A QUEER RECONCILATION: LGBT AND APPALACHIAN IDENTITY AS A MULTIPLICITY OF MUTUAL INFLUENCE

A Thesis
by
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Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
at Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2021
Department of Appalachian Studies

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Abstract

A QUEER RECONCILATION: LGBT AND APPALACHIAN
IDENTITY AS A MULTIPLICITY OF MUTUAL INFLUENCE

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LGBT Appalachians have struggled to reconcile their identities, often feeling tension and unwelcome in one space for their belonging in the other. Within the last decade, a reconciliation has begun to resolve this tension, with the recognition of both identities as part of a multiplicity of self, part of the network of experiences that make up the individual identity in whole. This reconciliation is taking place due to various techniques of placemaking being used to create in turn a community around the intersections. In LGBT Appalachian literature, a dialogue is taking place, both inter and intra community, that seeks to explore the intersections of these identities and their influence upon each other. Within music traditions, the banjo is emerging as a unique symbol and tool for solidarity and liberation between various groups that exist within the margins at the intersections of these two identities, due to the instrument's unique position within the margins itself. Finally, the creation of intentional communities with the Appalachian region have provided a space to explore what a world outside dominant institutions could look like. These practices of placemaking represent a brighter future for LGBT Appalachian people and communities.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the hard work of my committee chair Dr. Kim Hall in pushing my research in new directions and expanding my own knowledge through this process. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of my committee members Drs. Julie Shepherd-Powell and Zack Vernon for their influence on me as a scholar to look through new lenses and see my own work and the work of others in different lights. My committee members have been extraordinarily helpful and patient in this process, and this deserves my deepest gratitude.

I want to thank my parents, Jill and Timothy Alexander for their support and unconditional love that has allowed me the great privilege of making it this far.

I want to thank my partner Elias Julian Manus and my dearest friend Sarah “Saro” Rose for their support in this process and their love for me as I complete my graduate work. The late nights are finally paying off.

I want to thank my colleagues, all of whom have helped me develop my work and my insights through long conversation, in particular I would like to thank Brandon Zellers, Shauna Caldwell, Krystal Carter, and Chelsey Johnson for being my friends and peers, supporting me when I did not think I could make it through.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my great-grandmother, Rose Marie Baumgardner and my grandmother Madeline Claire Alexander.

Thank you for showing me the music.

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Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)[1] Appalachians have struggled to reconcile the two identities they hold as Appalachians and as LGBT people, with inclusion in either community seemingly reliant on the rejection of the other. Over the past decade however, a new generation has created a reconciliation between these two parts of self, as more people are identifying as LGBT Appalachians in addition to creating spaces and communities around the fusion of these two identities. The emergence of a more reconciled queer Appalachian identity can be seen prominently in the literature and music through which LGBT Appalachians are expressing themselves, both in virtual spaces as well as in physical spaces within and outside of the Appalachian region. The establishment of "queer communes" within the region and the way that they relate to greater Appalachian and LGBT communities and the radical potential of this intentional placemaking can be seen as an active manifestation of these ideas.

My analysis of this emerging identity is informed by two spheres of knowledge, drawing upon both queer and Appalachian research and theory. Important to this research as it continues, is the way in which Appalachian and LGBT identities are shaped, and the ways in which they inform each other for members of the LGBT Appalachian community. To date, much of the work published about LGBT Appalachians shows that the two identities are inextricable from each other, while also proving difficult to reconcile. Many LGBT

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[1] Throughout this thesis, I am using the term LGBT because it most clearly references the four specific identities I am focusing on within my work. I use queer a framework based on the scholarly field, out of a sense of respect for those who do not identify with the term as a label for themselves. While work needs to be done to address other groups sometimes included within the larger acronym, that work is beyond the scope of my work in this thesis.

Appalachians have to deal with tensions between being LGBT and being Appalachian, alongside their allegiances to both community and place. Community members often feel torn between the sense of heritage and place they feel as Appalachians and the sense of freedom and validity provided by well-established LGBT enclaves in more major metropolitan areas. Nonetheless, these two identities inform each other in essential ways and both epistemic frames are necessary in approaching the theory of a new understanding of the existing multiplicity of identity and culture, with new forms of expression being formed from the synthesis and understanding of these interactions. Creating validating and freeing queer enclaves within the mountain region is an essential part of helping to resolve the enmity by creating space where the sense of heritage and community can still be felt, especially given the importance of land and place to Appalachian identity. That importance of place is emphasized and elevated for Indigenous LGBT Appalachians, for whom reclamation of land is a powerful act in and of itself as part of a larger process of decolonization.

It is also worth noting that the enmity between LGBT and Appalachian identity to date often conceals some of the ways in which the two deeply overlap and intersect, creating a richer and deeper understanding of each other as they do so. This is where much of the power and radical potential of a deeper understanding of the interactions between variant identities around both communities finds its roots. This deeper understanding is overlooked in much of the existing scholarship around LGBT Appalachian experience, and it is this gap that must be filled within our existing canon of knowledge. The exploration of this gap can begin after the unique experience of being LGBT and Appalachian is named for what it is, and acknowledged as a complex identity composed of the experiences and culture generated

by the combination of lived experience as LGBT and Appalachian, created through the reconciliation that individuals and communities are engaging in directly.

This thesis makes the case for the expressions of this deeper understanding of LGBT Appalachian identity as it is manifested within literature, music, and active placemaking, and show how this more complexly understood interactions of identity is expressed through those venues, generating a new perspective on what it means to be from the mountains and LGBT, and providing insight into the deeper way in which this identity is informed by traditions from both communities. The impact of existing within the margins and at the borders of multiple communities is apparent in the work, both creative and physical, being done by LGBT Appalachians, and although many labels exist to define this experience and multiple intersections also interact with it along the way, at the end it comes out a unique lived set of experiences worthy of study that can enrich our understandings of life at the borders and inside the margins, and what it means to embody space in hostile terrain.

Appalachian Identity

The origin of people in the Appalachian region beginning to self-identify with the term "Appalachian" and using that particular label both as a political and cultural tool for advocacy is difficult to pinpoint. Various labels differentiating the residents of the mountainous Upland South region have existed for most of the nation's history, most often found in accounts from "outsiders" to the region, who talked about the region's residents in a variety of ways; however, the formation of a distinctly personal Appalachian identity didn't come until later. For this thesis, I am defining Appalachian identity as it has emerged as a

regional movement to push back against negative perceptions of those in the region and evolved into a means of advocacy for residents.

David Whisnant (1973) writes in “Ethnicity and the Recovery of Regional Identity in Appalachia” that the development of a cohesive identity on the basis of a shared sense of Appalachia is less correlated to any material fact, and much more directly correlated to a perceived unity of struggle and perseverance against the American mainstream culture, directly impacted by corporate energy interests and outside economic control by people outside of the region. Appalachian identity as a movement has been defined by a shared sense of struggle to push back against the efforts of dominant American culture to impose itself on methods of living in the region (124-126). Whisnant goes on to talk about the promise of a shared identity based on struggle against outside interests bringing a new mode of living to Appalachians, and the promise of a place-based identity to subvert the existing cultural narrative surrounding what it means to be productive and successful (134-138). Appalachian identity serves a tool to unite people based on their connection to the region, and thus has the potential to cross lines of division. It allows for the possibility of advocacy for all people within the region, along a multi-axis methodology.

Moving from this optimism of the 1970’s and the countercultural movement more broadly that gave birth to the Appalachian studies field and into the current climate, the media cycle of interest in Appalachia has shifted, and identification with Appalachia has become much more complex alongside the mainstream populist and fascist currents of American politics when contrasted with the neoliberal policies that have affected the region in the years during and after the Reagan administration. In “The Future of Appalachian Identity in an Age of Polarization,” Rachel Steele and Misti Jeffers (2020) make the

argument that as a political identity, one that can be mobilized around for advocacy and utilitarian purposes, Appalachia has garnered a high degree of attention in the news cycle, most of which has fallen flat. They write that "the rediscovery of Appalachian identity in the context of this election [the 2016 presidential election] is yet another recycling of long-term, external, pejorative narratives of Appalachia as a region marked by cultural deviance"(59). Jeffers and Steele go on to say that Appalachian identity can take three forms: legitimizing, resistance, and project identities. Legitimizing identities often take the form of stereotypes and are the means by which dominant societies and cultures reinforce and justify their control. Resistance identities are mantles taken up by individuals impacted by domination or oppression, and used as a means of pushing back or subverting that domination, which often reinforces those boundaries and distinctions. Project identities however, are a means of challenging the entire structure, and pursuing common goals based on a definition created outside the dominant structure of control. Steele and Jeffers write that "a project identity would allow both those living within Appalachia and those living in other areas to see their destinies as being connected with each other," increasing solidarity between various groups (60-61). Project identities are built on a more intersectional understanding of the ways in which experiences can differ, but goals can still be held in common.

Appalachian identity is currently cycling through all of these forms of identity, with the most recent cycle of re-discovery creating a series of project identities throughout the mountains, in contrast to the legitimizing identities of the distant past and the resistance identities of the countercultural movements that birthed Appalachian studies as a field and Appalachian identity as a movement. As a result, the field of study itself is evolving to reflect the new directions in Appalachian identity. In many ways, the field of scholarly study has

been built up around this identity as a resistance movement, and has been wielded as a political tool. In this way, Appalachian identity and queer identity share a commonality.

Queer Identity

The idea of identity as a political tool is something very familiar to the queer community as a whole, and the label "queer" reflects much of the same journey as "Appalachian" in its transition from legitimizing identity in the use of a slur applied to LGBT people for much of the 20th century through today, to a resistance identity that became reclaimed en masse in the 1990s. Within current usage, it has evolved into a project identity in the current years, which reflects the need for a broader group solidarity in terms of political, social, and economic advocacy within radical circles.

Alongside the queer perspective focused more broadly on advocacy for the group, it is possible to see minor and major hierarchies alike form within a broader LGBT culture. Konstantinos Eleftheriardis (2018) writes in "Not Yet Queer Enough" on the effect of public performance on the development of a queer culture, specifically in the context of queer festivals, that queer activisits often cede ground within great queer cultural terms to queer theory, since ideologically, queer theory is at least nominally the background and basis for the entire queer movement as a whole (122). Eleftheriardis argues that the vocabulary and percieved ideological principles of queer theory are incorporated by activists and festival participants as the basis of the queer culture performed there.

This trend within broader queer culture can become a problem when certain groups are left out of the academic canon which forms the basis for the organization and

performance of queer identity and culture. Cathy J. Cohen (1997), a Black lesbian scholar, writes that she is often skeptical of the label "queer" and the way it is applied, stating that queer politics and theory are often heavily impacted by class and racial privilege. She writes "but like other lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered activists of color, I find the label "queer" fraught with unspoken assumptions which inhibit the radical political potential of this category" (451). I am also wary of the term as an identity label, due to the tendency to single-axis politics that can ignore other lived experiences. However, the label has gained popularity and continues to be in use in many circles, so I will be using it to an extent when addressing the contexts where it applies directly both as an identity as well as a cultural and political movement. An example of the detriments of a single-axis approach that does not consider the margins is the trend to prioritize the urban over the rural within queer politics, known as metronormativity.

Metronormativity is a term that describes a tendency of queer theory and queer culture as a whole to disregard the rural when discussing queer lives, first coined by J. Jack Halberstam (2005) in *In a Queer Time and Place*. Regarding metronormativity, Halberstam writes:

> the metronormative story of migration from "country" to "town" is a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy. Since each narrative bears the same structure, it is easy to equate the physical journey from small town to big city with the psychological journey from closet case to out and proud. (44-45)

With rural LGBT people being left out of much of the conversation in dominant queer theory, LGBT people living in the rural Southern and Appalachian regions can find themselves left out of not just the academic discourse, but the perceptible and visible realities of queer life, culture, and media which focuses on the urban at the expense of the rural. This exclusion leads to a sort of double-disidentification for queer people existing at the margins of both Appalachian life and queer life. This can be further impacted by status of race, gender, and class especially within the majority-white Appalachian region.

Disidentification is described by José Esteban Muñoz (1999) as “the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (4). Much of this thesis is built on the ways that LGBT Appalachian identity and culture builds upon a disidentification not just with cisheteronormative Appalachian culture, but on a disindentification as well with the zeitgeiest of a metronormative queer culture that holds the rural, and those who proudly claim being of the rural, in disdain and suspicion. Disidentification can be seen as well in the ways that minorities within LGBT Appalachian cultures and spheres reclaim identity, as seen with the advent of Quare theory.

