well as first weaving instructor of Susan Leveille (Howard; Leveille). In Kingsport, Tennessee there is the Overmountain Weavers Guild, which Jan Turner is a member of. When I asked about the amount of activity of the East Tennessee guild, Turner said, “…[I]t’s had its high and lows. Older members leave, newer members come in. They give classes in August. There’s a minimal fee. It’s more for materials than anything else. Everybody is a volunteer that teaches weaving, to interest new people. The guild itself has looms, so it’s not something you have to make an investment in right away.” Other weaving guilds also dot the
Southern Appalachian region, and they provide educational books, classes, study groups, and sometimes even looms to practice on. Guilds are one of the ways the weaving community lives on in the region, with new members learning to weave as older members retire from the craft (Miller).

Local Cloth is a nonprofit organization, incorporated in 2012, that is developing a newer kind of network, connecting people involved in the entire fiber art process, from those who raise fiber producing animals, to local mills and other fiber processors, to the artists and craftspeople who create from those raw materials, as well as the schools and centers offering fiber art instruction (Donde). The goal is to connect the makers involved in every aspect of the fiber supply chain and to bring awareness to the fiber-based craft economy of the Southern Appalachian region within the 100-mile radius of Asheville, North Carolina (“About Us”).

Organizations like Local Cloth and individual weavers like Jessica Green also emphasize interconnectedness and fostering a personal relationship with each step involved in the cloth-making process.

Craft schools like the John C. Campbell Folk School, the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, and the Penland School of Crafts also continue to be resources to the weaving community as well as to those from outside the region who want to learn or perfect a creative skill. The region’s craft schools also hire instructors from all over the country, and serve as nationally-recognized learning centers. Eight of the ten participant mentioned taking classes and workshops at these historic institutions, some even teaching classes there themselves. The table below lists
each participant who has taken classes at a local craft school, as well as which schools they have attended.

Table 3: Participants and Craft Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Craft Schools Attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edwina Bringle</td>
<td>Penland School of Crafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Green</td>
<td>Penland School of Crafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon Grist</td>
<td>John C. Campbell Folk School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam Howard</td>
<td>John C. Campbell Folk School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo-Marie Karst</td>
<td>Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, John C. Campbell Folk School,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Leveille</td>
<td>Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Penland School of Crafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Miller</td>
<td>Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommye Scanlin</td>
<td>Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, John C. Campbell Folk School, Penland School of Crafts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, four participants mentioned taking classes at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, four mentioned taking classes at the John C. Campbell Folk School, and four mentioned the Penland School of Crafts. The experience of taking a class at a place like Arrowmont or the John C. Campbell Folk School is immersive. Jo-Marie Karst, in discussing her times taking classes at Arrowmont, said, “It’s like all you’re thinking about is art and eating…
It’s like a total saturation of not having any responsibility except creating what you have learned and practicing art.” Karst also said, “It’s just a good place to launch from, to go and learn all new techniques and theories and get all your ideas, and then go back and develop them further and practice with them.” Edwina Bringle believes visiting Penland was a watershed moment in her life, saying, “I always tell people because of the school, I’m a weaver.” While some scholars, such as David Whisnant in his book, All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region, take a critical stance in regards to institutions like the John C. Campbell Folk School and other craft education centers, several participants of this study highlighted the positive contributions these schools had in their lives. While Whisnant’s work provides a valid critique of the history of folk and settlement schools in Appalachia, the schools that exist today have continued to evolve and adapt to suit the needs of the region’s art and craft communities.

Taking a class at a local craft school can be a deeply enriching experience, allowing a weaver to develop their skill and explore the potential of their craft under the tutelage of an experienced instructor. Even very knowledgeable weavers and instructors will still continue taking classes to expand their horizons and see weaving in new ways. Bringle said, “I’ll still take classes. I was in a friend’s class and she said, ‘What are you doing here?’ I said, ‘It’s always interesting to see how somebody else teaches, and how they approach things.’” Unfortunately, while local craft schools provide quality craft education in the region, the cost of attending these institutions can be prohibitive for local weavers and aspiring fiber artists. Schools like the John C. Campbell Folk School and Arrowmont School of Art and Craft offer work/study opportunities so students can work in return for the opportunity to take classes and receive free room and
board (“Work/Study and Student Hosts”; “Educational Assistant Opportunities”). Penland School of Crafts offers studio assistantships, and both Penland and Arrowmont offer a range of scholarships (“Summer Studio Assistantships- 2016”; “Educational Assistant Opportunities”). Pam Howard also said that the John C. Campbell Folk School will be implementing a scholarship program as well, which would be beneficial to the many young up-and-coming artists and craftspeople in Appalachia.

