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RURAL FEMINIST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN APPALACHIA:  
THE HIGH ROCKS MODEL

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A Thesis

by

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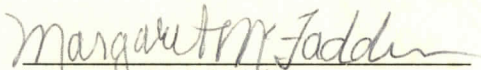
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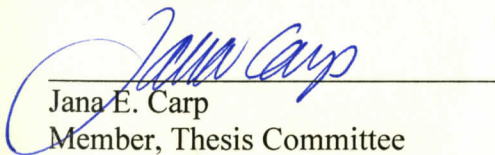
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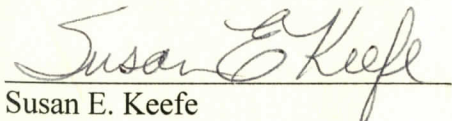
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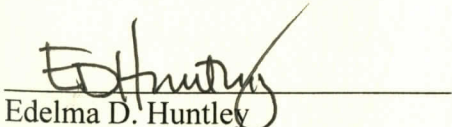
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## ABSTRACT

### RURAL FEMINIST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN APPALACHIA: THE HIGH ROCKS MODEL

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The High Rocks Educational Corporation, more commonly known as High Rocks for Girls, is a model for feminist action and community development in rural areas of the Appalachian region. Operating from their location in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, High Rocks provides intensive summer camps, academic enrichment and tutoring, service-learning projects, weekly mentoring calls, educational and college trips, and post-graduate advising. All High Rocks programs are free of charge for young women in Pocahontas, Nicholas, and Greenbrier Counties. Beyond its rural locale, High Rocks has an extended network of alumni, volunteers, partners, and funders that add to the diversity, sustainability, and viability of the organization. The balance between local and translocal influences serves to develop the capacity for social change while maintaining a dedication to helping local girls. A unique variety of feminism and community development allows High Rocks to operate as a highly progressive and sometimes radical organization and also build a trusting relationship with a characteristically conservative and traditional geographic community.

High Rocks connects theory with practice but also delineates where theory and practice diverge. As is the case with many grassroots organizations, theoretical ideals are part of the backbone of High Rocks, but putting them into practice can be a winding road. The leadership of High Rocks has remained focused throughout the years by constantly evaluating their organization through feedback from girls, interns, and volunteers. Their holistic approach to serving girls continues to form the role and breadth of the organization.

This thesis discusses how High Rocks uses a fundamentally feminist philosophy in their operations and how, as a result of this basic philosophy, they build assets for their local community. The ways in which High Rocks functions as a model for feminist community development in Appalachia are also examined. The struggles and growing process of a grassroots organization for women over the past thirteen years reveal lessons for communities and organizations throughout the region.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to all the people at High Rocks who helped me with this project, especially those who gave interviews. Special thanks to Elizabeth Engelhardt for introducing me to High Rocks. Special thanks to Sarah Riley for helping me organize the research I conducted at High Rocks and for encouraging me in this project. Special thanks to Chris Campbell for graciously opening her home to me while I visited High Rocks to conduct interviews, and also for introducing me to a fabulous drink called the hot toddy.

Thanks to my thesis committee members, Professors Beaver, Carp, Keefe, and McFadden for teaching me in preparation for this project and for their feedback and support for my research. Thanks also to Professor David Sutton for feedback on an early draft of this work. Thanks to the Center for Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University and Edward J. Cabell and the Cabell scholarship that helped me cover costs for travel and expenses during my research.

Thanks to my parents for always encouraging me and for biting their tongues when this thesis took longer than expected. Thanks to my sister for calling me on my procrastination. Thanks to Matt Fedorko for donating a new laptop after the old one bit the dust in the middle of this project and also for being my best friend.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Paisley the cat. The circumstances of his tragic passing corroborate the strength of community and diverse network discussed in this research.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

There is something wonderful about a mountain hollow in West Virginia where a bunch of women (and a few worthy men) have set up shop to change the world. Driving down the road from Hillsboro to Mill Point, you notice the birthplace of Pearl S. Buck on the left; the log cabin with an attached white farmhouse stands in an idyllic field against a mountain backdrop. "What a lovely place," you might think. Then you turn up the road, which quickly turns to gravel, and you notice small hunting cabins. You can see a confederate flag and the Nazi swastika hung up inside while blonde-headed toddlers play in the front yard. You take a left because if you took a right you would end up at the headquarters of the National Alliance, an established white supremacist organization. Instead, you climb up past a horse corral with a colorful mural of horses and West Virginia wildflowers declaring "Don't fence me in." You are at the High Rocks lodge, and there are probably some volunteers and junior counselors weed whacking outside. Inside, there are people making lunch, ordering supplies in the office, and working on a grant. It's encouraging to think about a place in Appalachia that is neither a romantic stereotype nor a savage one. High Rocks is an organization dealing with the realities of its location with a goal to change the world.

### WOMEN OF THE HIGH ROCKS, WOMEN OF THE WORLD

The High Rocks Educational Corporation is a four-year, tuition-free resiliency and leadership program for high school girls in Greenbrier, Pocahontas, and Nicholas counties in

West Virginia. When I worked there during the summer of 2003 I knew it as just “High Rocks,” and I certainly didn’t think of it as a corporation. Later, as a graduate student interested in women’s studies and Appalachian studies, I decided to research High Rocks as a thesis topic. After being exposed to the theoretical language of community development through graduate school courses, I began to realize how those theories applied to High Rocks’ function as an organization, and I’ve found that High Rocks is indeed a community development corporation. In this thesis I explore the complexity of feminism and the breadth of community development at High Rocks and how these apply in the Appalachian context. I argue that everything High Rocks does is built on a feminist goal: empowering young women. I call this “rural Appalachian feminist capital” to signify the context and usefulness of women’s empowerment. In Chapter 5 I detail High Rocks’s varied efforts to better their community of interest and place-based community. High Rocks builds community capital unique to its location, and importantly, High Rocks is also significant to other communities. All of these elements developed gradually at High Rocks, and many of the issues and struggles the organization goes through form a model for other individuals and organizations involved in social change in Appalachia. High Rocks is a model of feminist action that translates into community development for Appalachian communities.