Quare Theory

As a preface to this section, I feel deeply that it is necessary to discuss quare theory, developed by Black gay scholar E.P. Johnson in the early 2000s when discussing the relationship of ethnicity, class, gender identity, and sexual orientation for Black

Appalachians, as this theory is developed to discuss the unique challenges around region, race, and sexuality/gender orientation. My understanding and application of this theory is limited by my position as a white trans woman, and the conversations around the ways race affects the LGBT experience must continue to evolve alongside scholarship, taking the contributions of the most marginalized in the highest account.

E. Patrick Johnson (2001) defines quare as a theory by and for Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Johnson wishes to quare the queer, in which we can see the act of queering as placing the knowledge and experiences of the LGBT community in the foreground by decentering cisheteronormativity, and the act of quaring of applying the same logic and theory to foreground the knowledge of Black LGBT people within the realm of the queer (7).

Scholar Vincent T. Harris (2016) articulates quare theory as being defined by its use of both black feminist theory and queer studies, using the former as a sort of analyzing tool for examination of the historical exclusion of Black people from the latter (7). Harris acknowledges this as a particularly useful tool for looking at the lived experiences of Black gay men in the south as they stand on their own, without trying to force them into the standards of other more dominant experiences of sexual orientation, gender, and race that disrupt the lived experiences of LGBT communities of color (13).

The word “quare” presents an interesting challenge to white Appalachian studies scholars who is unfamiliar with Black queer studies. “Quare” has been reclaimed and used within queer studies circles to delineate the study of LGBT identity from the exclusive perspective of people of color, specifically Black people, in a way that distingushes itself

from the experiences of white LGBT people, which queer studies has centered historically (Johnson 2001, 3). In Appalachian studies however, that has been several instances where white Appalachian gay men specifically, such as Silas House, have used the term "quare" to denote their own experiences as white LGBT Appalachians, given that the word "quare" is found within the Southern and Central Appalachian dialect among both Black and white communities. Johnson also denoted the words early origins and usage in Anglo-Irish dialect and usage, which seems to have carried over to the mountains and been maintained to some degree. This can create conflict when discussing the usage of the word within LGBT Appalachian studies, as you are likely to find the word being used by different racial groups within the region to describe vastly different experiences from disparate perspectives. I want to eliminate any possible confusion around my usage of this term in this research, and make clear that I am defaulting to the origins of the word in a philosophical context within the Black queer studies field and that I am using it to denote a non-cisheteronormative experience unique to Black LGBT people, particularly in the South and Appalachia. Quare theory utilizes intersectional methods of analysis, which is also prominent in much of the work being done by LGBT Appalachians across racial lines.

Intersectionality and Queer Appalachian Identity

The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," originally published in 1989. In this foundational essay, Crenshaw ([1989] 2018) demonstrates the importance of a multi-axis framework with which to view discrimination and oppression, highlighting the intersections

of racism and sexism that shape Black women's experiences (61-64). The concept of intersectionality has since been expanded into a framework for analyzing how different positions in society interact with each other to create unique experiences along the lines of a multi-axis scale of oppression and privilege.

Within queer politics, intersectionality can be understood as the key to effectively challenging the dominance of cisheteronormativity and single-axis methods that exclude experiences on the margins. It is this tradition that must be drawn from to understand the radical potential of queer politics and queer identity. Cathy J. Cohen (1997) argues in "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens" that:

> I am interested in examining the concept of "queer" in order to think about how we might construct a new political identity that is truly liberating, transformative, and inclusive of all those who stand on the outside of the dominant constructed norm of state-sanctioned white middle- and upper-class heterosexuality. Such a broadened understanding of queerness must be based on an intersectional analysis that recognizes how numerous systems of oppression interact to regulate and police the lives of most people. (441)

LGBT Appalachians intersect at a regional and sexuality/gender identity crossroads, however people defined under that label can also come from a wide other array of lived experiences and perspectives, oftentimes at the margins as well. As Cohen argues, a broadened understanding must be based in the acknowledgement that the experiences and perspectives of LGBT Appalachians are rooted in many dominant institutions and marginalizations. For this thesis, I am focusing on regional and sexuality/gender identity, while also touching on

Black experiences as they relate to the use of the banjo, however there is a lot of ground to be covered and explored at other margins, such as gender, class, and the impacts of colonization.

The concept of intersectionality has been applied to many aspects of the Appalachian experience as the Appalachian studies field has grown and broadened as an interdisciplinary area of research. A notable example of this can be seen in Anna Rachel Terman's chapter in 2016's *Appalachia Revisited*, titled "Intersections of Appalachian Identity," where she uses intersectional methods of analysis to look at not just sexual, racial, and gender identity, but place-based identity such as Appalachian identity. Applying this to LGBT identity, Terman (2016) writes about the way that Appalachian identity and the process of reconciliation have evolved writing that testimonies from those individuals who exist at the intersection of Appalachian place-based identity and LGBT identity "shows that for many young people in Appalachia, the struggle to reconcile their intersecting identities can push people out *and* pull them into the region" (79).

Much of the original literature on LGBT and queer identity in Appalachia focuses on the tensions the members at the margins of these communities faced, which can be seen in the first published academic piece on the subject, "Out in the Mountains" (2001) by Kate Black and Marc A. Rhorer. The authors talk to several respondents who identify as gay or lesbian as well as Appalachian, and overwhelmingly are met with reports of feelings of isolation when present with the mountain region contrasted with a feeling of community only being found in towns and cities off the mountain, in well-establish urban gay enclave (19-20). Conversely, some respondents do report a need to be present in the mountains, saying that they do not feel complete or whole as themselves in areas outside the region, describing

the experience of living in mountain communities as necessary to their own mental and emotional well-being (24).

In this survey of LGBT Appalachians from only two decades in the past, we can begin to see the effect of the metronormativity of mainstream queer culture, as well as hints of the radical reconciliation beginning to take place for community members within the region. The research conducted in this thesis shows the ways in which this process of reconciliation has resulted in an understanding of the mutual influence of each identity upon the other. The result is a distinct and complex multiplicity of selves that can broadly be grouped together as a way of knowing and being.

Gaps in Our Understanding

As the narrative of the unique intersection that exists at the margins of place-based and LGBT identities evolves, the development of this deeper understanding and synthesis of the multiplicities of self-produced through the reconciliation of those identities is a natural evolution. The current research approaches these conclusions, however the knowledge contained within academic circles has not yet caught up to the radical work being done by activists and radicals on the ground, focused on a culture being actively developed through practice of both a queered Appalachian identity and an Appalachian-based LGBT identity. As these two cultures, perspectives, ways of being and ways of knowing intersect, they inevitably inform each other, and the synthesis results in the development of a singular LGBT Appalachian cultural identity that holds space for the margins and intersections.

The theme of tension between the two identities is prominent in much of the existing scholarship on LGBT Appalachians. However, this thesis focuses on the difference between the tension described in scholarship and the reconciliation that informs more recent forms of placemaking taking place in LGBT Appalachian communities. Placemaking is defined for this thesis as the act of shaping the culture of a region or community actively, and can take many forms. The reconciliation currently taking place is an example of the way in which place, that is space within a larger cultural narrative, is being transformed. The reconciliation that has begun taking place in the last decade is either absent, as in the scholarship from the past two decades, or left mentioned but unexplored, as in the scholarship from the past few years. The current gap in the research concerns the results of that reconciliation, and the subsequent development of this synthesis of identity, as well as the culture being developed as a result of that emergent self-identification, which is being expressed not in academia but in literature, music, and radical placemaking. This thesis will make the case for the existence of that synthesis as it is being developed and display the ways in which the potential for the emergence of new traditions and senses of culture is being built around it, filling that gap in the current academic research and allowing subsequent research to build off of that foundation.

We are currently experiencing the birth of a new field of study at the intersections of both rural queer studies and Appalachian studies, the existence of which in the margins of these fields can inform us about where those borders are and why, offering an exciting and unique opportunity to expand our knowledge and studies. What is presenting itself now is an opportunity to show that the synthesis of multiplicities into explicit cultural identity is a significant moment and deserves study. I show that LGBT Appalachian people are engaged

in practices of placemaking that are creating a unique culture. In addition, this research represents an opportunity for both Appalachian studies and queer theory to expand and include more marginalized voices within them. Shifting focus away from cisheteronormative Appalachian culture and away from urban queer culture makes visible groups that have historically been left out of the scholarly narrative about identity in both fields and makes possible the development of a radical ethos that can inform how we understand what it means to be LGBT and Appalachian.

Through this thesis, I will explore the way literature, music, and intentional communities are sites of placemaking for LGBT Appalachians that are actively reconciling the tensions between these two identities and recognizing them as a mutual influence within a greater multiplicity of self. In chapter one, I will analyze the ways in which literature has informed the dialogue around what it means to be LGBT and Appalachian. In the second chapter I will look at banjo playing as a site of placemaking for LGBT Appalachians, particularly Black LGBT Appalachians. Finally, in the third chapter, I will show how intentional communities are places where queer futures are being both imagined and implemented while building on lesbian seperatist and Radical Faerie communal practices. Together, these demonstrate the ways that reconciliation is happening between being LGBT and being Appalachian, and serve as a site for placemaking towards a brighter future for LGBT Appalachians within the region.

Chapter One

An Ounce of Comfort for a Pound of Grief: Embrace and Defiance in Appalachia

"I was born in the grist of a rebel yell,

swaddled in the song of the whip-poor-will

They haunt me and they hold me just the same

But it's an ounce of comfort, for a pound of grief

I just wanna sit on the porch with you and hear the tall pines creak"

-Amy Ray, "Sure Feels Good Anyway," *Holler*

You can never go home again, not without pain. As LGBT Appalachians understand intimately, the conflict we embody between our identities as Appalachians and the inherent queerness/quareness[2] that sets LGBT people into tensions with their Appalachian identity. All too often, both communities tell us there is no room for the other, and we are caught in the middle. In the proud tradition of both communities however, we have begun to reclaim and remold this into an identity all our own. As we develop this identity as LGBT Appalachians (dirt dykes, farm faggots, fabulachians, and queer/quare Appalachians)[3] we are

[2] Quareness in this context is used in a dual format, with one usage originating from quare theory in Black queer studies where it was developed as theory of unique Black Southern LGBT experiences, and another usage by white LGBT Appalachian writers who cite the word due to its use across racial lines in the Appalachian dialect to describe something odd or weird.
[3] I am using these terms, which I have heard friends and community members use as self-descriptors, to show the breadth of the way LGBT people in the region choose to identify themselves, demonstrating the multiplicity that is central to my thesis at work.

manifesting that culture into the material realm. Literature from the Appalachian region has a long history of serving as the voice for those in the region, and as the last decade has unfolded we have seen a huge rise in LGBT Appalachian regional literature. This style of out-and-proud LGBT regional literature is serving as a means for the expression of the grief and comfort that comes from the way LGBT Appalachians relate back to the region, as well as serving as a means for the synthesis from the lived experiences to create a unique culture.

As our literature develops, it tells our story, weaved into a tapestry of novels, poetry, short stories, and creative nonfiction. The collections we publish and the chapbooks we read inform our identity as LGBT Appalachians, and the communities we form and discussions we have inform the literature and stories we create in turn. The last three decades have presented themselves as an amazing opportunity to see what rural queerness can look like, and the accessibility of literature via the internet and social media has expanded who can participate in community building. As we have seen reflected in the literature produced by LGBT Appalachians, these emergent communities and cultures have been heavily focused around social and environmental justice work, as well as strong themes of anti-capitalism. All of these are drawn in equal measure from both Appalachian and LGBT communities and their histories, cultures, and political traditions of struggle and resistance. The function of gay regional literature from Appalachia as a tool of liberation, both communal and personal, allows LGBT Appalachians to create a dialogue with themselves as well as with the wider community, enabling them to make sense of what they are creating, and how they relate to themselves to the Appalachian and LGBT communities they exist within. We can see this as a continuation of our Appalachian storytelling roots.

In this chapter, I will discuss my own personal experiences with LGBT Appalachian

literature, and the ways in which it has enabled me to understand my own multiplicity of self more deeply. I will then review the history of Appalachian literature and examine the functions of LGBT literature as a place for intra community dialogue. In the next portion of the chapter, I will present the ways in which LGBT Appalachian regional literature is beginning to expand to include more voices. Lastly, I will look at "Homecoming" by Jeff Mann, a poem that explores the tensions central to my thesis, and analyze them from the perspective of reconciliation. Together, all of this will show the ways in which LGBT regional literature is shaping the dialogues taking place in the communities being formed around LGBT Appalachian identity.