The experiences of the participants indicated that local guilds and craft schools offer many opportunities to learn about weaving. Another institution that provides fiber arts-related education in Southern Appalachia is the many colleges and universities with fiber arts programs. My own introduction to weaving was through the University of North Georgia, where I learned under the guidance and instruction of Jo-Marie Karst and Tommye Scanlin, both former UNG students. The development of my weaving knowledge was part of my studio art education, and I learned design and color theory alongside of my fiber studio classes. In my weaving classes, I began with the basics of weaving, learning the required technical skill, and then progressed through understanding and experimenting with different weave structures and fibers and learning how to utilize them in the design of original works. Regardless of whether one is an art student or not, though, learning how to design and then execute your plans to create art and well-crafted functional pieces is at the core of the collegiate weaving experience. I have also taken a fibers course at East Tennessee State University, where Tommye Scanlin received her MFA in weaving and where Jan Turner first learned to weave while taking weaving as an elective course for her degree in land surveying. Both Scanlin and Turner’s instructor was Gerald Edmonson, who
taught weaving at ETSU (Scanlin; Turner). Today, ETSU is the only university in Tennessee that offers an MFA with a concentration in fibers. Their fiber studio is equipped with several looms, should fiber students choose to focus on weaving.

One college program with a unique approach to art and craft education is Haywood Community College’s Professional Crafts Program. Karen Donde, a graduate of HCC’s Professional Crafts Program with a concentration in fiber, said,

   It was quite a learning experience. It’s different. There’s a lot of weaving, yes, but there’s also…because they’re set up to teach a different program, a different mission than most of the college weaving programs or textile programs you’ll find out there. Most other colleges are set up to prepare people for industry. Haywood is a community college, so it’s set up to teach you how to make a living when you get out of the two-year program.

The school offers business and marketing classes alongside of the studio classes, so students are prepared to work as professional craftspeople upon graduation.

Beyond the organizations, institutions, and interconnected communities that weavers in Southern Appalachia are members of, there is something much more deep-rooted and profound that connects our weaving heritage to these mountains. There is an awe that surrounds weaving, a feeling that one is engaging in a practice that connects the weaver to those past who performed almost the exact same steps of winding a warp, setting it on a loom and drawing each thread though the heddles and reed, one by one, then tying up the warp and finally passing the shuttle back and forth, the steady rhythm of the beater swinging forward and back, as the cloth slowly
grows with each shuttle pass. I feel this is one of the reasons why overshot weaving has continued to be iconic. The wooly starbursts and undulations have become emblematic for the region and, while weaving, one’s mind is taken to earlier weavers who created patterns from treasured scrolls of paper, patterns that today we can recreate or use as inspiration for our own designs. Jessica Green carries on the overshot coverlet tradition in her own way, incorporating freeform design, space dyed warps, and other personal additions that make her work a continuation of the tradition that still has her own mark. About overshot, Green said,

I had never seen any of those motifs or patterns before, and they were so tender and so complex. I loved them! Then to hear the stories of these women, when paper was so scarce, scribbling a couple of numbers onto a tiny scrap of paper and mailing that to their weaver sister/friend as a new pattern and then having that weaver, depending on how she interpreted the draw-down, the pattern would shift a little bit, and how they called them recipe and then feeling totally invited to have my own recipe be a part of that conversation.

That sense of connection weavers have to their past goes beyond just overshot patterns, and is a pervasive feeling when in the meditative state weaving can induce. Susan Leveille, who also finds weaving serves as a link to past makers, said,

I’m sure potters and basket makers feel it, too, that they’re doing something that mankind has done for thousands and thousands of years. There’s this, like, “Wow. Somebody else watched the threads interlace and the colors play against each
other, and they got just as excited as I do.” There’s something to be said for that connection with humanity.