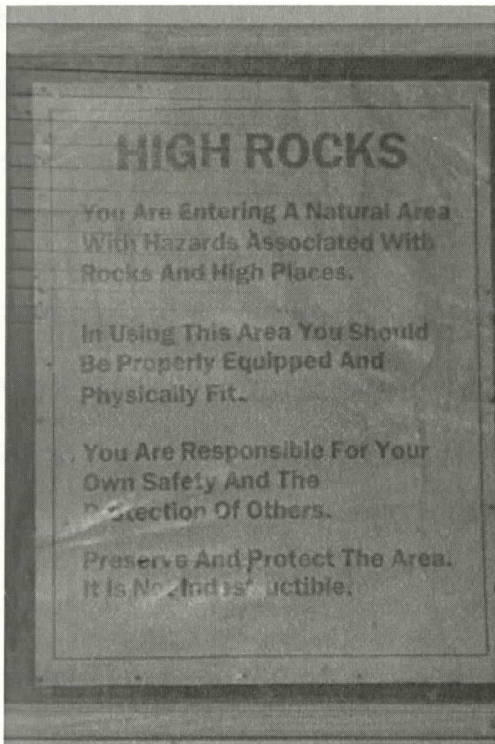
Susan Burt, the founder of High Rocks, got the idea for the organization as a response to a need she saw in her community:

During her 18 years of public school teaching as a librarian and gifted/talented coordinator, Susan Burt observed a trend emerging among Middle School girls in her community. Girls beginning Middle School with positive energy and sunny dispositions, excited about their future, soon began to downslide,

failing to live up to their early potential. As a result, doors to their futures began closing and their choices became few. (“Our History”)

Burt, with the help of others, decided the best way to meet this need was to start a “wilderness summer camp with the goal of preparing girls academically and emotionally for the challenges of high school” (“High Rocks for Girls”). Burt quit her job at the public school in 1996 to start High Rocks, and the first camp was rainy, miserable, and quite successful. Perhaps they didn’t know it then, but this first camp solidified the High Rocks model of determination in community development.

High Rocks was named for an outcropping of rocks high on a mountain that can be seen from the field on the High Rocks land. The outcropping is at the end of a trail called



“High Rocks,” and every year the entire camp hikes from the High Rocks field to the outcropping. This rock formation has become a symbol of goals and achievement for the High Rocks. A sign from the trail is displayed at the High Rocks lodge.<sup>1</sup>

Almost thirteen years later, the camp continues in the same vein, and High Rocks now offers two camps every summer—one for first year girls called New Beginnings and one for continuing participants called Camp Steele. High Rocks also

<sup>1</sup> The sign reads: You are entering a natural area with hazards associated with rocks and high places. In using this area you should be properly equipped and physically fit. You are responsible for your own safety and the protection of others. Preserve and protect the area. It is not indestructible.

provides year round programs like girls' night, a weekly night spent at the High Rocks lodge for tutoring, a family-style dinner, and organizing of future activities. Other programs include college tours, community service projects, and an after school program for younger children. Staff and girls are always thinking of new activities, and the organization evolves with the coming and going of people involved at High Rocks. High Rocks has over seventy girls actively participating in the program and over 100 women active in their alumnae network ("Frequently Asked Questions"). Girls from the first camp are still involved in the local community through High Rocks as they pursue careers and lives elsewhere. This is an example of the translocal nature of High Rocks that will be discussed in Chapter 6.

It is frustrating as a writer to attempt to convey the profundity of a place like High Rocks, but hopefully this brief overview will suffice as an introduction. Then, by examining the system of feminism, community development, and Appalachia at High Rocks, more details about the nature of the organization will be revealed.

Although I am a supporter of High Rocks, I tried not to create a fluff piece about a place where I once worked. Looking back on my employment history, there are plenty of jobs I've held that I could view from an academic perspective now. For example, I worked for the Feminist Majority Foundation registering voters in West Virginia during the 2004 presidential campaign. Similar to the High Rocks program, I did a lot of work in the community, and I could argue that I was building social, cultural, human, and political capital. However, that kind of community organizing is not invested in the *local* community. The national organization wasn't concerned with the outcome of local politics, just the national election, and is therefore not an example of sustainable asset building. In their Asset

Building and Community Development, Gary Green and Anna Haines assess national advocacy organizations in similar fashion”

...local chapters of national organizations may not always have place as their chief concern; the larger organization and its interests may matter more. We are interested in CBOs [community based organizations] that are rooted in a place, are supported by residents, and have as their missions a focus on the community as a geographic entity. (186-187)

In this thesis I will explain how High Rocks fits this latter type of community-based organization rooted in its place. One reason High Rocks is a model worth highlighting is because it does develop local assets.

Another reason I found High Rocks to be a worthy thesis topic is the juxtaposition of liberal and conservative ideas that live together in the organization. In order to understand Appalachian communities, it is necessary to contemplate the existence of both traditions in the region. I found this particularly relevant when analyzing feminism at High Rocks. The fact that High Rocks exists in such a rural part of West Virginia is interesting to me as someone who grew up in an urban center of the state. I can't remember ever seeing examples of feminist action until I went to college, and then I found High Rocks, a group of women running a non-profit empowerment program for teenage girls in rural Pocahontas County. Yet many people involved in High Rocks are not entirely comfortable with the label feminist. I hesitated to even use the term in the title of this thesis. I discuss this complexity at length in Chapter 4.