The Personal is Political

I feel that I would be remiss if I did not take at least a section of the paper to reflect on my own experiences within this multiplicity of Appalachian identity and LGBT identity and how that has affected the way I view this research. I am a bisexual trans woman and I am an Appalachian queer, despite my own personal reservations around that term as an identity label. My mother's family hails from the mountains of Pennsylvania, along the border of West Virginia and Maryland (she grew up along the entire Eastern seaboard as the result of a difficult family situation), and I was raised in the Piedmont foothills of North Carolina, deep within the Bible Belt, where my father's family has lived for at least eight generations, on the outskirts of the city of Charlotte. Much of my viewpoint on this research has been influenced by my own experiences as someone with a great number of intersecting identities within both communities.

Accepting my own identity as a bisexual and as a trans woman was to experience a great deal of dissonance for myself as a member of my immediate family and community. The religious paternal side of my family has been so blatant and visceral in their intolerance about even the idea of LGBT people, to the point where to this day, I have never come out to them in any capacity, and it is likely that I never will. Even so, I spent much of my time as a child and young teenager hearing about how I wasn't really redneck, or country, even whilst participating in the same activities and recreational hobbies as my family and my father's friends. I grew up rejecting that side of my family and essentially that side of myself, knowing that for reasons I could not even begin to articulate yet, I did not belong there.

On the other hand, I did not find much comfort in the LGBT community of Charlotte. I did not really understand the nuances of gay culture, not in the way I was expected to perform them, and in my own view, I performed them poorly. Literature however, served as a means of connection. Novels and poetry I found as a young teenager helped me come to terms with who I was at a young age, and understand the connection I had to the LGBT community, even though I spent much time feeling like an outsider to it all together. I shunned my redneck roots, put them out of my mind, lost my accent, and went as all in as I could on trying to fit into a mold that wasn't shaped for me. Between queer meteronormativity in the city, and cisheteronormativity in my family, I was left feeling barred from the places I looked for home and place.

Mary L. Gray (2018) writes in her book chapter "There Are No Gay People Here," from *Appalachia in Regional Context*:

[State Representative] Napier looked at us and said, 'Well, there are no gay people

> here, there are no gay people in my district, so I do not need to worry about this.' Mind you, he was talking with a father who was, at the time, the cochair of PFLAG, and young people, most born and raised within thirty miles of Napier's birthplace, who identify as queer. The cognitive dissonance of the exchange with Representative Napier didn't really make sense to me then. In many ways, the moment represented a much more complicated puzzle that would require another year of work to piece together. What seemed important then, perhaps even more so today, was figuring out how to reckon with Napier's statement and understand how he might see his rural community as the last place he would find real gay people. (111-112)

Napier's statement has mostly to do with the concept of metronormativity, the idea that gay culture is defined by the well-groomed, upper-middle/upper class white gay man, and the representations in popular culture of LGBT people preclude the existence of a queer rurality, and set the standard with shows like *Queer as Folk* defining what it means to exist as a homosexual or trans person (112-13). This has a damaging effect on those who do not or cannot meet such a standard, including LGBT Appalachians. The metronormative narrative creates a reinforcing cycle of dominant queer culture, where the popular representations inform the material cultures which in turn inform the popular representations, creating a cycle that repeats ad nauseam, encouraging those outside the norms of this system and mainstream culture to drop their other identities in order to assimilate themselves into the popular culture.

Breaking this cycle is difficult. Reconnecting with my Appalachian side also took literature to cement for myself. Reading the works of authors such as Silas House (*Clay's Quilt* in particular) and Ron Rash (*Eureka Mill*) connected me back to that side of myself. I

learned to embrace the things I thought I wasn't cut out for, and realized I could do them in my own way. The stories and poetry I read helped me realize that there wasn't just the straight way to do things, that it's possible to fish the lake with a bent fishing pole so to speak, and that there's room for "hillbilly queers". Embracing this and cementing that identity took a lot of thought and reflection, and I found and continue to find immense value in the writings of my fellow community members. The stories I see spilled onto the pages of authors like Carter Sickels in his essay "Bittersweet" from *Walk till the dogs gets mean* are reflections of my own experiences coming to and from the mountains, and the tensions inherent to my two identities and experiences.

Reconciling the two for myself and embracing the enmeshed nature of my own relationship to where I come from and who I am, the wider cultures that I belong within, has created a new sense of liberation for myself. I can only conclude from the literature I see coming out every year, that it serves as a tool of liberation for others. The space created by Appalachian literature within both the regional genre and the queer genre, is representative of the wider approach being taken by our community as we develop and refine our identities and our relationships to both sides of ourselves. LGBT Appalachian literature serves as the space in which we can explore the hard and often painful questions of what it means to live here and be queer, what it means to leave here and be queer, and what it means to come back, whether we ever left or not.

Appalachian Literature

Appalachian literature, for the purposes of this research, will be defined as literature

produced by those from within the region or with strong community ties in the region. There has been a plethora of writing done from the perspective of folks from outside of the region, and for the purpose of paper, they will not be considered as part of the Appalachian literature canon. Katherine Ledford and Theresa Lloyd present in their 2020 anthology *Writing Appalachia* the narrative that the literature from Appalachia is diverse, with roots stretching out from Cherokee oral histories to modern fiction pieces on mountain top removal, noting the many steps along the way, and making the argument that older anthologies have a tendency to ignore the wider and diversified expressions of literature in the region. As we enter the third decade of the new millennium, we can see this expressed further not just in anthologies and collections, but reflected also in the myriad of social media spaces, self-published zines, and community forums available to anyone with a smartphone. As the possibilities for engagement with the literary community increase, so too does the number of prospective authors. Diversity of voices and erstwhile engagement is the result of this new multitude of voices coming out of the Appalachian region (Ledford and Lloyd, 2020).

The result is a synthesis of new voices, resolving old conflicts and creating forums with which to engage in conversation with each other about the region and what it means to be Appalachian. Literature is a way for marginalized communities within the region to get their voices heard and to prompt conversations about their own experiences, both within and outside of the community. Ledford and Lloyd argue that the development of Appalachian studies and the literature that emerged around that field of study, has often used literature and anthologies as a way to show a conversation between the diverse inhabitants of the region.

Jim Wayne Miller (1977) discusses the need for regional literature from the mountains to break free from the stereotypes so often associated with it (85-90). Ledford and

Lloyd consider this the dichotomy of "degenerate" and "romanticized" that has become all too common in writings and other media depictions of the region. Too often and for far too long, the region has been presented as either the crazed murderous hillbillies of James Dickey's *Deliverance*, or in simple and quaint terms as William Goodell Frost's "contemporary ancestors." W. H. Ward (1978) wrote:

> Today Appalachia finds herself in a limbo between the passing of the oral culture which has been her chief glory in the past and the firm establishment of the written one that she understands the modern world to require and which her loyal sons and daughters are hell-bent to create. They may do it in time if they can bring themselves to stop trying so hard. (334).

Appalachian literature, as it has expanded from the time of Miller and Ward's writings in the 1970s, has certainly lived up to the task they gave it. The writings on the region come more often from voices with experiences deeply rooted in the mountains and hollers here, with a wide and diverse range of authors who make statements about what it means to be Appalachian, and how the region can be both liberation and death. Appalachia can be a place for growth and change, however the social conservatism that so often defines the region can also lead to stagnation. The conversation has helped form new understanding of identities, as in the case of the Affrilachian poets headed up by Frank X Walker, and informed the conversations being had within those communities, helping people within the region reclaim an Appalachian identity from the myriad of outside voices that have tried to define that identity for them. Local color writing, which embellished and exaggerated the stereotypes of mountain people and resulted in much of the stereotyping familiar to Americans, has attempted to speak for the region. In contrast, these conversations within the community have

proven necessary in order to more deeply understand the ways in which we embody multiplicities, and using literature as community dialogue is something that is inherent to much of LGBT literature as well.

LGBT Literature

Literature from the LGBT community has a long enough history that a full overview of the genre would be outside the scope of this research paper. LGBT literature is fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama written by members of the LGBT community, addressing their lived experiences and perspectives as LGBT people. In Brett Grubisic's (2019) book chapter "The Queer Short Story," he quotes Don Laverntz as describing the 1970s as an explosion of LGBT literature oriented around the emerging gay liberation movement. He writes that LGBT literature "served an oppressed minority first by helping gay people identify themselves and then by speaking up and striking back against the powerful forces of prejudice and bigotry" (328). Literature from the LGBT community has served as a means of expression and advocacy, in addition to serving as a forum for dialogue around identity and its functions. This attitude has long been prominent in the LGBT community as to what functions both our literature as well as our other art forms within the community, in addition to its role as an ambassador of our culture to the outside cisheteronormative world. This process has not yet ended, with LGBT literature still serving to assist in the discovery and identification of the self as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender.

Literature also serves the purpose of allowing us as individuals to explore that identity more deeply, developing our relationship with ourselves as well as our relationships

to the wider community, in both the interpersonal and metapersonal dialogues taking place. For the LGBT community, literature has long served the purpose of allowing those who interact with the material to inform their own identities and self, with noted works from decades past such as the quintessential lesbian novel *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg (1993) alongside young adult work such as *Rainbow Boys* by Alex Sánchez (2001) enabling young members of the community to get in touch with and grasp a sense of the history of the community and the common challenges we face. LGBT literature assists young members of the community with developing their own identity as they relate to themselves as well as allowing them to cement their own identity and relationship to the wider community. It can often serve as a means of cultural transmission for the LGBT community, allowing young members of the community to understand the cultural norms and prevailing attitudes within both the broader LGBT culture as well as within their specific subculture within that.

Literature for the LGBT community is a means for creating dialogue and forums for discourse around the nature of identity, the relationship between members of the same and different communities, as well as allowing for connection between isolated members of the community. Literature forms a connection over space and time, and allows individuals to connect with the wider community even as they are physically or emotionally separated from other LGBT individuals.

Critical Queer Theory on Literature

R. Raj Rao (2012) writes in his essay “Pigs, Queer Literature Does Not Exist!” that:

What writers who aspire to mainstream and canonical status need to realise is that in

> doing so, they're being judgmental, while in truth they must defer and deconstruct judgment. Partly this occurs because instead of developing new and hybridised aesthetics, they rely too uncritically on a hegemonic aesthetics formulated by the modernists in the 20th century. (256-257)

Rao was writing on the state of queer literature in India, but much of what he writes can be translated to queer literature across the board. To write explicitly queer material for an explicity queer audience is a refutation of the mainstream and a rejection of cisheteronormative politics and society. In order to understand the significance of this literature, it is important to, as Rao says, deconstruct our judgement, and engage with our material wholly and in good faith. Rejecting assimilationist politics that may filter our words and our writings in order to be able to get to the truth of who we are and of our relationships to each other, allows for the exploration of more complicated forms of identity. To leave out the negative and the painful in these writings, or conversely to write in order to please a cisgender straight audience and appeal to stereotypes, is to betray the complicated realities that these identities exist within. There are some conversations that cannot be had while engaging primarily with an audience that fundamentally cannot understand the lived experiences of the margins.

Jeff Nunokawa (2011) writes in his essay “Queer Theory: Postmortem” through the context of the AIDS crisis and the surrounding activism, about the instrumental role literature and writings plays in developing our politics, our theory, and our advocacy for ourselves. He writes that queer theory has developed itself through literature, while expressing concern that the dialogues taking place may end up sequestered in the ivory tower, divorced from what’s happening in communities on the ground, and being judged in ways that hamper further

development of conversation (247). I share his concerns, with a major concession of my thesis being that the scholarly work being done is ignoring the experiences of the margins. Literature, particularly independent literature and accessible literature, helps fill this gap by placing the dialogues back into the communities they are about, allowing for deeper connections and understandings to take place outside the halls of academia. It is in this function that LGBT Appalachian literature can be a forum to develop the ways in which our communities understand themselves. It is because our literature is important to developing our community, that it serves a function as a piece of the wider cultural puzzle. We must view it critically and without judgement (248), discerning the truths from within it, and allowing ourselves to develop the broader understandings we need in order to continue to evolve ourselves and our communities. Moreover, however, literature allows us to connect to our own spaces and ourselves, turning our perception inward and allowing us to resolve the conflicts we face. As LGBT Appalachians especially, we can understand these conflicts of identity, and literature provides us with a tool to help resolve that tension and create something new out of the rubble. In particular, we must pay attention to the margins of our own communities in order to develop our politics and understandings more deeply. It is here that intersectional approaches become important.

Intersectional theory allows the analysis of experiences along a multi-axis framework from which it is possible to see the way identities overlap, intersect, and influence each other within a wider culture and society. This method of analysis can be used to understand the conflicts often presented in LGBT Appalachian literature between Appalachian identity and LGBT identity. Both of these experiences of self relating to self, interact with each other to create a sense of ill-fit in both communities, as well as coloring the relationships between the

individual and their respective communities. Literature serves as an outlet for this tension, as well as creating the discussion forum whereby we can seek to understand ourselves in relation to these identities and the communities and systems that inform those identities in turn.