Weavers, particularly weavers in Appalachia, feel their work does not exist in a bubble—rather, there is a sense that they are continuing a legacy that connects present-day weavers to the past weavers who have labored over coverlets and linsey-woolsey that they used to keep their loved ones warm and protected. It may have been drudgery and hard work to many now-forgotten women who wove as an act of survival, but carrying on that tradition and sharing it with future generations, even if it is now in the form of fine craft, is a modern-day weaver’s way of saying that their work mattered. They show honor to their weaver ancestors within the works which they make with a deep appreciation of the craft. Our society may not depend upon weaving to survive, but handwovens still have care and love intertwined in their cloth.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overall Findings

At the onset of this study, I developed a set of questions that I hoped to answer in my work. Essentially, I wanted to understand what role handweaving has in modern-day Appalachia and in the lives of handweavers. To reiterate the four research questions I developed at the onset of my research and discussed in chapter one, what is it that motivates and inspires people to weave, and in what way does it give meaning or add benefit to their lives? How do weavers define their work and what does it mean to be a weaver in Southern Appalachia? What are the issues they deal with, and in what ways is the weaving community today different or similar to the weaving community of yesteryear? What role does weaving play in Appalachia today? Also, through reading the work of author and handweaver Philis Alvic, I developed an interest in the goals of early missionaries and cottage industries, which were to preserve weaving in the region, provide income to local women, and to encourage character growth (5-8). Did those missionary women succeed in reaching those goals? Do handweavers in the Appalachian region reap those benefits?

Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of the impact weaving has made on the Southern Appalachian region and on the handweavers who carry on the tradition, as well as the way early missionary women and their weaving programs still influence the region, by identifying four dominant themes from the participants’ interviews. The first theme, “A Deep Calling,” focuses on the fascination the participants had for handweaving, how events and
experiences in their lives connected them to the craft, and how certain personality traits, such as technical and artistic inclinations, are well-suited to weaving. The second theme, “You Can Never Learn It All,” illustrates the significance of weaving in the lives of the participants by highlighting the many ways the participants are inspired to weave, and the different attributes of weaving they find captivating. “Weaving as Work,” the third theme, deals with the struggles and benefits of working as a professional weaver, and the way handweavers contribute to the region’s community. These first three themes address the kind of impact weaving has made on the lives of the Southern Appalachian region’s weavers. The fourth theme, “Weaving in Southern Appalachia,” illustrates how handweaving still continues to be a creative force within the region. The fourth and last theme also addresses how the work of missionary women at the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has left its mark in Southern Appalachia, and has been instrumental in introducing new weavers to the craft, as well as drawing weavers to the region. In addition to the four major themes, the study identified four minor themes: “Teaching and Weaving,” “Technology and Weaving,” “Loom Talk,” and “Recent Weaving Trends.” The key concepts of these minor themes were addressed in chapter four.

For handweavers, weaving provides many benefits. Weaving fills a need that is unique to each weaver, and may change depending on the place a weaver may be in their life, but there were certain patterns in the attraction of weaving that could not be overlooked. Handweavers love to learn, and weaving provides more than a lifetime of learning. Often, the lifetime learner is well-suited to the role of instructor, and many handweavers are more than willing to pass down their knowledge to those who are interested in the craft. Weaving can be used to create
works of art as well as quality utilitarian pieces, as well as works that are a blend of art and function. The handweaver role is multifaceted, as a weaver is often an artist-craftsperson, a lifelong learner, and a teacher to other weavers.

The process of weaving can induce a state of flow for those who have a calling to the craft. Weaving can be seen as a challenge; a new pattern, technique, or design being a puzzle that must be solved. It can also be meditative and therapeutic, giving weavers a chance to process thoughts and emotions, and allowing stressors to drift away as one becomes hyper-focused on the task at hand. Handweavers take pride in knowing their skill gives them the ability to provide a unique service to others, creating quality works that are meaningful to their recipients.