As a student of Appalachian studies, I find that High Rocks stands out as an organization with a determined vision for the future. My goal in researching High Rocks was

to find the ways in which the organization is a leader in terms of social change organizations in Appalachia.

## TERMINOLOGY

I use the term “feminist” and “feminism” throughout this thesis. These are terms that have myriad interpretations and misinterpretations. I define feminism as empowerment for women. I use this broad definition because there are many specific feminist theories I agree with and realize are useful in specific scenarios, and I also recognize that feminism defined broadly becomes useful not only for understanding women’s issues, but also gender in general as well as minority and community issues. At its best, feminism is applicable to society as a whole. In subsequent chapters of this thesis I explain specific types of feminism in more detail, but “empowerment for women” serves as a general and basic definition.

The controversial nature of the word “feminism” has dogged scholars and activists alike for decades. The term is at once useful and useless because its meaning is profound yet often misunderstood. Karen Offen’s 1988 article proposes a historical approach to defining feminism. Offen finds that so many permutations of feminism exist because it is “a shorthand too convenient to give up” and without “satisfactory substitute” (134). Offen concludes that the only way to overcome the compartmentalization of feminism is to relearn the history of the word. This history reveals a much broader understanding of feminism including both “individualist” and “relational” feminism. In other words, The Western feminist tradition encompasses both of the often-opposing ideas that women should be respected as individuals regardless of their gender and that the distinct roles women and men hold in society should be held in equal regard. Certainly, if everyone were educated about the history of feminism,

the word would not be nearly as contentious. Unfortunately, the word “feminist” is still off-putting to many people, even to proponents of its cause.

Claire Moses argues for a similar expansion of what is included in “feminism.” In her 2002 speech, “What’s in a Name? On Writing the History of Feminism” Moses argues that feminism is most successful as a movement when a broad range of voices is included. This seems logical, but it has been a stumbling block for feminism in the U.S. in recent decades. Moses also points out that it would be ridiculous to count all women’s groups as feminists. She cites the Ku Klux Klanswomen as an obvious example (2). The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union could be considered feminist but historically made questionable decisions based on race and class and currently has an anti-homosexuality mission. Moses also asks, “[...] if we label some activities “feminist” and not others, are we not constructing—rather than identifying—‘feminism’?” (2). After consideration and hesitation, I decided to use the term “feminist” and “feminism” to describe High Rocks because as Karen Offen states, there is no “satisfactory substitute” (134). Ultimately High Rocks is an asset to the goals of the feminist movement, and therefore should be acknowledged as such at least within the confines of academic language. This is discussed at length in Chapter 4.

In my research, I also came across some new words that I use throughout this thesis. It will be useful to define them now. First, “pledgetaker” is the word I use to describe anyone who has been involved with High Rocks including girls, permanent staff, part time staff, volunteers, and alumni—literally anyone who has taken the High Rocks pledge (see Appendix A). This is a term I learned during my interviews. High Rocks staff created it to refer to the network of people involved in High Rocks over the years. Second, I use the term “translocal” to describe people, ideas, or actions that move from one location to another. I

use it specifically to describe the exchange of ideas across space acknowledging that wherever ideas end up, they are localized.

## ORGANIZATION

The first three chapters of this thesis introduce the context and methods I used to conduct the research. Chapter 2 provides a contextual analysis of this project through a review of the literature relevant to the three themes I address in this thesis: feminism, community development, and Appalachia. I also provide some historical context for the area of Appalachia in which High Rocks is located and the status of women and community in that area. Chapter 3 is a detailed description of the data-gathering process for this project including interviews and participant observation.

The next three chapters discuss and analyze the results of my research. Chapter 4 is an examination of the status of feminism at High Rocks. Chapter 5 looks at community development work at High Rocks and the system of eight types of capital. I also discuss the way translocal community works to increase the capacity of the High Rocks community locally and beyond High Rocks. Chapter 6 places High Rocks in the context of Appalachia to explore how feminist community development and the High Rocks model can benefit the Appalachian region.

This thesis is about a unique group of individuals and a unique organization. Their perspectives provide several applicable lessons and bits of wisdom for those interested in the future of feminism and Appalachian communities. High Rocks is a model of feminist action that translates into positive development for Appalachian communities. Ultimately, High Rocks is a place best understood through experience. Through this thesis I hope to convey at



least partially the significance of this organization. I encourage anyone interested in this research to get involved with High Rocks.

CHAPTER 2. HIGH ROCKS IN CONTEXT:  
FEMINISM, COMMUNITY, AND APPALACHIA

To understand the significance of High Rocks in the context of this thesis, it is necessary to examine the literature of feminism and women's studies and community development in the context of Appalachian studies. What makes an organization feminist? Is there a right or wrong way to do community development? Are there specific issues for organizations in Appalachia? Much has been written about the successes and failures of feminism, community development, and organizations in Appalachia. All three of these subjects are present at High Rocks, and the combination makes High Rocks particularly relevant to those searching for new ideas in feminism, community development, and Appalachia.