The Emergence of Gay Regional Appalachian Literature

There has been an increase in explicitly LGBT regional Appalachian literature within the last decade. As the community grows in size and influence, the number of writers being included in anthologies, and indeed the number of anthologies and collections being published entirely or mostly composed of regional gay literature, has increased dramatically. LGBT Appalachian authors are writing explicitly and openly about what it means to be both LGBT and Appalachian, and working to make sense of the complications of the relationship between these two identities, communities, and cultures. The thesis of the inextricable truth of our queerness is meeting the antithesis of our predominantly conservative and fundamentalist communities within Appalachia, and literature is providing a forum for a synthesis between the two to emerge, through discourse around the ideas being expressed about place and the relationship to it as Appalachians and as LGBT people, as well as how those identities intersect with other experiences and cultures.

The publication of collections of literature such as *Walk till the dogs get mean* and *LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry From Appalachia*, alongside the rise in popularity of authors such as Silas House, and the increased academic focus on authors such as Dorothy Allison within the field of Appalachian studies, points to the rise of LGBT regional Appalachian

literature as a topic and as a forum for discussions to be had about identity. The increased publicity and academic study around the topic of LGBT Appalachia serves as an indicator that the literature is both increasing in production and proliferation as well as an indicator that it is serving a function for the community that produces it as well as for the community that consumes it.

Production is certainly increasing, which alongside the use of the internet, independent publishing, and university presses, has allowed more and more marginalized voices to be heard, as with increased access and lower costs facilitating the ability of overlooked voices to be seen within the field. In addition, proliferation of LGBT Appalachian literature has increased for much the same reason. It is easier than ever before to find and consume niche writings, allowing more members of the community to connect to literature that connects to their experiences.

Demonstrably, the effects of the genre on the wider discussions being had both within the community, between the community and larger mainstream society, and outside of the community all together in relation to the community itself allow for a deeper understanding of lived experience. Reading material from a queer political perspective, which as well as consuming explicitly queer media can help connect individuals to communities and create a sense of connection and heritage. For LGBT Appalachians who often suffer from isolation and distance (Black and Rhorer 2001, 19-24), creating a sense of connection to Appalachia the place and Appalachia the culture, understanding that there are predecessors who carry or carried the same cultural weight and conflict as they do now, this particular forum allows for a common sense of identity to be developed. The benefits of such an approach have already been practiced in other studies, as Lisa Tatonetti (2020) writes in her essay on teaching queer

Indigenous literature. She writes on the ways in which exposing a history of queer Indigenous writing can challenge the Western narratives around the history of gender in North America prior to and during contact and colonization (120). In LGBT Appalachian literature, this function is served as the texts challenges a cisheteronormative and socially conservative narrative about what it means to be Appalachian and who is able to belong to that community.

Through an intersectional approach, the positive effects niche literature can have for the community, especially when the literature is engaged in figuring out these questions of identity, community, and place, as it relates to being LGBT and Appalachian allow for a deeper and more inclusive discussion about the margins. Gay regional literature from the mountains has focused itself on resolving the questions and conflicts created by the intersections of experience of both communities, and in doing so has helped foster a new sense of identity and community for those folks living in the region and grappling with these tensions. The self-reflection and community-minded activist approach brought to these writings and works is informed by a history of struggle for recognition. Viewing the region from a queer intersectional perspective enables to deconstruct and untangle some of the complicated legacies of the region and its conservative politics as well as its liberatory traditions. It allows us to question the narrative about the region so often sold to us and view our place and culture through fresh eyes, alongside helping us understand what it means to call this place home and what it means to come home for the first time.

I have selected one work from the collection *LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry From Appalachia* (2018) that I think neatly summarizes a lot of the complexities around LGBT Appalachian existence. The work I have selected is “Homecoming” written by Jeff Mann, a

gay pagan writer from Hinton, West Virginia. I would first like to note the limitations imposed by my own selection, mainly being that Mann is a cisgender white gay man, with a relative degree of privilege in the way that he is able to relate to his communtiy as well as wider cisheteronormative society. However, I have chosen this piece because this particular poem can, in a simple and direct way, showcase the sense of tension and conflict between what one considers "home" and the nature of one's self, in relation to both the microculture of Appalachian identity and the wider identity in mainstream society.

"Today, mid-November, my lover, my sister, and I,
we're carrying box after box of Ball jars to the basement,
riches my father has grown and canned. Lime pickles,
spaghetti sauce, green beans, tomatoes, strawberry jam.

Hinton, West Virginia, is much the same, that Appalachia
my teenaged years so wanted to escape. There's a storefront
preacher shouting about perversity, a bookish boy with a split lip.
There's a gang outside a Madam's Creek farmhouse shouting
"Come out here, you queers. We'll change you."

Now I know only five hours away, amidst DC traffic,
crowded sidewalks, men are holding hands along Seventeenth Street,
buying gay novels in Lambda Rising, sipping Scotch
and flirting in the leather bars. But I want to be here,

in West Virginia,

where my ancestors worked their farms, where, today,

we form this assembly line from kitchen to basement.

John hands me a box of bread and butter pickles,

I lug it down the cellar stairs. There, amidst cobwebs,

Amy's lining up the jars, greens and reds,

with their masking-tape dates, joining other summers

packed away. I want to be here,where first ice collects along the creeks,

where the mountains' fur turns pewter gray,

and my father mulches quiescent gardens with fallen leaves.

Early evening's hard rain, hill-coves filling with mist.

After pinto beans, turnip greens, and cornbread,

John's drowsing on the couch, I'm finger-picking

a little guitar by the fire. There on the coffee table

,gifts Amy's left for us: a jar of spaghetti sauce, a jar of jam.

There on the mantelpiece, my mother's urn.

The boy who fled Hinton twenty-five years ago,

he's here too, the boy who dreamed

of packed disco bars, summers on Fire Island,

fascinating city men, the boy who did not yet know

what family meant. His hair is thick and black,

his beard is sparse, still dark. He shakes his head,

amazed that I've come back willingly, even for

a weekend. An ember flares up, fingernails of freezing

rain tick the windows. The boy, bemused, studies

the lines on my brow, shyly strokes the silver in my beard."

(133-134)

Mann, in this poem, describes the very common cycle for many LGBT Appalachians, of moving to the city, which he demonstrates an intimate familiarity with in this poem, from a small town or rural community within the Appalachian region. For Mann, however, the place of greater importance where he finds the most comfort and intimacy, is not among the crowded streets of the gay districts in DC, but rather at his family home. He describes the sense of tension he feels with his own homecoming, returning to his family farm with his partner, with the idealized version of his own life that he initially wanted as a young man.

This poem represents the bittersweet nature of finding yourself alienated from your own roots and coming to an understanding of knowing that the you who used to be, maybe had not quite figured it out yet. Appalachians have always had a culture of both fluidity of movement as well as deep attachment to land and place. Of particular note for me in this work is the fact that Mann has returned home to participate in a uniquely quintessential Appalachian tradition, but has brought along his partner, side by side with his family they are participating in this tradition together, with John passing down canned items to be stored. Mann portrays this homecoming with a bittersweet bemused nature, but ultimately is drawing the conclusions that in order to be happy, he needs to embrace both sides of his identity.

The young man he used to be would never have come back here willing, but that young man also likely never thought that there would be space in the region for a gay couple to come visit their family's farm, participate in tradition, and be welcomed as full members of the family. Make no mistake, this space was carved out with a lot of pain, Mann has

elaborated on his fears and struggles in his other work, but ultimately the main conclusion is that coming home is a necessity. In this context, coming home is not a return to things as they were, the Appalachia that still is in many respects, the store front preacher shouting hellfire and damnation and the hatred against a local gay couple. It is the act of creating space for oneself within that hostile environment, and indeed the act of reclaiming the negative and embracing the positive within the community that you spent most of your adult life trying to get away from.

Appalachian literature and LGBT literature have a lot more overlap than would initially be expected. Both genres, by and large, serve to give a voice to underrepresented groups within the broader English language canon of material, and allows these groups to tell their own stories about their own experiences, in their own words. As I have argued before, the meeting of these two genres is an opportunity for exploration and discourse around the nature of who we are and what we mean to ourselves and each other. It is also, however, a celebration. It is an opportunity for us to reject the negatives on both sides and reclaim who we are as a community, developing that community side by side. Our work feeds into other's works, creating a new canon and a new field to study. Beyond that, it creates space for the emotions we carry, the tensions we feel, and the conflicts that have often torn us apart to be taken, and deconstructed without judgement, allowing us to resolve them and create something new from the ashes.

Out LGBT Appalachians can never go home again, whether they leave physically in the first place or not. The home that exists within nostalgia and the comfort of family can become a bittersweet memory. Reminders dot the landscape of Appalachia that can often make LGBT people feel a sense of discomfort (Sickels 2015, 77). Our region is dominated

by a hostile attitude towards our existence, wrought with religion and conservative politics. For many of us, our arrival at the point where we recognize our own queerness, even when we cannot classify it to ourselves yet, is simultaneously our point of departure. That realization of self-queerness represents a shift away from the dominant culture of the region, often placing us at odds with family, friends, and community. We can never return to the time before, however given enough space to explore, we can develop new ideas about what we mean to ourselves and each other, and create time and space to come home.

Chapter Two

Resilience: Queers and Quares, Hillbillies, and Old-Time Banjo

"Gay people are beautiful and so is the banjo, and it's a shame that people see them in such light," a friend once told me, half-laughing as we talked about the anecdotal phenomenon of gay folks playing the banjo, no matter where you go.

The banjo is an instrument with a complicated history that presents interesting opportunities for building solidarity across racial and class based lines. This chapter will outline the connections between the banjo, racial tension in the South, and queer possibilities of radical political action utilizing the 5-string banjo, the variety of the instrument most common within Appalachian old-time music. I will be framing this discussion through the lens of what Mariana Ortega (2014) termed hometactics, which she defines as the means of familiarizing oneself with a place or inside a space where one cannot fully belong (181). The practices of queering the banjo are a practice of hillbilly hometactics, serving as a way to connect and familiarize oneself with their own connections to the region due to the instrument's prominence in Appalachian music.

Looking at an overview of queer and quare theories of performance as they relate to Appalachian politics and interactions will provide a framework for using an intersectional approach that makes visible how class, race, gender, and queerness overlap to produce unique abilities for expression and placemaking within the region. The banjo has emerged as

symbolic of the Appalachian region and continues to feature prominently in queer art and music from the mountains. I can also see the banjo emerging outside of the region in relation to queer country music and outside the old-time/bluegrass/country canon as well. Solidarity can be developed using an instrument that has long standing and deeply embedded roots in multiple marginalized groups, and there exists the potential for that solidarity to become utilized to build towards liberation within queer Appalachian community.

There is a scholarly gap in both queer and Appalachian studies concerning the use of the banjo as a tool and instrument of queer Appalachian performativity, so this chapter will draw upon research and theory on queer country music, quare oral history, and emergent trends within Appalachian queer music as a whole to look more closely at the potential of the 5 string banjo as a tool for liberation within the mountains. By applying the same theories about class, gender, race, and queerness that have been used to look at similar intersections with country music and storytelling, the margins of old-time music and the banjo can be explored more thoroughly and brought to light.

This chapter will focus most intently upon the possibilities of practical liberation from within these margins, not just the potential for visibility while remaining trapped inside them. First I will offer an overview of the history of the banjo in particular its relationship to Black Southern and Appalachian communities, followed by a discussion of my personal experiences with the banjo as a queer Appalachian. I will then address how music can function as a form of hometactics. A conversation about quare theory and its relationship to queer studies will follow. I will then look at two LGBT banjo players from Appalachia who represent different ends of the spectrum, showing hometactics being applied in the real world through the banjo.

5 Strings, a Stick, and a Drum

It is important to first understand the history of the 5 string banjo in the Appalachian region. Richard Jones-Bamman (2017) writes in "A Brief History of the Banjo," the opening chapter of his book *Building New Banjos for an Old-Time World* that banjo music began life in North America as an instrument most often played by Black people who were being held hostage and forced into labor on plantations in the Deep South region as well as households across the United States. Over time, however, the banjo crossed racial lines into the folk music of white Southerners and Appalachians, eventually becoming a more-or-less essential component in what is labeled today as old-time music. At the same time, it was becoming the key instrument used in minstrel performances, a form of blackface comedy routine where white performers performed stereotypical and deeply racist caricatures of Black people. This form of performance gained enormous popularity both in the northern regions of the United States and across the Atlantic Ocean in England, however that popularity eventually faded. The banjo evolved into parlor music for a short time, in the homes of upper-class white Americans, before eventually being discarded as new forms of music became popular around the turn of the century. For working class households, both white and Black, in some areas of the United States however, the banjo continued to exist as part of folk music until the development of country music, and seeing a small resurgence in popularity around the time of Bill Monroe's first show with Earl Scruggs in the late 1940s. The banjo then regained popularity with the folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s, entering into more mainstream middle-class American culture through icons like Pete Seeger (Jones-Bamman, 23-35).