As for the issues weavers currently face, while there are many personal benefits to weaving, most weavers would not recommend taking up the craft for economic gain. In regards to making money through handweaving, living solely on income from weaving alone is nigh impossible. It is very difficult to get the appropriate monetary return for the amount of time, effort, and skill that goes into weaving, and a handweaver will never be able to create their work cheaply and quickly enough to compete with Wal-Mart and other large retailers. For the most part, though, weaving seems to be a fine way of providing supplemental income, especially if the weaver has a spouse or partner who is able to provide a primary income. At the very least, weaving allows a weaver to maintain their passion without feeling like their source of enjoyment is a financial burden. Other sources of primary income may stem from a job wholly unrelated to weaving, or it can be complementary, like teaching.
Despite the low pay of weaving in comparison to the time and effort involved, it does afford a weaver flexibility. This can be used to a weaver’s advantage if they have a family to care for. A weaver with children or elderly parents can adjust their schedule or the amount of time they work depending on the needs of their loved ones. Engaging in unpaid labor, like house cleaning, child rearing, and caring for aging parents, is often relegated to women, regardless of their careers. While there are male handweavers in Appalachia, weaving has a history of being considered a female-gendered job—one that was carried out alongside other traditionally woman-designated tasks like cooking and raising children. To this day, many handweavers are still balancing their profession with taking care of their families. Unfortunately, as younger women find that full-time careers outside the home are necessary to survive or to fulfill their personal goals, either independently or with partners, working as professional handweavers may be a difficult career choice, unless supplemented with work from other jobs.

Today, handweaving continues to be a part of Southern Appalachia’s heritage. Artists and craftspeople across the region still carry on the handweaving tradition, creating both historically-inspired as well as contemporary pieces, continuing to stretch the boundaries of the craft and leaving their own mark through their artistic styles and innovations. For many weavers, there is a sense that their work is a way of preserving Appalachia’s connection to its past. Susan Leveille said,

There’s a lot of tradition in these mountains…That always seemed to be a big, strong part of living in these mountains that I appreciate. There are other places that don’t have so much history. Europe goes back thousands and thousands of
years, and we’re just…what, three hundred years old? But there are places that are just fifty years old here in this country. There does seem to be a depth of social appreciation that goes along with an area that has deep roots. It’s hard to escape that in these mountains. I’m sixty years old, I think. When I was a kid here, we were still talking to the operators on the telephone, and that was normal every day. Only thirty percent of the roads in this county were paved, and none of them were wider than two lanes. The world has changed so rapidly around us that I think the crafts in this area have been one of the things that have really kept those in these mountains tied to their history.

Handweaving continues to provide the people in Appalachia with a tangible link to their traditions and their heritage. Each piece a weaver makes that is inspired by the works of earlier Appalachian weavers adds to the story of this region’s history.

Organizations like the Southern Highland Craft Guild remain an influence in the area, establishing a set of standards for fine crafts, offering learning resources to its members, providing networking opportunities, and drawing visitors to its shops and fairs. Craft schools like the Penland School of Crafts, Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, and the John C. Campbell Folk School have become nationally recognized as offering quality fiber art education, drawing students from Appalachia and the rest of the U.S. to these learning institutions. Local colleges and universities also play a role in the maintenance of handweaving by hiring weavers as instructors who in turn educate upcoming generations of weavers. As noted in chapter four, Haywood Community College stands out as one higher learning institution that offers a
Professional Crafts Program with a focus in textiles, which provides instruction in craft skills as well as entrepreneurial skills to students. Handweavers also offer instruction in their own studios and through local weaving guilds, introducing newcomers to the craft and sharing shortcuts and new techniques with each other.

Visitors and residents of Appalachia alike appreciate the fine craftsmanship and originality that handweavers imbue within their work. Being able to know the maker of a handwoven is especially meaningful to buyers, as it provides an opportunity to establish a human connection that purchasing the same item from a store would not provide. As our society grows increasingly digital, once again we turn to handmade traditions as a way of reconnecting to humanity, much in the same way industrialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century triggered culture workers to preserve craft traditions and led consumers to develop an interest in acquiring handmade goods. Handwovens provide a sense of stability in a rapidly changing world.