Elizabeth Engelhard asks what women's studies can add to Appalachian studies and what Appalachian studies can add to women's studies in her essay, "Creating Appalachian Women's Studies: Dancing Away from Granny and Elly May." She explains that while both fields examine similar themes of justice, equality, diversity, and experience, the two disciplines often run parallel instead of intersecting in opportunistic discourse. Engelhardt posits,

Not only would feminism reveal the complicated power dynamics between stereotyper and stereotyped, it might provide Appalachian studies a way to see and analyze the connections between individuals and institutions—in other words, between the personal and the political. (9)

High Rocks is significant in this respect because it provides a model of women and Appalachian people that defies stereotypes and shows how positive change is happening at an individual and organizational level. Moreover, this is a model of how feminism can be an important community asset in the Appalachian region. Thus, a more accurate portrayal of the intersection of Appalachia, feminism, and community emerges. Engelhardt goes on to say, "Appalachia has long been a place in which the agency of socially and structurally disempowered peoples has been recognized" and "Appalachian studies has a well-articulated, broad definition of activism (which often turns out to be a location for that agency for otherwise marginalized people)[15]." In light of this connection, Appalachian studies reveals that High Rocks is not simply an organization that benefits individual young women, but that it is also an important center for community development in a rural Appalachian community. In the following sections of this chapter, I explore the literature that places High Rocks in the context of ongoing feminist and community development work in Appalachia as well as the highlights and challenges specific to this study.

#### WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND FEMINIST ORGANIZATION IN APPALACHIA

Historical models and some current resources for women's leadership and feminist community exist in the High Rocks counties specifically and Appalachia generally. Still, the status of women in West Virginia evidently needs to be improved. Young women in Appalachia grow up in a context of promise and empty promises. The American Dream, the ideals of democracy, and the rights to equality and justice are juxtaposed with the realities of declining community, quiescence, and inequality. Details of the status of feminism and

women's leadership in the three High Rocks counties, West Virginia, and Appalachia place the High Rocks mission in context.

Historically, feminist action in the United States can usually be categorized into one of three "waves" of feminist movement. "First wave" feminism refers roughly to the time following the Civil War to around 1920 when U.S. women won the right to vote. The first wave is most commonly linked to the suffrage movement but also encompassed advocacy of marriage and property rights for women as well as a rise in women's social and political organizations. "Second wave" feminism, also known as the Women's Liberation Movement, refers to the time period between the early 1960s and late 1970s. Like first wave feminism, many second wave feminists advocated political and legal rights for women. However, the second wave is perhaps most remembered for its focus on changing women's and men's personal lives and relationships at a consciousness level. "Third wave" feminism is perhaps the most difficult to pinpoint, and it could be argued to be an extension of second wave feminism. Generally, the third wave refers to feminism after 1990 and encompasses the generations that came after the progress made by second wave feminism. The third wave deals with issues specific to younger generations and issues that were not adequately covered by the second wave such as sexual harassment, technology, and balancing careers and family. (Baumgardner and Richards 69-80). All three waves of feminism can be found in Appalachian history.

Women in the three High Rocks counties, as well as in West Virginia in general, have a history of participation that is typical of women in U.S. history. Upper and middle class women excelled in leadership. For example, Lenna Lowe Yost became the WV state Woman's Christian Temperance Society president, leader of the state's suffrage movement,

and in 1920 the first woman to preside over a Republican state party election (“Lenna Yost”). Historical evidence of leadership and opportunities exists specifically in Pocahontas and Greenbrier counties. Carnegie Hall stands as the most noted landmark in Lewisburg, the county seat of Greenbrier County. Andrew Carnegie gave the money to build this structure in 1902 for the Lewisburg Female Institute that would later become Greenbrier College for Women and is now the Greenbrier Community College. Greenbrier County is also home to several women’s organizations, some dating from the early twentieth century such as The Woman’s Club of Alderson (Greenbrier County Heritage Society 211, 230). Similar clubs exist in Pocahontas County such as the Marlinton Business and Professional Women’s Club, founded in 1940, and the Marlinton Women’s Club, founded in 1917 (Pocahontas County Historical Society 145). Although I didn’t find specific evidence, women’s organizations were likely founded in Nicholas County as well. Indeed, women’s leadership was recognized in Nicholas County at least as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the unincorporated towns Belva and Lockwood were named for first wave feminist and presidential candidate Belva Lockwood.

Despite this history of women’s leadership in the public sphere, West Virginia as a state still lags behind in several ways. In the political realm, the U.S. ranks low in proportion of women elected officials in comparison with the rest of the world, outranked by The U.K., Spain, Germany, Portugal, all the Scandinavian countries, China, Australia, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, Argentina, Mexico, Canada, and several other countries (Seager 94). On top of that, West Virginia ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the U.S. for women in state legislatures (“Officeholders”). Additionally, only two women have held a U.S. seat in Congress from West Virginia. Maude Elizabeth Kee filled the vacancy left by her husband in 1951 and

Shelley Moore Capito was elected in 2001 ("Facts, State by State"). In addition to political indicators on the status of women in West Virginia, "26% of children in Pocahontas County live in poverty" and women in West Virginia rank last in women's employment and earnings, economic autonomy, and earning a four year degree (Shaw 199-200). The High Rocks organization believes the best way to confront these situations is by offering community to women in pursuit of education, leadership, and self-confidence. By seeking empowerment for women, High Rocks joins the collection of varied feminist action in Appalachia.

I think it is important to acknowledge feminist action in the Appalachian region in general. Feminism in Appalachia is not a distinct brand of feminism because feminist efforts in the region are sporadic and lack cohesion. Still, feminism in Appalachia exists and is often specific to the culture. Akin to Gloria Anzaldua's "borderlands" in which a person exists in a fluid state between two communities, Appalachian feminism has to walk the line between mainstream and regional ideals.