This overview of the banjo's transformation from the plantation to the holler, and from the parlor to the folk cafe, shows the numerous interactions between the instrument and various communities. The instrumental role that the banjo has played in the foundations of multiple forms of traditional music, especially within Black southern communities and white Appalachian communities most often working-class, places the instrument in a unique position to claim heritage and roots among a diverse range of people, many of whom can situate themselves with each other in a way that scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1991) describes as the "outsider within" (11), overlapping in terms of place-based identity (Southerness/Appalachian) and class (working or poor) while being separated from each other by racial lines. This can extend to include gender and queerness in many ways. With that in mind, the banjo can be an instrument towards solidarity; however the use of the banjo in minstrel shows, designed to mock Black people, had severed the link between the instrument and most contemporary Black communities. That wasn't the only factor according to scholar Tony Thomas (2013), who writes that a large part of the decision to abandon the banjo came from the cultural assimilation of Black people in the United States. With minstrel shows depicting the banjo as a ethnic and racialized instrument associated with Black people, the assimilationist viewpoint sought to discard the banjo in favor of the guitar, and blues came to dominate Black music. The banjo, which had also featured in Black jazz bands, ragtime, and pop music, began to disappear within the Black community (150-155).

That link is slowly being restored within contemporary old-time and folk music, as well as within bluegrass, with artists such as Rhiannon Giddens, Amythyst Kiah, and Jake Blount notably reclaiming the banjo as a Black instrument and using it to tell stories and histories from within their community (Cholst, 2020). The International Bluegrass Music

Association has also started the "Arnold Shultz Fund" with the intent to encourage the participation of people of color generally and Black people specifically, in bluegrass music (IBMA, 2020). Important to note, of the three artists I named above, both Kiah and Blount identify themselves as queer.

Jake Blount, in an interview with Rachel Cholst from the media project *Country Queers* also notes that of the final winners in 2019 at the Clifftop Bluegrass Festival, a notable fiddlers convention[4] and competition that is often considered one of the largest in the country, all were LGBT and many were people of color, describing it as the "gay sweep of Clifftop" (Cholst 2020b). Here it becomes clear that the reclamation of the banjo is happening within both Black and LGBT communities actively. The very first Queer Old-Time Fiddlers Convention was scheduled to happen last year in Minnesota, far outside of the Appalachian region, before being canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The banjo is appearing in unexpected places and becoming a symbol of something emergent within LGBT Appalachian communities, alongside it's reclamation by Black people within the United States as a whole.

I want to frame my discussion of the queer reclamation of the banjo alongside my own personal experiences as an Appalachian as well as a Southern queer transgender woman, all of which are aspects of my identity alongside the fact that I am an old-time banjo player. My hope is that discussing and attempting to explain my passion for the banjo and its place in my life as a tool and means for connection, solidarity, and liberation will help lead the way

[4] It is worth noting that fiddlers conventions and bluegrass festivals are also showcases and competitions for other instruments such as the banjo, guitar, dulcimer, and traditional Appalachian flatfoot dancing. In addition, the name "bluegrass festival" is also used to denote gatherings dedicated to old-time Appalachian music.

and open the gate for a more robust discussion. The banjo exists on the margins of American music as its popularity among the mainstream has declined, and the resulting gap of knowledge leaves a space to be filled.

I did not start playing 5-string banjo until I was already in my late teenage years, and had already moved to the mountain region from the foothills of North Carolina, however the banjo had already held a place in my life. I grew up hearing bluegrass music played on radios and car stereos by cousins and uncles. Following a pattern of metronormativity, as a young openly queer person I shunned what I perceived as the rural in favor of what I percieved as the urban, eschewing country and bluegrass music for punk rock and metal, and spending more time visiting shows in the city than I did going to hear music in the more rural settings in which my family lived.

My interest in the banjo sparked with my move to the mountains and my exposure to old-time music, as I developed friendships with street musicians in Asheville, North Carolina. Learning to play banjo was something that happened alongside my own early transition, with myself becoming a competent player around the time I first started taking feminizing hormones to begin medical transition as a trans woman. What struck me and opened up the door to start thinking about the banjo's liberatory potential was my move to New England for a short period. It was there that I found other queer people who owned and played banjos, often the same songs I had learned living in the mountains.

In my discussion with a friend, a noted openly gay banjo player from Southwest Virginia, we discussed the anecdotal phenomenon of LGBT folks playing the banjo no matter where you go. We saw the banjo present among LGBT communities across the country from

Brooklyn to Portland, Oregon. While my friend theorized that this is because the banjo is a bit of an outcast among instruments (a feeling many queer youth and adults alike can relate to intensely), I would like the theorize more deeply about why this instrument resonates with LGBT people, both Black and white, and what potential that serves alongside liberatory politics and theories about making place and creating home.

I see the banjo as an instrument on the margins, at the intersections of race and class, and in a unique position to be an instrument for liberatory art. Playing the banjo has allowed me to reconnect with the rural aspects and working-class aspects of my own identity and community, and allowed me to relate to other LGBT people while also existing within an intensely cisheteronormative space and challenging preconceived notions of acceptable identity within rural and working class spaces of my own community. With this in mind, there is radical potential that the "gay sweep" at Clifftop carries, and the ways in which it is creating solidarity across marginalized groups, many of whom are outsiders/within, overlapping in terms of queerness and creating solidarity across racial boundaries, working together in resistance to an overwhelmingly white, patriarchal, and cisheteronormative dominance of Appalachian traditional music, challenging the assumptions about who can and who cannot participate in those traditions as well as to whom that heritage and tradition belongs.

Music as Placemaking/Hometactics

bell hooks wrote that "the ability to see and describe one's own reality is a significant step in the long process of self-recovery; but it is only a beginning (quoted in Adams 1989,

26).” To create radical new possibilities for creating place and space within a hostile sphere, there is a need for cooperation and to look toward solidarity with others in a community who exist within the margins of that community. My experience is at the margins of the queer experience by the virtue of my position as a transgender woman, however my experience does not capture the racially marginalized position of Black, Indigenous, or Latina people who exist both at the margins of their queerness as well as their race, often further impacted by a place based identity such as being Appalachian. If the web of oppression and marginalization is going to be cut, it is imperative to understand how solidarity can be built while allowing individuals to exist as what Mariana Ortega (2014) terms “multiplicitous selves” (179). All queer Appalachians exist within margins, as the popular image of Appalachia is limited to the white, the heterosexual, and the male. In order to create space and community along the lines of what I understand as a project identity, there must exist a desire and the tools to build solidarity across those margins.

In this portion of the chapter, I seek to understand the banjo as a tool of placemaking, and therefore as a tool of dismantling the web of oppression. I see the playing of banjo music, and Appalachian old-time specifically by queer Appalachians as a part of what Ortega describes as “hometactics”. Ortega (2014) writes:

> The reality of home is often quite different from our imagined home, both in its personal and political instantiations. I wonder though, whether we can go beyond the myth of home and move toward a decentered praxis of home-making and belonging, one that gives up the full possibility of belonging and allows for the possibility of not longing to be on one side or site of belonging. (181)

Ortega describes hometactics as a means of finding and creating a sense of familiarity in a place where one cannot fully belong, due to the idea of multiplicitous selfhood. Within Appalachian culture, cisheteronormativity within the mainstream traditional practices more often than not serves as a bar across the door that keeps LGBT people of all racial and class backgrounds regardless of gender from participating in these practices. Queer bodies, queer self, and queer politics are gatekept by social norms from participating in traditional practices, often enforced by an older generation that has gained prestige within Appalachian culture. For example, it is hard even as a white trans woman for me to show up at the door of a noted local musician and ask to learn songs from them, in the ways in which many of my contemporary musician colleagues have learned old-time music.

An emphasis is placed within Appalachian traditional music on the learning of songs from older generations of players, who in turn developed their craft by sitting at the knee of notable regional musicians. This apostolic tradition is given weight and deemed as the traditional method. What hope is there for a Black trans woman or a Latina butch lesbian to show up at the door of a well-known white elderly and often male musician and ask to learn from them? Appalachian culture places an emphasis on traditional methods of doing things, and LGBT people are more often than not barred from this when it comes to learning music. This also impacts the performance and participation in cultural events. There are dangerous precedents established by factors like the attack on Latinx-Appalachian string band Che Apalache at the Galax Old-Time Fiddlers Convention, where advocacy on stage against the Trump campaign's promise of building a wall resulted in a physical attack on the band members (Enriquez 2020, 73). When openness about queerness could lead to similar assaults, especially when considering the intersections of race for LGBT people who play old-time,

the ability to participate in cultural events around old-time music in the region start to look limited.

In this way, learning to play banjo (or fiddle, guitar, dulcimer etc.) in spite of these barriers, is a part of the praxis of hometactics. When we as LGBT Appalachians, regardless of racial or class background, learn from each other and through less-traditional channels, we are practicing developing a sense of familiarity with the region that is tied to our place-based identity that we also cannot fully belong to. The practice of banjo playing then unites LGBT Appalachians in cross-community solidarity because we are learning from each other and playing with each other, as well as forming opportunities for performance within our own spaces and on our own terms.

Old-time music is often discussed as a focal point for feelings of Appalachian tradition and heritage. In the essay "Somewheres on the Track" from *Appalachia in Regional Context*, Kirby, Haywood and Pen (2018) assert that "nothing weaves the fabric of community together as well as participatory music and dance (191)." I can remember going to dances, before the current pandemic, and always feeling tension when dancing the "girl's role" at these community functions. However, I felt equally uncomfortable dancing in the boy's role, and oftentimes had to pick a side as Ortega described it. Participation was precipitated by a careful curation of my presentation. From my experiences as an Appalachian trans woman this rings true, but can also hold true for gay people as well as other trans people in the region. Cultural participation becomes difficult alongside open queerness, especially so in smaller and more rural communities, leading to a perceived imperative to compromise one or more identities. However, LGBT Appalachians within the

region have shown that by organizing our own dances and our own community events, there exists the potential to create a hometactic from these traditional cultural practices.

"Somewheres on the Track" opens with Ron Pen writing that place matters and that it can begin with something as simple as a tune (2018, 189). In the same book, bell hooks (2018) writes in "Reclaiming Place: Making Home" that creating home and reclaiming your identity based on place is a multi-layered process, that can include making art (181) or in this case, music. When LGBT Appalachians take the tradition into their own hands, it is a practice of reclamation and a practice of making home. The act of making music, playing the banjo loudly and proudly is the creation of a connection to the region through solidarity with each other across other oppressive boundaries and through the margins, and the creation of space and community that can create a fuller sense of belonging and safety. It is carving out space within a place to make home.

Queering and Quaring the Banjo

This section of the chapter will be focusing on what those hometactics look like when applied to the practicing and performance of old-time music, and on what is currently being done to create space within Appalachian communities for the queer. I will also be framing this discussion around the theories of quare identity and what it means to be Black and LGBT in relationship to the banjo, considering the banjo's foundational roots within the Black community.[5]

[5] I feel I would be failing in my duties as a scholar if I did not address this, however my engagement will always be from outside the Black cultural perspective due to my personal perspective as a white trans woman and therefore fundamentally lacking.

The lack of research and scholarship on queer and LGBT expression within old-time music is due to both the relatively recent emergence of it into the mainstream roots and folk music culture as well as the tendency of many artists to fly below the radar. Due to this, I'm going to be looking at the way country music, which evolved in part from Appalachian folk music traditions, has been queered in the past and then apply those concepts and theories to old-time music. The research on queer performance and politics within country music is also scare, however I plan to draw from Nadine Hubbs's (2014) *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* in order to draw parallels between country music and old-time.

Of particular interest to me are the last two chapters of *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*, dealing with gender deviance and queer political performance respectively. Aspects of both queer politics and gender deviance can be seen in the way old-time music is currently being queered, and importantly in the way that banjo is being queered in relation.

Hubbs' third chapter, titled "Gender Deviance and Class Rebellion in 'Redneck Woman' " deals with the Gretchen Wilson song "Redneck Woman", and addresses the pushback from female artists in country music against both dominant middle-class culture as well as the more nuanced pushback against working-class stereotypes. Hubbs' argues that the song expresses defiant contempt for the restrictions of middle-class femininity, while simultaneously proudly embracing both a "virile female" image as consciously chosen and staking its central conceit upon working-class values of resiliency and self-sufficiency that are generally associated with men. Hubbs writes that redneck woman as phrase seems a contradiction, but the song's embracing of both working-class feminine stereotypes in contrast to middle-class ideals while also asserting working-class masculine traits (such as truck driving) serves to establish the song's protagonist as the embodiment of both a

deviance from feminine norms of the dominant culture, as well as middle-class norms (112-15).