As for the secondary set of questions that arose from Alvic’s work, taking into consideration the way handweaving has impacted the Appalachian region and the weavers who continue the craft, can we say that the goals that guided the missionary women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to revive the craft been met and maintained? Handweaving is still practiced in Southern Appalachia, and the goal of keeping handweaving alive has outlived the missionary women like Frances L. Goodrich, and is now being carried out by the many local and visiting weavers who teach from their homes, studios, craft schools, and universities. There seems to be no need for outside intervention in today’s Appalachia, as local
weavers continue to share their passion and instruct new weavers. Even the very dichotomy of regional outsider/insider may be less relevant today, with the region’s weaving community being increasingly interconnected on a national and global level. Yet even this interconnectedness is not a new phenomenon. In the 1930s, the Penland Weaving Institute brought teachers and students from across the nation to western North Carolina for weaving education. While the missionary women may have held to romanticized notions of the region, even going so far as to recreate certain facets of Appalachian culture, today’s weavers still appreciate their efforts to preserve handweaving in the region. Barbara Miller, who has extensively researched the history of Frances Goodrich in particular, said, “Well, there’s such a rich heritage in the area. I felt like that I learned a lot from those early people from what they wrote, what they did, what they told. You don’t want that to be lost. I think what they did was the basis of what we are…we’re reaping the basis of what they planted today.”

As for providing economic support, weaving professionally is still most often only a source of supplemental income. While supplemental income may have been a great boon for women in the early twentieth century, making a living solely as an artist and craftsperson in the twenty-first century can be a financial struggle. Trying to resolve our current economic problems in Southern Appalachia, which are symptomatic of larger national maladies, cannot be done through weaving alone, and is beyond the scope of this study. Still, weavers continue to provide quality works using time-consuming processes in a society that seems to encourage speed and disposability.
Lastly, missionary women and culture workers saw handweaving as a way of promoting character growth. As mentioned in chapter one, this goal has elitist underpinnings and is a rather vague characteristic to measure, as handweaving attracts a wide range of people. Although this goal may well have been rooted in negative stereotypes of Appalachians as people who needed to be improved and uplifted, handweaving nevertheless is a craft well-suited to character development. I can say, based on my experiences in the weaving community and through interviewing the participants in this study, that the love of learning, the patience and fortitude expressed when tackling challenge, and the generosity in sharing time, knowledge, and even equipment and learning materials all exemplify the character of handweavers in Appalachia. Weaving continues to enrich the lives of many in the region, just as it had a century earlier, and handweavers in turn continue to enrich their communities.

Along with providing answers to the research questions, this study contributes to the body of work on artists and craftspeople in Appalachia. And, while this is a study on handweavers, it is also a study on the way a subset of women work and create in Appalachia. To this day, research on women’s lives and contributions is limited, and this study is centered on experiences of the ten artists and craftswomen participants. As time goes on, this case study may also serve as a time capsule, capturing a moment in Appalachia’s history that may be enlightening to future historical research.

The strength of this study stems from the many insights the participants shared through their interviews. The methodology I used helped to facilitate the dissemination of their knowledge, and is worth mentioning as well. Ethnographic fieldwork, visiting and documenting
community landmarks, and engaging in the craft gave me a foundation and body of knowledge from which I could better engage with the participants. The interviews, which provide the bulk of the data this work relies on, unearthed an abundance of information. The coding process, with a first cycle of Concept coding and a second cycle of Pattern coding, assisted in honing in on the heart of the interviews, drawing connections and establishing themes that I relayed in the study. The study of creative communities is well-suited to qualitative research, particularly the exploratory nature of case studies. I believe the case study approach proved to be especially fruitful in this instance.