Many scholars have documented feminist action in Appalachia. Examples include the social dynamics of female factory workers in Mary K. Anglin's Women, Power and Dissent in the Hills of Carolina and early women economic leaders in Phylis Alivic's Weavers of the Southern Highlands. Jewish women in central Appalachian coal mining towns are another example of women participating in the community as businesspeople, breadwinners, and community organizers (Weiner). In addition, much has been written on individual women in Appalachia like Mother Jones, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Memphis Tennessee Garrison. Chris Weiss, author of "Appalachian Women Fight Back," discusses groups formed to make headway for women in historically male industrial and manual labor fields. These include

“the Coal Employment Project (CEP), which targeted coal mines, the Southeast Women’s Employment Coalition (SWEC), which focused on highway jobs in the region, and Women and Employment (W&E), which took on the building trades in West Virginia” (152). These varied efforts speak to the ongoing presence of women’s leadership and feminism in Appalachia. Weiss explains, “I believe women in the Appalachian mountains caught the rebelliousness [that is feminism] and saw it as an opportunity to come together to advocate for jobs and opportunities we never had” (152).

As Weiss alludes, women’s leadership in Appalachia did not occur randomly, but rather congruently with larger national and international women’s movements. Similar to the employment projects that thrived during the late 1970s and early 1980s, second wave feminism also came to Appalachia in the form of the Council of Appalachian Women (CAW) and the Magazine of Appalachian Women (MAW). Begun in 1976 and 1977 respectively, CAW and MAW later merged under CAW leadership. The purpose of CAW was “to inspire women and girls in Appalachia to develop and use their mental, physical, and spiritual resources” (Cheek 1). This is strikingly similar to the High Rocks goal stated simply in their motto, “educate, empower, inspire.” Perhaps it is unfortunate that a group with similar goals to second wave feminism in Appalachia is still necessary over twenty years later. Although CAW and MAW were able to create a network of women across Appalachia, the organization ultimately ran out of steam after only five years. Still, feminism never died in the region. Women in Appalachia continue to be leaders for positive change in the twenty-first century. Examples include community organizer Helen Lewis, mountaintop removal activist Judy Bonds, and the women of the Appalachian Women’s Alliance, to name just a few.

The long and substantial history of women leaders and feminism in Appalachia provides a cultural backdrop for understanding feminism at High Rocks. It also reveals some of the disconnection in the Appalachian feminist movement or lack thereof. Thus, any success in terms of creating a sustainable feminist community at High Rocks is important to this Appalachian history.

### SUCCESSFUL FEMINIST ORGANIZING IN THE HIGH ROCKS CONTEXT

On the surface, it seems easy to label High Rocks a feminist organization. Its fundamental mission is to empower young women. However, the term “feminist” is controversial at High Rocks. I will fully explore the controversial nature of this term as it is played out at High Rocks in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, it is important to review feminist literature in order to understand the role of feminism at High Rocks.

Particularly for young women in Appalachia, High Rocks provides an important stepping-stone toward fulfilling feminist goals. In Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards explain the environment where feminism grows in young women today. They use “fluoride in the water” as a metaphor to show how young girls grow up in a culture of feminist victories. Now that feminism is “in the water,” it may be harder for young women in particular to place their personal struggles into a larger context. If girls can do anything boys can do, then failure is a reflection on the person rather than the system. Baumgardner and Richards qualify this by acknowledging that young women also need to be taught feminism and need activist tools. For many girls in rural West Virginia, High Rocks may be the only place where they can be empowered and learn how to use their empowerment. Jaime Madden, in her master’s thesis on High Rocks titled



“Semipublic Communities: Group Spaces Conducive to Efforts to Constructively Engage Embodiment and Particularity,” explains High Rocks as a safe space for girls to become individuals among a group. Madden says, “The individual uniqueness of each girl is affirmed, and they are encouraged to make their differences visible in ways that make others also want to make their own differences visible” (52). She explains, “They must trust in their ability to lead others, and also, they must trust others to lead them” (56). Madden shows that the High Rocks environment encourages individual growth while also participating in sisterhood.

The idea of having a separate space for women to discover their potential is an old one. Virginia Woolf in Three Guineas argues for a “Society of Outsiders” where women, and some men, would avoid the pitfalls of mainstream society that leads to waging war and oppression. Woolf claims that instead of striving to join “the procession” of men, women should create new ways of learning and working. Woolf’s ideas may seem extreme and are perhaps purposely exaggerated, but having the option of a free space is essential for young women learning about opportunities and complexities, particularly in terms of feminism. High Rocks can be seen as a space where young women can explore the possibilities of both mainstream and other avenues. Conventional education is certainly emphasized at High Rocks, but there is also a sense that High Rocks is uniquely for Appalachian girls and that that experience is paramount.

Kendra Vincent, in her master’s thesis titled “For the Benefit of Girls: Evaluating a Girls’ Program in Appalachia,” explains how High Rocks has been successful because they promote girls’ agency within the organization. Vincent talks about the “re-surge of girls’ movement in the 1990s” where “most programs were run in accordance to what adults

thought girls needed” (75). Vincent found, and my research corroborates, that what makes High Rocks different is that they are highly receptive to girls’ wants and needs and, moreover, proactive in asking them and getting them to participate in the process. This results in the feminist goal of girls’ empowerment and is what Richard Couto in Making Democracy Work Better defines as “sweat equity” where “people who take on this role worry about the organization and its work and invest a position of themselves as collateral for the community-base mediating structure” (241). The investment of members’ selves into an organization provides needed labor, ideas, and connections to more potential members. Moreover, invested members represent the organization to the community at large and can generate interest and support. This last part may be particularly relevant to rural Appalachian communities where word of mouth can have significant influence. Ultimately, in order for an organization to survive, younger members will have to take over for the older people that ran the organization. Thus, the more invested members are in an organization, the better likelihood the organization will continue. This tenet of organizational development is essential in the handing down and reinvention of feminism to the younger generation.