Hubbs's fourth chapter, titled "'Fuck Aneta Bryant' and the Queer Politics of Being Political" deals with the rather infamous David Allan Coe song of that name, and examines the way that the antibourgeois politic and language of that song, namely its use of decidedly offensive language to convey a progressive meaning of defending homosexual men from the conservative activism of right-wing anti-gay crusader Anita Bryant. Hubbs argues that the politics expressed and the language used to do so seem contradictory, but only when judged with the assumption of middle-class values and ideals, while making more sense within the culture that the music arises from (139-44). It is, in effect, holding a multiplicity in the face of what appears to be a contradiction, something we can see reflected in LGBT Appalachia writ large. It is a queered politics being performed by Coe, who is often associated with an outlaw masculinity (which may in part shield him from criticism from the conservative right in his defense of homosexuals "beating your meat" inside prison).

The deviance from traditional norms is reflected in the claiming of a specifically queer Appalachian identity and the creation of queered and quared Appalachian musical traditions is in direct reflection of these ideas. There exists within country music, Hubbs has argued, an ability to contain these oft-conflicting views in a constant process of reconciliation and synthesis while still being easily understood by the audience. We can see this reflected in old-time music as well. The singing of murder ballads by women, often grisly songs containing details in which a woman is murdered for overtly misogynistic reasons, is often a process of reclamation for some of the singers I have talked about this with at festivals and bars. Similarly, the usage of traditional Appalachian music by queer and quare Appalachians

represents a means of synthesis between the multiplicities that may not be understood when looking at the practice from a cisheteronormative or metronormative perspective, but makes sense to those within the practice and community.

According to E. Patrick Johnson (2001), quare theory is a reconceptualization of what we know and how we know it (7). This functions as a recontextualization of the knowledge queer theory claims to produce as well as the ways of knowing. Within the span of my research, this is reflected in the meaning of the banjo to white LGBT Appalachians versus it's meaning to Black LGBT Appalachians, who have the added legacy and history with the instrument that means different things within their own community and cultural perspective. Given the origin of the instrument in West Africa and it's complicated history in the United States between white and Black working class communities, to the role of the instrument in mocking Black people during blackface minstrel show while also giving them one of few available opportunities to make a living as a musician in the 19th century, the banjo has significantly more weight in Black communities of the mountains.

This Black history of the banjo is being quared by performer and musician Amythyst Kiah, and for this case study I will be looking at her work through an interview with *Country Queers.* I will also be looking at the queering of the banjo through the lens of the work of Sam Gleaves, who is a white gay man from Southwest Virginia. These two musicians represent two separate ends of the spectrum of LGBT experiences in Appalachian along racial and gender lines,as well as different socio-economic backgrounds. Gleaves comes from the rural and the working class, while Kiah grew up in the suburbs of Chattanooga. As well, each is taking different approaches in their music. Gleaves is an approach at queering

existing tradition, while Kiah represents an experimental approach rooted in history, a quare future.

In her interview with *Country Queers*, Amythyst Kiah marks the importance of realizing that her experiences growing up were just as Appalachian as any other. Understanding her own role in the history of the region as a Black lesbian allowed her to connect with the musical traditions of the mountains in a deeper way. Kiah mentions reading Jeff Mann's *Loving Mountains, Loving Men* as a formative experience that allowed her to connect herself to that tradition. Mann is mentioned here in the first chapter, and his influence on LGBT Appalachians and the influence of gay regional Appalachian literature in the service of homecoming is seen exampled here. She says of reading it, "That's when I started to realize all of our stories in Appalachia have meaning" (Cholst 2020a).

This connection serves as a powerful reminder of the fluidity of identity and the importance of connection to place. Quare theory is important because it asserts the importance of using the complexities of lived experiences to capture what labels and terms cannot: existence within the margins (Johnson 2001, 13). Kiah's music is representative of multiple traditions, and cannot be easily defined, but it is also firmly rooted in her experiences as a Black lesbian and a Black Appalachian, while also defined by the exposures to a wider range of experiences as well as her education which came from the benefit of a higher socio-economic status. Here, race, gender, sexual orientation, and class all come together to inform her music and her life, in a way that defies the traditional use of labels both in genre and identity, which draws on Johnson's ideas of a quare theory (Johnson 2016, 49). The result is a distinctly quare intersection at the margins of the knowledge and scholarship on the banjo and its role in Appalachian communities.

Where Kiah creates it is often drawn from a wide variety of sources, but this is not the only approach being taken to queering the banjo in the Appalachian region. Sam Gleaves' music is a subtle subversion and reworking of existing Appalachian traditional music as well as original work that queers that tradition.This can be seen distinctly in two songs that work to create a reframing of traditional gospel and old-time music in the region.

First, in "Two Virginia Boys," Gleaves (2015) sets the lyrics of a gay Appalachian love story with a happy ending, to the tune of "East Virginia Blues" a sorrowful blues song. Gleaves sings a song of love and compassion, with a distinct connection to place, writing:

I can place you by the way you talk,

You hear the music in your heels.

Just like any raised right Southern boy,

You don't tell everything you feel.

I don't need to know much more than that,

Long as I've been knowing you.

If two Virginia boys can fall in love,

I reckon that's just what we'll do

(2015)

Connection to place is important in this, and the use of a familiar and traditional melody for the chorus emphasizes a connection to the region and the history of music here, while also allowing for a new interpretation of that past.

We can see similar strains of subversion in Gleaves' (2015) version of "God Gave Noah the Rainbow Sign," a mountain gospel song that tells of the endtimes to come in the traditional interpretation, followed by the redemption and salvation. The song is reframed when played by Gleaves, due to the use of the rainbow as a symbol of LGBT pride for the last several decades. Gleaves' banjo features a rainbow strap, and this is featured prominently on the album cover. The song transforms into an anthem of pride and reclamation, foretelling an end to the conservative homophobia of the past and giving rise to redemption and a new future for the people of the region. The symbolic cleansing of the region being done through artists like Gleaves and Kiah who are queering and quaring the regional traditions and in turn encouraging a new tradition to evolve and develop within it. The banjo and the songs played on it are being used to reframe and reclaim the history of the region itself, and in turn offer paths to new futures whether in the wide ranging catalogue of Amystyst Kiah, drawing on multiple sources of knowledge to imagine new futures or in the subtle subversions and reframing of Sam Gleaves which recontextualize the existing traditions and give birth to new meaning in the process by inserting an LGBT subtext into cisheteronormative narratives. The meaning becomes one of belonging, and places a sense of heritage within the music, connecting LGBT listeners more deeply to their traditions as Appalachians.

I am framing all of the above in the lens of hometactics and "making home," reinforcing the point of creating solidarity, concluding with the importance of framing further all of this within liberatory politics. The banjo is useful as a tool for creating that solidarity

due to its unique positionality amongst several communities at once. It is the instrument of the margins and the marginalized.

I have demonstrated how the banjo's use by LGBT Appalachians both Black and white can fit within Ortega's concepts of hometactics, and the use of it as well as traditional music serves to reframe and find place inside a region full of "barred doors." The use of the banjo by marginalized people within the region operates to establish a foothold in tradition and place, creating home in hostile territory in ways that manifest differently based on an array of intersections of experiences and knowledge held within communities. It is important to resist the urge to homogenize these experiences however, and the two presented alongside my own experience as an Appalachian trans musician does not begin to cover the tapestry of community held within the queering of the banjo and old-time music in the region. Cathy J. Cohen (1997) writes in her critique of radical queer politics:

> In the same ways that we account for the varying privilege to be gained by a heterosexual identity, we must also pay attention to the privilege some queers receive from being white, male, and upper class. Only through recognizing the many manifestations of power, across and within categories, can we truly begin to build a movement based on one's politics and not exclusively on one's identity. (479)

Cohen goes on to write on the importance of developing an explicitly anti-capitalist politic within queer movements, and of the need to organize around something other than single-oppression. The experiences of LGBT Appalachians vary wildly due to such factors as their race and class positions, as well as their gender and not all queer experiences in the mountains hold the same weight. We must account for the intersections.

In my final thoughts for this chapter, I want to provoke questions about what it means to queer and quare the banjo, and how these hometactics can evolve into something more. Do we need to settle for creating subtleties and subversions of the existing normative society? How does the banjo fit in as a tool of liberation in this context? I do not claim to have the answers; however I hope this can serve as a jumping off point for a wider discussion within both the scholarly and the old-time/banjo-playing community. The jumping off point I am defining with this chapter is the potential for the banjo to be an instrument of liberatory politics. It is through hometactics that the banjo has become a site of placemaking for LGBT Appalachians, allowing us to create space within dominant institutions in addition to creating our own spaces outside of them.

Chapter Three

Quare Hollers: Reclaiming Place in Appalachia

For LGBT Appalachians, it is infinitely more prudent to view the idea of homecoming through the lens of arrival rather than return. Homecoming is best represented as the moment when we reconcile the conflicts and contradictions of our inherent identities, the thesis of the essential truth that we are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender and the antithesis of the oftentimes conservative/fundamentalist domination of our region's consciousness, and reach synthesis between these multiplicity of selves that enables someone to fully embody themselves as dirt dykes, farm faggots, Fabulachians, faeries, and quares.

For many LGBT Appalachians, the dominating experience of childhoods is one of a constant conflict between who they know themselves to be and the version of themselves they are sold on by cisheteronormative Appalachian society. This experience is not universal, but it is a common refrain for many who grow up in or reside within the small towns and rural communities of the region. Appalachian society, for all of its positive characteristics, more often than not broadcasts the message of "you do not belong here" to LGBT residents of the region. The often conservative and fundamentalist politics of the region provide an unfriendly space to rural LGBT youth within the region that grow up with ideas about what it means to be Appalachian within a deeply patriarchal and cisheteronormative society.

Therefore, it is of little surprise that many who think about this topic often assume that the only chance for LGBT Appalachians is for them to get out of the rural, and into the urban. The narrative of the great gay migration from the rural to the city is one that we see

played out in media across the spectrum, in a dichotomy where the rural means pain and death, and the city provides sanctuary and life. In addition so much of what has become a universally recognized gay culture, disseminated through national media to all corners, was developed and continues to be developed within the urban gay neighborhoods and districts of large metropolises like New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. This culture demands visibility and public celebration as a method of confirming one's own lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender identity, a feat that is most often impossible within the confines of rural communities in the hollers and hills of Appalachia as it is known and perceived.

In her 2009 study of rural LGBT youth in Eastern Kentucky, Mary L. Gray writes:

> Rural youth in the United States have unprecedented access to national media markets. These markets saturate them in a politics of LGBT visibility that demands public recognition. Seeking acknowledgment as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender means grappling with these demands no matter where one lives. Rural youth must respond to the call for LGBT visibility that structures their feelings of authenticity amid vastly underfunded, rural public spaces that prioritize allegiance to familiarity and solidarity over public claims to difference of any kind. (106-107)

What is homecoming then to the LGBT Appalachian? For those who leave as well as those who stay, what does it mean to return to or reclaim a home that seems at face value to reject the notion of any kind of LGBT cultural minority? Furthermore, these factors prompt the question of what can be inferred and learned from those who willingly seek out the region as a place to make a new home, specifically designed to get away from the urban gay culture that has taken over the national mindset and attitutdes about what gay culture can look like.

The founding of LGBT-specific intentional communities, the definition of which for our purposes is cited by William L. Smith (2002) as "a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values," within Appalachian rural spaces provides the participants with an opportunity to explore these questions and create something new that reflects the desires and will of the participants (110). It is a reflection, in the truest sense, of reclamation and placemaking within the region, a way to cast off the undesirable aspects of the dominant regional culture, embrace the radical possibilities of that culture, and come together as a community with an intention to create an alternative queer future within the region for the marginalized.

In this chapter, I analyze intentional communities, consisting of exclusively LGBT-identified people residing within the Appalachian region, and form a conclusion as to what the existence of these communities means within the framework of reclaiming place and making home. Through the methods which intentional communities provide LGBT Appalachians, these communities have the ability to define their own identity for themselves, as both LGBT individuals as well as Appalachians, without the constraints presented by life within wider cisheteronormative society. Intentional communities in rural spaces also serve a crucial function by providing freedom from urban assimilationist constraints. Building on an intersectional framework and bell hooks's observations in "Reclaiming Place, Making Home", I show how models for intentional communities in the region can be expanded and utilized to inform a new queered future for the region and for its LGBT inhabitants, particularly its most marginalized members. There is space to take these models and create a different future for the region from the past and the present.