**Areas for Future Research**

Although I tried to interview a diverse group of handweavers for this study, there are certain demographics that are not represented in the research. All the participants in the study were women, and it is certain that their gender had an impact on their experiences and career options. While handweavers are predominantly women, interviewing male handweavers who are part of the regions weaving community may show more nuances in the connection between traditional gender roles and weaving. Every participant was extensively involved in handweaving, so there is no input from weavers who weave on a more casual or occasional basis. Naturally, weavers who are more devoted to the craft are more willing to participate in an interview; using surveys may be a better alternative for engaging casual weavers. None of the participants were newcomers to weaving, and Jessica Green, being in her early thirties, was the youngest participant in the study. Interviewing younger weavers who are new to the craft, along with showing a broader variety of outlooks, could provide more information on how younger
women integrate weaving into their career paths. While, from my experiences, many weavers who are active in the region’s weaving communities tend to be older, there are also many younger weavers who are often engaged in weaving, particularly through local university weaving programs. Further research is needed on the role that these younger weavers play in the region.

There was also a lack of racial and ethnic diversity represented amongst the participants. None of the participants were African American, though I do not know if any of the participants belonged to other ethnic minorities. Although African Americans have made colossal contributions to the arts in the United States, there is very little information on African American weaving history in general, and I could find no information on African American weavers in Southern Appalachia. For those who are interested in African American involvement in the weaving revival, fiber artist and historic interpreter Liz Cherry Jones’s article, “In Search of Continuous Threads: Legacies of African American Handweavers,” serves as a good starting point for further potential research.

I must also point out that the Cherokee have produced finger-woven goods for generations, and the tradition is still maintained by weavers who belong to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in Southern Appalachia (“Finger Weaving”). This Cherokee weaving tradition is an important part of the story of Appalachia’s weaving traditions, and unfortunately it is not represented by this study. In order to carry out a case study on the traditional Cherokee finger weavers, I believe much more fieldwork would need to be done in The Qualla Boundary. Learning more about the history and contemporary issues of the Eastern Band of Cherokee
Indians would provide a foundation to the interviews that would be conducted with Cherokee weavers. Ideally, a researcher of Cherokee descent would conduct such a study, though a non-Native researcher may still be able to respectfully research this topic in a way that places the needs of the Cherokee community at the forefront.

This ethnographic case study would have greatly benefitted from more time spent in the field, more interviews with additional participants, and more time with weavers in their studio spaces. Although I originally planned on interviewing each participant face-to-face, most of the research and data gathering occurred in the early spring, during several bouts of snowstorms which greatly hampered my travels. I was still able to interview my planned minimum number of participants, whose interviews provided a great deal of rich and insightful material. This study, while it makes a good start to including the voices of women handweavers, merely skims the surface of the essence of our remarkable weaving community.

The themes presented in this study were those that featured prominently throughout the coding process of the interviews and represented the core values of the weaving community. For the sake of brevity, I did not delve extensively into other minor themes that presented themselves in the research. Two minor but fascinating themes were the role of technology in today’s handweaving community and recent trends amongst weaving newcomers. These themes may be explored in further research. Even the themes that were discussed in the study, such as a weaver’s sense of a calling, the appeal weaving has for weavers, and the economic value of weaving, are worthy of continued investigation.
Future research would ideally have an even broader range of participants, providing a more expansive and nuanced range of experiences. Interviewing male weavers, younger weavers, Cherokee weavers, and African American weavers would give the research an even more accurate picture of modern-day weaving in Appalachia. Also, as more people from other regions and countries migrate to Appalachia, they bring their own weaving and art and craft traditions to the region, which in turn adds another layer to the region’s weaving heritage. As a Latina who has learned handweaving in Appalachia from local weavers, my own work is a bicultural product that carries my own family history as well as the history of Appalachia’s many weavers who have passed down their knowledge from one generation of weavers to the next. I believe future research on modern-day Appalachian weaving will begin telling this multicultural story.

I have focused on Southern Appalachian weaving, based on the amount of historical and current weaving activity, but other parts of Appalachia deserve further study of their current weaving communities. Central Appalachia, home to institutions like Berea College, which still has a crafts-based work-study program where students can weave in exchange for free tuition, the Hindman Settlement School, the Pine Mountain Settlement School, the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen, as well as numerous weaving guilds in eastern Kentucky, southern Ohio, and West Virginia, may also be home to handweavers who would contribute to our understanding of the role of weaving in today’s Appalachia.