It is important to reiterate that any feminism at High Rocks is necessarily responsive to young women in particular. This means that while older women who may associate more with second wave feminism certainly have a role in High Rocks, some ideas from second wave feminism won’t apply to younger women at High Rocks. For example, Helen Lewis’s examination of the community development efforts in Ivanhoe, VA in It Comes From the People contains many parallels to what is going on at High Rocks. Lewis’s discussion of women’s roles in organizing is highly relevant here. Lewis claims, “Community development has become a social movement largely led by women,” and,

Women's experience in the domestic economy has given them a different perspective on community development. Women's work, in contrast to mainstream and men's jobs, is more life-sustaining, life-producing, family- and community-based. (130)

Lewis, among others, contends that women in particular are vital components of community organizing because of their experience and propensity for cooperation and personal relationships (130-131). This somewhat essentialist take on women's contribution to community organizing is based on an older generation where the dichotomy between men's and women's work was more distinct. This is not to say High Rocks girls' lives are gender blind, but fundamental differences exist between Lewis's analysis of why women are good organizers and the experience of the girls and many staff at High Rocks. As Baumgardner and Richards would point out, High Rocks girls have grown up with feminism in the water. This means that some of the traditionally female values Lewis describes will be weaker or prioritized differently for younger women. Consequently, developing a sense of community in the girls corresponds with empowerment initiatives.

#### STATUS OF COMMUNITY IN APPALACHIA

The word "community" is a term often used generically to refer to any group of people. There are groups as large as "the gay community" or "the online community." There are groups as small as "the Junaluska community" in Boone, NC, a historically African American neighborhood. Everyone knows what a community is, but the significance of it is harder to determine. Rhoda H. Halperin, in her book Practicing Community: Class, Culture, and Power in an Urban Neighborhood, says:

Community is a common, ordinary word. We think we know what it is. We take it for granted. We assume its presence or we lament its absence. We know why we need it; yet we question it at the same time—where is it, what is it? (xii).

Green and Haines use the term more narrowly to refer to place-based communities, like neighborhood associations, as opposed to communities of interest, like national women's rights groups (2). As an organization, High Rocks definitely fits the profile of a place-based community development organization. However, the lines of "place" become blurry when the High Rocks community is examined. In addition to serving the immediate local community, they also serve a three county area, a statewide West Virginia community, an Appalachian community, and ultimately the national and global community. Therefore, while it is important to note High Rocks' status as a place-based community development organization, their work extends to places outside the local region in ways that ultimately benefit society in general and feed back into High Rocks' local work.

Community becomes a complicated term when applied to Appalachia. Depending on the definition of the region, places as far apart as New York and Mississippi can be lumped together as part of the same regional community. Even among the central region more commonly thought of as Appalachia (West Virginia, southwestern Virginia, east Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northern Georgia), most people think of themselves as "West Virginian" or "east Tennessean" before they think of themselves as Appalachian. Furthermore, scholars such as Henry D. Shapiro in his book *Appalachia on our Minds*, claim the sense of regional connection is an aberration, not grounded in reality. Still, "community" continues to be an important aspect of Appalachia. Whether the Appalachian region is fundamentally different from mainstream America or it just gets treated that way, and even if

the concept of a cohesive Appalachian community is illusive, many scholars and community workers have noted specific aspects important to understanding Appalachian communities (Beaver; Jones).<sup>2</sup>

Much scholarly attention is focused on the economic status of Appalachian communities. Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee provide historical analysis of poverty and other social problems in The Road to Poverty. Billings and Blee also point out that other factors such as corrupt local politics and demographics can play key roles in determining economic status. Likewise, Helen Lewis, an expert on communities in Appalachia who has spent decades on various community development projects in the region, wrote about the many unique characteristics of local community development (Hinsdale, Lewis, and Waller). From her work with the community development effort in Ivanhoe, Virginia, Lewis explains how cultural sensitivity and creative solutions originating in the local community are vital parts of successful regional community development. Lewis notes that all factors are important in community decision making, not just economic need. Even if the main goal is economic improvement, as in the Ivanhoe community, efforts to increase community pride, education, bonding, and participation are essential in developing a healthy community. Lewis delineates this process further in her article "Rebuilding Communities: A 12-Step Recovery Program." Of the twelve steps to development, only one is specific to economic needs. The rest focus on strengthening a sense of community and participation within the community. Although the benefits of strengthening local economic assets are certainly great, it is the local

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper I am focusing on rural Appalachian communities because this is the context for High Rocks. Urban Appalachian communities may have similarities to this study, but significant differences exist.

community that must be sustained as business fluctuates—a lesson Appalachian communities have dealt with time and time again.

Two of the traditionally strongest community assets in Appalachia depend on each other and are in now jeopardy as a result of the decline and restructure of communities. First, social capital (i.e., trust and reciprocity among people) is what many people in rural Appalachia will cite first as the best asset in their community. For example, when I interviewed an Ashe County, North Carolina woman in 2007 about her community, she told me about being involved in a serious car accident and the outpouring of help she received from her neighbors while she recovered. The system of trust and reciprocity among members of a community is particularly important to rural Appalachians where formal services may be too far from home or not available at all.

The second type of asset, physical capital (i.e., buildings or public space), can help define the boundaries of common community needs and goals and generally provide a place for interaction. Social capital is often developed and reinforced in common places such as schools and churches. School consolidation and declining church membership can disrupt the crossroads of physical and social capital development in rural communities. In Sarah Suzanne Savell's master's thesis, "Building Community From Within: The Story of the Riverview Community Center," she describes the process of school consolidation and then rebuilding community by turning the old school building into a community center. This type of grassroots organizing can reverse declining assets in communities and reassert the strength of social and physical capital.