In this chapter, I will first conduct an overview of making place as it intersects with an intersectional mode of analysis, particularly the way in which place-based identity informs community building. I will then look at the ways in which metronormativity shaped anti-urban queer politics, and the ways in which those politics directly led to the formation of lesbian “landykes” seperatist communes and Radical Faerie sanctuaries. Next, I will analyze these intentional communities, looking at the ways in which they have fallen short as well as the ways that they have paved the way for new intentional communities with more radical politics in the region. Finally, I will present the Short Mountain Sanctuary as a space in which radical placemaking is taking place and point to the possibilities for a queerer Appalachian future that it indicates.

We Are the Sum of Our Parts

Based on an intersectional analysis, every LGBT Appalachian is subject to the positive and negative consequences of both their LGBT and their mountain identities, at the very least, most often compounded by their experiences of race, class, and gender. It is also worth considering for a moment within this framework that just on the scale of the LGBT community alone, a variety of experiences are created based on the intersections of oppression, with a hierarchy in place between the various subgroups of the community with gay men as experiencing the least axises of oppression and so most often placed at the top, and sapphic trans women as experiencing the most axes of oppression and so almost always placed at the bottom.

My thinking on queer and quare intentional communities in Appalachia has been

deeply influenced by the work of bell hooks in regards to what place means. Intentional communities are spaces where LGBT Appalachians can make a home where it is possible to fully embody themselves both in presentation and interactions with wider society but also within themselves and the ways in which individuals and communities understand and experience their own identities. Of importance has been her words in her essay "Reclaiming Place, Making Home" and the way that they mark physical place as an essential part of our experience with home. hooks eloquently writes in her essay for *Appalachia in Regional Context*:

> When we have no place to identify with, no roots to drink from, no tree trunks to guide us in clear directions, it is no accident that we can't on any given day feel sincerely that we know who we really are, what our values are, what we mean, and which of our seemingly multiple personalities is the true one. From lack of home we suffer schizophrenia, dislocation, and much loneliness, both psychologically and morally. And part of that lack of home has to do with place. Place is also a home. (hooks 2018, 179)

The ideas expressed by hooks in that paragraph alone highlight the importance for intentional communities to consider place as part of how they function as well as the need for individuals to relate physical place to their own experiences of their identity, community, and culture writ large. She goes on to detail the ways in which it is possible to reclaim identity with a place for the individual, through music, food, farming, people, and physical return (180-181).

Home and place can mean one thing to the urban enclaves, but the way that the gay

hollers relate to identity is a complicated beast with a long and complicated history to our communities. Ultimately though, rural LGBT Appalachians require place because Appalachian identity is a place based identity. To be in the mountains is to be home and rooted, to be in the cities of the coasts is to be uprooted and lost in the wilds by the dominant logic. Even under the pressures of assimilation, those remain in the mountains, carving out enclaves for themselves to forge a connection to place that is often lost with outmigration, although many often retain their Appalachian identity through the practicing of music and foodways. These intentional communities serve as deliberate spaces for the exploration of our relationship to place and to identity, critical to our identities as not just non-city queers but mountain people. But before the efforts began for founding spaces to try to become radically liberated in the hills, what were the options? How did one survive as out homosexuals and transgender people? Some just lived openly at home in the hills and hoped nothing violent would happen, while others hid in the closet and tried to get along best they could. But so many others joined the non-LGBT Appalachians as they left for the cities and the jobs and opportunities there before they were able to be returned to the hills.

Fight or Flight: A History of Queer Movement

So what were many of the first LGBT-specific intentional communities, such as Radical Faerie communes, were working to liberate themselves from. In order to understand what makes the intentional queer communities radical, powerful and liberatory, it is important to first understand the forces that drove the earliest founders to create these spaces in the first place. This can be reflected in the understanding of the ways in which this

movement from rural to urban to rural again mirrors the trends in migration seen amongst Appalachians as a whole, and the effect it has had on the culture of the mountains.

First, it is necessary to acknowledge that Appalachian history has been one of migration for a long time, with fluidity and relocation a constant effect on the culture of those within the region. Obermiller (2004) writes in his book chapter "Migration" from *High Mountains Rising* that "mountains are an abiding symbol of permanence, but in Appalachia that symbolism can be misleading because fluidity and movement have long been characteristics of the Appalachian population" (88). Obermiller presents his evidence with a history starting after World War 1 that showed streams of migrants leaving the region for the nearest metropolitan areas in search of jobs, with an increase coming in the 1960's and 1970's as the agrarian lifestyle in the mountains disappeared and many Appalachians were forced to relocate to make a living in other parts of the country, traveling further from the region, eventually settling in working-class and middle-class enclaves in cities across the United States, often locating themselves in neighborhoods full of other out-migrants from the region (90-96). This narrative was familiar to many gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans people living in the "gay ghettos" of San Francisco and New York City, who came from rural towns across the nation in search of something more.

Meanwhile, life in the mountains for those LGBT people who stayed was an isolated existence. In "Out in the Mountains" by Kate Black and Marc A. Rhorer (2001), respondents said:

> Donald mused about the nature of urban anonymity and rural visibility. "When you move to a bigger city, your reputation doesn't necessarily have that much weight," he

> said, implying that reputation has different definitions and meanings in these two worlds. What is a boon in one place may be a hindrance in another. But Karla saw the rural community with a more steely gaze: "Appalachian queers migrate out of there ... the few that do live there are usually not totally rejected by the family but rejected by the community. They'll be real kind [to your face] but still say stuff behind your back." Thus you might be despised but not necessarily be treated as if you are. (18)

It is, then, not a wonder that many left the mountains for city enclaves where they could feel as if they had a community to surround themselves with, as well as quite simply have possibilities for meeting someone with whom they could have romantic interaction. Life in the mountains for LGBT individuals, closeted or out, was often very limiting both in the community and the interpersonal aspects of everyday life. It is with this in mind that many LGBT Appalachians left for the cities, where there seemed the possibility for a life as their authentic selves. However this presented its own series of conflicts. Black and Rhorer got a variety of responses from their survey participants in regards to reconciling their identities, but almost all agreed that their identities as Appalachians was equally important to them as their identities as gay or lesbian, with a number of respondents even saying that they prefered living in the mountains due to the sense of belonging they got, even at the expense of having to live a more isolated lifestyle and travel for hours in order to visit a gay bar (19-20).

Jeff Mann (1999) wrote in his article "Stonewall and Matewan," describing his time living in a city after migrating out of West Virginia, that "As a poet, I know all about how productive longing can be, but for that young man I was, weeping on a city rooftop, pining for a mountain home so eagerly left, longing was less a direction and more a damnation, the fear that I belonged nowhere: neither the country nor the city, neither urban gay bar nor

mountain farm" (209). Both staying and leaving brought their own sets of problems for many LGBT Appalachians, and those who left for the cities often found themselves confronted with an urban gay culture that forced conformity and excluded anyone other than middle-class white gay men.

"Assimilate!": Metronormativity and You

So what were these forces driving gay culture in the urban metropolises, and why were LGBT folks from the cities forming intentional communities in rural areas to begin with? The roots lie in the anti-urban movement, which positioned itself as opposed to metronormativity. Daniel Rivers (2018) writes in the opening of his history on the early days of the Radical Faerie movement "Founding New Sodom," "'I'm so tired of the city, of the gay treadmill, recyclable people and city trips.' This complaint, from a gay man writing from Berkeley, California, appeared in *RFD*, a magazine devoted to celebrating rural gay life. The focus of this criticism was the increasingly visible "gay urbanism" of the 1970s" (234). Gay culture in the areas of the cities where gays, lesbians, and transgender folks were starting to congreate demanded an adherence to a certain lifestyle and a certain race, gender and orientation.

Many of these enclaves had been founded by countercultural and liberation-minded people in the early days of the gay rights movement. However, as these established queer enclaves came increasingly into view of the mainstream, millions of predominately middle-to-upper-class white gay men saw this as an opportunity to start new lives. They brought with them, however, reformist politics and a desire to ease into the mainstream, a view that was

directly at odds with the revolutionary liberation-era spirit and ideas that were held by the longtime residents of these communities. Rivers (2018) writes that another group of gay men began to move in the opposite direction, seeing the rural as an open land of possibilities, where they could be free from both the constraints of cisheteronormative society as well as the new assimilationist desires of the newcomers to the gay enclaves. These men would go on to form the Radical Faeries, a group of rural gay male radicals who decried assimilation into mainstream cisheteronormative society (34-37).

Metronormativity is, at its core, a function of the assimilationist white gay male culture that references the common narrative that for the LGBT community, the rural is a place of suffering and the urban a place of liberation. By this logic, one must move from the small town and the farm to the city and the high rise in order to participate in LGBT culture. The narrative has its roots in the assimilationist politics of the post-Stonewall generation, which sought to prove that the white homosexual male was just like his white heterosexual counterpart, and perfectly able to function within the conservative ideals of the neoliberal capitalist United States. This mindset would eventually grow to encompass other members of the community and develop into the mainstream depictions and stereotypes of gay culture that most adults in the US are familiar with, while often still excluding members of community based on race and class. As Scott Herring (2012) writes in his review of anti-urban publishing in the 1970's, "Out of the Closet, Into the Woods" about the magazine *RFD*:

> In the late 1940s and 1950s, pre-Stonewall white middle-class urban gay U.S. males appropriated this postal term [Rural Free Delivery] to disparage what Katz describes as the "R.F.D. queen—a homosexual who lives in the country or in a small town, and

> who has homosexual impulses and desires, but who does not understand the argot and ways, or know the habits and places of congregation of the homosexual fraternity in cities and metropolitan centers." In the 1970s, however, these so-called RFD queens reappropriated this regional slur to express dissatisfaction with the "argot and ways" of an emergent white gay male "ghetto" culture felt to be inherently normalizing rather than inherently oppositional. (261)

In this passage, we can see pushback towards people who rejected assimilation politics, clearly showing the divide in the 1960s and 70s. What began as a legitimizing identity transformed into a resistance identity, in which rural LGBT people reclaimed pride in their own rurality and began advocating for themselves around this community as it developed. Ultimately, this will develop into an organized opposition to assimilation and urban queer culture. This pposition to meteronormativity was the foundational idea for both the lesbian seperatism of second-wave feminism and the counter-subcultural politics of the emerging Radical Faerie movement. With these, the anti-urban queer movement was born, and eventually evolved into a more project-based identity and movement oriented around more idealistic and radical politics.

Radical Faeries and Landykes

Anti-urbanism is rooted in a liberatory promise of home and community. This promise appealed to those who were raised in rural spaces, as a way for them to have the best of both worlds. It presents an opportunity to reclaim the space that you call home, and all the good and the bad that it encompasses, and queer it for your own exploration. The

countersubcultural[6] radical rural queer movement has it dyed into the wool that that you can be a faggot, a dyke, a queer, and a freak, and still go hunting, still farm the fields, and still hold your place as an Appalachian and maintain your connection to the land. It allows for a different lifestyle and approach to queerness, not rooted in the assimilation and reform politics of the city, but rooted in neopagan ideas and politically radical theories of what it means to be a community. Appalachia and the South were centers for this movement. Daniel Rivers (2018) writes that Running Water, rural gay communal land in North Carolina, alongside Short Mountain in East Tennessee served as the hearts of rural gay life in the South, both located within Appalachia. The idea for what would eventually develop into the Radical Faeries was conceived at a conference in Running Water, and Short Mountain would become the first Radical Faerie sanctuary (236).

Meanwhile, lesbian separatists, influenced by back-to-the-land movements and second-wave feminism, were making their own stakes in rural radicalism. The cycle of rural to urban to rural was present among lesbian groups at the time as well. In *The Lesbian South*, queer feminist scholar Jamie Harker (2018) writes on how the cycle of moving from small Southern towns to New York and then back to the rural south was a common experience for many lesbians in the late 20th century (146).

Continuing in that same narrative, Harker (2018) writes that Southern lesbian feminists, both within the region as well as those who had left, were concerned with the South still. The writings of those who left built on the back of separatist landyke communes in the region, working to imagine a different South from which they had never had to flee,

[6] I use this term to denote that the anti-urban movement was itself a counter culture within a counterculture, acting against the subculture of assimilationist politics within LGBT communities.

while lesbian feminists in the region formed communes on rural land in which to attempt those imagined utopias (147). These two approaches continued to inform each other through the 1970s, with the communes informing the writings and the writings informing the communes, building into a broad collective vision for a different South.