Whichever direction the body of knowledge on weaving in Appalachia may take, I hope that I have helped to shine a light on how meaningful it is to many who call the region home. Weaving is but one of many arts and crafts with which Southern Appalachia abounds in
expertise. Hopefully this study will assist those who long for a better understanding of
Appalachia’s handweavers of years past, and also those who want to better understand one of the
region’s vibrant creative communities today. Appalachia’s cultural and creative talent is like an
ever-bubbling spring, nourishing the region and beyond, and learning about its artistry and
innovation honors the many people who have worked and continue to work in Appalachia as
artists and craftspeople.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Appalachian Regional Commission: Subregions in Appalachia

Map by: Appalachian Regional Commission, November 2009.
Appalachian Regional Commission Subregions in Appalachia Map with Participants’ Counties

Highlighted in Black

Map by: Appalachian Regional Commission, November 2009.
Appendix B

Interview Guide

1. When did you begin weaving?

2. When did you first develop an interest in weaving?

3. Do you have any relatives that were weavers?

4. Where else did you learn how to weave?
   a. Have you attended workshops?
   b. Did you take any college classes in weaving?
   c. Did you learn from a family member or friend?

5. Are you a weaving guild member?

6. Is your educational background in weaving?

7. Are you a weaving instructor?
   a. If so, tell me about your experiences.

8. What kind of weaving do you do?

9. Are there any particular weaving techniques you are drawn to?

10. Is your weaving functional, is it art, is it both?

11. Do you incorporate what you would consider traditional designs in your work?

12. Tell me about your creative process.

13. What continues to motivate you to weave?

14. Do you have an online presence?
   a. Blog?
b. Website?

c. Social media account?

15. In what ways do you think weavers benefit from the internet?

16. Are there any downsides to using the internet to learn about weaving and sharing with others?

17. What role does weaving have in your life?

18. How do people react to learning about your work as a weaver?

19. How do people respond to your work?

20. How long have you lived in the Appalachian region?

21. What is it like to be a weaver in Appalachia?

22. How might weaving in Appalachia be different in comparison to the rest of the U.S.?

23. What role does weaving play in Appalachia today?

24. How has being a weaver in Appalachia influenced your work?

25. Do you believe there are more opportunities for weaver in Appalachia?

26. Do you find people have any stereotypes about weaving in Appalachia?

26. Are you familiar with the craft revival in Appalachia?

27. For many of the weaving revivalists in Appalachia, there were three goals. The first goal was to preserve the art of weaving, the second was to provide more economic opportunities for local women, and the third was the use of weaving to encourage growth in character. Do you think those goals have been met in today’s weaving community?

28. Are there any other thoughts about weaving or experiences that you would like to share?
Appendix C

Participant Work Photos

Shawl by Edwina Bringle, Penland, Mitchell County, NC.

Photo by Edwina Bringle.
Fabric woven by Karen Donde, Asheville, Buncombe County, NC.

Dress patterned and sewn by Susan Stowell. Photo by Zaire Katz.
Blooming Leaf Coverlet by Jessica Green, Little Sandy Mush, Madison County, NC.

Photo by Jessica Green.
Framed Overshot Drawing: Pathmakers by Jessica Green.

Photo by Jessica Green.
Photo of Pam Howard, Brasstown, Clay County, NC, wearing a silk top she designed, wove, and sewed, next to Coca Cola weaving she created for the John C. Campbell Folk School auction.
Set of naturally-dyed cotton dishtowels by Pam Howard.

Photo by Pam Howard.
Sodium alginate resist-fulled scarf by Jo-Marie Karst, Ball Ground, Cherokee County, GA.

Photo by Jo-Marie Karst.
Overshot weaving by Barbara Miller, Pisgah Forest, Transylvania County, NC.

Photo by Barbara Miller.
“Secrets” by Tommye Scanlin, Dahlonega, Lumpkin County, GA.

Photo by Tommye Scanlin.
“To the Essence of Every Nature” by Tommye Scanlin.

Photo by Tommye Scanlin.
Overshot coverlet by Jan Turner, Jonesborough, Washington County, TN.

Photo by Jan Turner.
VITA

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