Community participation is on the decline in general throughout the United States. After examining several plausible reasons for the decline in social capital in the U.S., Robert

Putnam argues in Bowling Alone that television and generational societal change are the most likely culprits. We can assume that young people will not reap the benefits of social capital in their communities as long as television remains a popular pastime or there is some cultural shift toward community participation. In terms of young people in Pocahontas County, television might be even more apt to break down social capital than for young people in more urban areas. Pocahontas County, spanning 941 square miles, has one consolidated high school. For students living at a distance from the school, participation in extra-curricular activities and organizations is limited by transportation, particularly if parents work in another part of the county. It is more common for students to ride the bus home where the TV awaits than participate in after-school activities.

After-school programs are one way to build community among young people. They can also strengthen community bonds between generations and among parents and adult volunteers and staff. Maintaining a physical space for community work, particularly accessible space like the Riverview Community Center described in Savell's thesis, promotes the development of social capital and increases community participation. Some type of common public space where people can and want to gather is essential to rural Appalachian communities and American society in general where the bonds of community are on the decline.

## HIGH ROCKS COMMUNITIES

The three counties served by High Rocks—Pocahontas, Nicholas, and Greenbrier—experienced distinct histories characteristic of Appalachia. Indeed, they form a sort of triumvirate of market-driven Appalachian historical development: Pocahontas was, and still

is, primarily agricultural, Nicholas endured the boom and bust cycles of the coal industry, and Greenbrier became a center for tourism. These three Appalachian economic paths are well-covered territory by scholars (J. Williams; Billings and Blee; Eller). Estimates of the poverty rate as of 2007 are between 16% and 19% for all three counties, all above the national average of 12.7% ("County Level Poverty Data"). Still, much wealth exists in this area, particularly in Greenbrier County, location of the famous Greenbrier Hotel. In these three counties there is clear socioeconomic stratification among the residents and distinct issues associated with the three distinct economic histories. These specific economic histories coupled with other local cultural characteristics provide a backdrop to development efforts in the community.

#### ADDITIONAL SOCIAL CHALLENGES IN APPALACHIA

In order for important work for women and community development to begin and be sustained, a shift in consciousness is often necessary. Just as consciousness-raising groups helped women open doors for themselves during the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, alterations to the psychological *status quo* are a powerful organizing tool. Raising consciousness empowers individuals and groups and creates better understanding amid diversity. This shift in worldview followed by thoughtful actions is an agent of positive change.

John Gaventa's classic Appalachian studies text, Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley, explains a three dimensional approach to power and how quiescence, or passivity, is maintained. Simply stated, the one-dimensional approach says that A has power over B, and if B has a grievance, B will tell A. The two-



dimensional approach says that A has power over B, and B's grievances are unknown to A because A makes sure B is not heard. The three dimensional approach says that A has power over B, and B may have a good reason to have a grievance, but A, and even B, do not know because A's power is so pervasive that it suppresses any grievance at a conscious level. To this point Gaventa adds:

Just as the dimensions of power are accumulative and re-enforcing for the maintenance of quiescence, so, too, does the emergence of challenge in one area of a power relationship weaken the power of the total to withstand further challenges by more than the loss of a single component (24).

Although this theory may be too general to explain all power dynamics in Appalachia, the idea that individual consciousness can be influenced by the power elite can be demonstrated. Applied to High Rocks, this theory of power deepens the significance of the organization. If power controls the consciousness of oppressed people, like women and rural Appalachians, then challenges to this power are essential steps in overcoming quiescence in women's and Appalachian communities.

Like Gaventa, Helen Lewis claims that Appalachian communities need a change of consciousness in order to build higher quality communities. Her theory models the twelve-step program from Alcoholics Anonymous. Lewis's theory is a reaction to the unique situation of communities where she notes "industrialization and deindustrialization [have caused] the erosion and destruction of communities" (316). Although High Rocks is not as directly focused on economic recovery as are Lewis's twelve steps, the twelve steps are

pertinent to the development of High Rocks girls and their relationship to community.<sup>3</sup> The process of raising consciousness among community members is particularly relevant as High Rocks girls begin to understand more about themselves and their role in their community while participating in the program. Moreover, each step that High Rocks might take can be seen as a challenge to power in terms of Gaventa's three-dimensional theory. Individual and community self-esteem are essential in order for Appalachian communities with a depressed past to become healthy.

Another challenge for the region is acknowledging and making connections between diverse groups. Inclusion of people from different backgrounds is key to an accurate portrayal of a community and for community unity. Although the Appalachian region has a rich history of diversity and progressive social action, the realities of racism, sexism, and general xenophobia characteristic of the U.S. as a whole seems particularly stuck as a general perception of the region. Indeed, these social problems need to be addressed.

Looking back at some of the indications of women's low status in West Virginia described earlier in the essay, the urgency for girls' empowerment seems clear. Does this mean that boys' empowerment is not important? Of course it is, but empowerment can be particularly influential to girls at risk for low status indicators. Gender, class, and race overlap to create varieties of power structures in a community. Thus, programs to empower people dealing with these signifiers help to promote healthy diversity. Patricia J. Williams' discussion of affirmative action in The Alchemy of Race and Rights is helpful in

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<sup>3</sup> Helen Lewis's twelve steps are: understand your history—share memories, mobilize/organize/revive a sense of community, profile and assess your local community, analyze and envision alternatives, educate the community, build confidence and pride, develop local projects, strengthen your organization, collaborate and build coalitions, take political power, initiate economic activity, enter the local/regional/national/international planning process.

understanding special programs for girls. Here Williams is discussing affirmative action in terms of race specifically, and while sexism and racism are not interchangeable, her ideas can apply to High Rocks. She states:

Blindly formalized constructions of equal opportunity are the creation of a space that is filled in by a meandering stream of unguided hopes, dreams, fantasies, fears, recollections. They are the presence of the past in imaginary, imagistic form—the phantom-roomed exile of our longing. It is thus that I strongly believe in the efficacy of programs and paradigms like affirmative action (49-50).