In addition to this broad collective vision towards a queer utopian future, lesbian rural and urban spaces alike were often a great deal more heterogeneous in their contemporary existence than their gay male rural radical counterparts. The early Radical Faeries encompassed a predominantly white and exclusively male demographic, while lesbian landyke communes were often much more diverse in racial terms. Harker writes, "Perhaps because they lacked the financial clout of upper-crust gay men, lesbian communities have been more intersectional in their creation of queer space—their own spaces do not preempt or exclude other uses of space" (167). As time has progressed the previous boundaries have worn away in some spaces, but diversity along gender lines still remains a problem for the Radical Faerie community. John A. Stover III (2008) writes in his article "When Pan Met Wendy" that women Faeries were often contested in these gay male spaces, and their contributions to the community overlooked (32).

Landyke movements are of particular interest to me as I feel they most closely showcase the radical and liberatory promises of an anti-urban movement. Their natural heterogeneity lends itself imperfectly to the intersectional framework I apply, although they were often firmly women-only spaces and enforced this in a way that is best considered transphobic towards transgender women who may wish to participate, although that has lessened in recent years in my own experience. The changes in boundaries show the way in which the broad collective vision is evolving alongside radical politics, and actively utilizing

a more intersectional approach, as Harker described. Indeed, although there is drastic lack of scholarship and primary source academic studies available to draw upon, I can speak from personal experience to my understanding that the rural radicalism of the new generation of queers, the one that is being put into practice in the current day and age, is firmly intersectional, and centers the voices and experiences of queer and trans, Black and Indigenous people of color (QTBIPOC). Examples of this include the Idyll Dandy Arts (IDA) land project on the edges of Appalachian Tennessee, which follows in the tradition of lesbian seperatists by existing as a community set aside for only QTBIPOC, allowing for a space where creative ideas and experiences can be explored and refined uninterrupted by a white supremacist cisheteronormative society, before being brough back into the wider world to influence the politics and platforms of a new generation of queer radicals (the IDA land project can be found on Instagram @down.in.gay.holler). This project and the dozens like it catering to a variety of intersections with LGBT identity can be found across Appalachia and the South, and their existence represents a fulfillment of the liberatory promises of the radical rural movements of previous decades. IDA exists in a form of harmony and semi-inclusion with the Short Mountain Sanctuary, making up a larger collection of communes in Cannon County Tennessee.

Welcome Homo!

The Short Mountain Sanctuary is a Radical Faerie commune located on stolen Cahaya, Ša˙wano˙ki, and Tsalagi land, now known as Cannon County, Tennessee. The county itself, as well as several of the surrounding counties, are home to at least a dozen

small queer land projects and communes, including IDA described earlier in the chapter. This area, situated in the hollers of the Highland Rim, and just on the westernmost edge of Appalachian Tennessee, has slowly become a haven for rural queer radical projects, tucked back off of dirt roads in hollers, coves, and forests. The spaces being carved out in the mountains of Appalachia today are a direct reflection of the liberatory promises made by anti-urban movements. These promises line up with general Appalachian culture more than one would necessarily suspect on first glances alone. In "Queer Rurality and the Materiality of Time," Stina Soderling (2016) writes:

> As one regular visitor to Bucky's told me, "There's something queer going on in each of these hollows." And she does not just mean the hollows populated by out GLBTQ individuals, but the whole region. Rural Appalachia, a culturally and economically marginalized region of the United States, can in many ways be read as queer, outside of properly normative behavior. Activities outside of the realm of the proper are survival mechanisms. Sometimes you just butcher your own deer, sell your milk right from the farm. (339)

Appalachia also exists apart from the mainstream, with attempts to capture it from the outside almost always existing within some kind of vicarious thrill ride for those on the outside. In this way, it is unsurprising that Appalachia has offered a space for LGBT people to carve out a uniquely powerful and radical life for themselves, opening the door to the possibilities of a queer future for those LGBT Appalachians who find themselves seeking to change the region to suit them rather than changing themselves to fit the region.

Short Mountain Sanctuary functions as a part of the collection of communes that

make up what is known as the Gayborhood, encompassing places known by such names as Sex Change Ridge, Buckys, and Hickory Knoll, amongst others. These all circle the Radical Faerie sanctuary, which was founded in 1979 as one of the flagship sanctuaries for the movement. Over the years, neighbors began to move in, more land was purchased, and now nearly 1000 acres make up the network of communes, land projects, and private residences. What exists in that space now is a thriving community, that as Alex Halberstadt (2015) writes in his article for the *New York Times Magazine*, opens up space for residents to question themselves and seek new experiences and new ways of relating to their fellow LGBT community members. However, for residents of the Gayborhood, it is still a delicate tightrope to walk when they interact with those evangelical Christians neighbors that share the space with them. Everyone knows what the longhaired folks on the mountain are up to, however no one within the non-queer world publicly acknowledges these publicly understood facts, situations, and lifestyle (Halberstadt 2015). This dance around the public and the private, encompassing a space of functional invisibility while also reclaiming the space to create something new and queer, is a familiar one to the LGBT Appalachians who have long called the region home. This experience can inform the way those who have adopted the region based on anti-urban/anti-assimilationist politics approach the delicate situations they find themselves in. As Mary L. Gray (2009) writes on rural East Kentucky LGBT youth in *Out in the Country* "They also temporarily commandeer and recast rural environments where "everyone knows about them," but they are expected to remain functionally invisible. These occupations are dangerous, though perhaps not as much as the urban-generated depictions of rural places lead us to believe" (112). This means of reclaiming place, albeit in an impermanent fashion, provides a model for a radical queer

future that defies the assimilationist models of belonging that currently dominate much of the mainstream LGBT community. It provides a method for addressing the conflicts caused by the intersections of being Appalachian and LGBT, and developing a synthesis between the two. It is not hard to argue for the success of this project, as large as it has grown in the last four decades, and the case for its efficacy in providing tangible benefits for the physical, psychological and moral health of the residents is attested to by the large crowds who arrive for the annual gatherings and the steady stream of migrants to established intentional communities and new land projects alike.

Intentional communities centered around LGBT identity, rural identity, and Appalachian identity offer a chance to provide a queer future with endless possibilities, especially when they are centered around radical ideas of what it means to be all of those things. The ways in which people relate to the world are constantly shifting, but as a transgender and bisexual Appalachian woman I feel that land projects and intentional communities within the region offer the best chance for a radical reclamation of place. The thesis of a claim to an identity as LGBT, as queer and quare, meets with the antithesis of the dominant conservatism of Appalachian cultural and political organization, yet within a cruicible of new creative ideas, new room can be allowed for the possibility to create a new Appalachia that reflects the understanding of connection to place and to each other. Appalachians have long valued connection to land, from the original Tsalagi people who acted as caretakers of the land to the European settlers who forced them out and the Black people that were enslaved and held hostage on it, the physical place is the defining characteristic of a regionalized cultural identity. The premise and central conceit of Appalachian identity is that an identity rooted in the simple fact of our connection to the

mountains has blossomed into a rich and vibrant tapestry of subcultures, community ties, and networks of reliance and providence. All LGBT Appalachians possess a complicated relationship to this place as LGBT people, however intentional communities allow space and place to analyze those intersections and reclaim and rework the place some of us find ourselves still attached to, in spite of the hostile terrain, and make something uniquely queer and undeniably beautiful within it. Carter Sickels (2015), an openly gay transgender man with family roots in Appalachian Ohio, writes in “Bittersweet”:

> My experiences, so unlike those of my parents and grandparents, carried me away, and I left behind the identity they expected of me. I was the one who left, but now I want the family stories to know where I come from. I still write about this place of dreams and nightmares, my yearning mixed with fear. I look for a home in words and language. And, maybe that’s okay. Maybe one day I’ll go back to the homeplace as myself. Maybe home is fluid, just like identity, and sexuality and gender. It wasn’t until I transitioned that I could finally feel at home in my body. At home with my name, at home with myself. Transitioning is like stepping into another country and yet a country that I already know from some place inside me….That’s what all of this was - discovery and rediscovery - of myself, my family, my roots. Now I had my own name, my own stories. (78-79)

Sickels taps into this idea of rediscovery and the bittersweet longing for place that comes with being an LGBT Appalachian. Our pasts inform our presents, and create the circumstances in which it is imperative to reconcile and allow for open interaction with these identities that reflect a multiplicity. However, there exists have the ability to make choices with intention, to form community, and to manifest a radical and queer politics that

transforms not only ourselves but our spaces. Communities and individuals have the power to reclaim place and their place within it, and resolve the conflicts that keep longing for a better future. We can build that future, here and now, among the hills and hollers of this region. There is a brighter, queerer future available to us all when we put in the work to make it, to make the future our home.

Conclusion

The evolution of LGBT Appalachian identity represents not the creation of something new per se, rather it represents the reconciliation of two identities and the refutation of an ideal within cisheteronormative and queermetronormative culture that insists upon allegiance to one or the other. Through literature, music, and carving out physical community, the development of an LGBT Appalachian identity in the recent decades has created space to embrace both identities and identify openly and exist in community with others as not just LGBT and not just Appalachian, but as a queer Appalachian. This represents a shift towards reconciliation from previous work by LGBT Appalachians where the tensions between embracing both identities simultaneously have been highlighted.

Those who queered their Appalachian identity and stayed in the mountains and those brought their Appalachian identity into metronormative queer circles have historically been the exception and not the rule, and moreover often stood alone. In early writings and music from LGBT Appalachians, the themes of isolation and alienation stand out prominently, as in the work of Jeff Mann and the early interviews done by Kate Black and Marc A. Rhorer (2010). However, with the publication of more gay Appalachian literature that has explicitly embraced and expressed the tensions and complexities of being both LGBT and Appalachian as they interact with each other, there has been the beginnings of community dialogue which has paved the way for physical community development. The shift towards reconciliation and an understanding of the mutual influence in literature allows the expression of the private to the public, and writing aids in the development and exploration of the complicated

feelings, emotions, and ideas that surround existing in duality and multiplicity in ways that the dominant culture considers either deviant or impossible.

Music as well, due to its unique status within Appalachian communities and culture, has served to allow the explicit queering of Appalachian identity. This is reflected in activities in explicit and open ways such as playing the banjo while in drag, as well as in smaller ways, such as changing the pronouns in a traditional ballad to reflect same sex attraction, which may be noticed by the audience but received as less shocking than full drag. The raw emotional expression that is lauded in much of Appalachian music is also met with the role of music in uniting communities within the region. The making of music that is explicitly Appalachian and queer, as well as subtly Appalachian and queer *at the same time*, exists as a form of hometactics and placemaking. The reclaimation of these musical traditions and the development of queer traditions within the dominant musical narrative show a way to reconcile the multiplicity of selves and create space for new traditions and methods of making community to emerge.

The construction and establishment of physical communal spaces, notably in communes such as the Short Mountain Sanctuary and land projects such as Idyll Dandy Arts, has served to further explore the ideas and possibilities of what a queer Appalachia can look like and be. Utopian daydreams and philosophies are given a chance to be put into practice and the development of queer worlds is given life through this literal place-making in action. The establishment of these communities serves to strengthen the bonds of those living in the region as well as serving as a testing ground and demonstration for the ideas and emotions developed in literature and music. LGBT Appalachian communes represent the fulfillment of

the promises of the anti-urban movement and provide what is ultimately an inclusive and safe space for the expression of multiplicity.

Looking ahead, the research I have conducted in this thesis and the ideas I have put forward are merely the starting point for the exploration of the margins of both rural queer studies and Appalachian studies, as well as the intersections of those fields with a multitude of others such as Black queer studies alongside quare theory. LGBT Appalachian experience is not merely the duality of those two identities, but a multiplicity of selves that exist concurrently and constantly inform each other just as much as they stand in tension with each other. The LGBT Appalachian existence is one of multiple threads in a rich tapestry, and to pull on one thread is the unraveling and loosening of five more in the same motion. There is much to research and explore, and my research is only a beginning. My hope is that by acknowledging the emergence of organized community and culture that explicitly embraces the queering of Appalachian identity and the Appalachian-ing of LGBT identity, our particular margins can be more deeply explored and that the knowledge gleaned from the exploration will allow for more voices, leading ultimately to the dismantling of the oppressive institutions that have held this queer reconciliation back for this long. I hope for a brighter future for us all in the coming days.

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Vita

Jade Louise Alexander was born in Charlotte, North Carolina to Timothy and Jill Alexander. She graduated from Northwest School of the Arts in Charlotte in June 2014. The following autumn she was accepted to the University of North Carolina Asheville to pursue a major in Mass Communication with a minor in Sociology, and was awarded her Bachelor of Arts degree in June 2018. After a year spent working various jobs in Newbury, Massachusetts, she applied for and was accepted to the graduate school at Appalachian State University and began to study for a Master of Arts degree in Appalachian Studies. She is currently expecting to be awarded her M.A. in May 2021.

Ms. Alexander currently resides in Foscoe, North Carolina with Elias Manus, her partner of two years and their two cats, Ezra and Lou.