Williams argues that the promised ideals of America do not take into account the injustices done in the past, which effectively continues injustice today. In this text Williams shows that forces like race, class, and gender affect everything, including even supposedly objective arenas like law.

Stephen Fisher's analysis of the critique of new populist theory reiterates the significance of unity among diversity in the Appalachian context (323). Fischer acknowledges that a united community is beneficial when working toward increased participation and thus higher quality democracy. However, he points out that it is also important to notice differences within the community. Categories like race, gender, class, and cultural differences exist even in small localities, and can divide "the people" (322). In the same collection of essays, Don Manning-Miller points out that many well-meaning community organizations in Appalachia at best pay lip service to fighting racism, and at worst sweep it under the rug (58).

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High Rocks is struggling with these issues as well. As of 2007, the racial make-up of the area is predominately white: 98.0 % in Pocahontas, 98.7% in Nicholas, and 95.3% in Greenbrier (“State & County Quickfacts”). Regardless of the level of racism in this area, people of color are an extreme minority, and thus their social status as a group is likely lower than the majority. Gay and lesbian issues are becoming an increasingly dominant issue for High Rocks. However, information on this population within the region is only beginning to emerge, and precedence for confronting issues of sexuality in a regional organization is sparse. Additionally, class stratification continues in these communities. The charge for a community development organization working with a diverse population is to create unity while honoring individual differences.

John Alexander Williams posits in the final chapter of his book Appalachia, a History that the future of the region depends on an increasingly diverse community claiming membership in the Appalachian community. He cites examples of in-migration in the 1970s when many college graduates from elsewhere moved to farms in the region and many tourists found second homes (353-365). Newcomers to local communities will certainly affect the nature of the group, but true inclusion of locals is up to the community itself.

## SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In their book Asset Building and Community Development, Gary Green and Anna Haines are primarily concerned with place-based organizations. They define community development as “a planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life” (xi). This definition aptly describes High Rocks, as the data will later support. Green and Haines also detail seven types of capital that can be built by

community development organizations (CDOs): social, human, environmental, financial, physical, political, and cultural. These types of capital are resources for the community to use toward increasing the quality of life. Thus, when a CDO builds these types of capital, and residents are able to use these assets, the CDO is successful in its purpose.

The focus on asset building, as opposed to problem solving, was a shift within the field of community development that occurred during the early 1990s. Whereas community development had been based on community needs and problems, the new school of thought became asset-based. Through the asset-based focus, community organizers identify the opportunities in a community and work with what they have available. John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight explain this concept in Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets. In this book they literally map out all of a community's assets including youth, the elderly, artists, churches, clubs, schools, businesses, parks, and many other features (7). Kretzmann and McKnight show how to draw on each asset in order to bring the community together to further increase assets. For example, they show how something large like a community college can engage in productive relationships with other community assets like merchants, hospitals, and welfare recipients (239). They also show how individuals can impact their community like a welfare recipient working on a local farm to learn skills and in turn being hired and provided with housing (92). Kretzmann and McKnight remind us that although we tend to think first of the problems with our community, focusing on the assets will create sustainable change.

Building community assets can be particularly important when the community is rural. Luther K. Snow, in The Organization of Hope: A Workbook for Rural Asset-Based Community Development says that "the more spread out you are, the more important each

existing asset is to the community” (6). Although some of Snow’s analysis of rural communities could easily be applied to urban areas as well, it is true that rural communities are organized differently than urban centers. Thus, as Snow explains, for rural communities the significance lies less in the individual asset or the specific community but more in the collaboration between assets and communities. The issues associated with High Rocks’ location will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Although Green and Haines are correct in making the point that local organizations are crucial for effective change, they also point out that exchange between locals and non-locals is important (63). In Rural Communities: Legacy and Change, Cornelia Butler Flora, Jan L. Flora, and Susan Fey endorse this modification of place-based preeminence. They argue that a system that yields high levels of bonding and bridging characteristics is most likely to be successful for community development and the break down of power hierarchies. Bonding social capital refers to the social networks that develop within a community. When bonding is high, there is significant interaction among community members, and when bonding is low, there is little organization or interaction among community members. Bridging social capital follows the same pattern only between communities instead of within them. Flora, Flora, and Fey illustrate the possibilities for interaction between bonding and bridging social capital in the diagram shown below (64).

Diagram 1: The system of bridging and bonding social capital

		Bridging Social Capital	
		-	+
Bonding Social Capital	+	Community resists externally initiated change or infighting negates community change efforts	Locally initiated change driven by community defined goals, with links to external resources
	-	Wealthy solve problems with financial capital; the poor have few options	Community change dominated by local or extralocal bosses or power elite

In an ideal situation, the place-based group initiates activities, programs, goals, and mission statements (and any changes therein). Then, interest-based individuals or groups serve as external resources providing help, ideas, advice, money, and other resources as needed. According to this model, connections beyond the local community are important to the validity of the High Rocks organization. Jean Richardson echoes this sentiment in Partnerships in Communities: Reweaving the Fabric of Rural America. Richardson says, “linkages between communities” are “more likely to be beneficial, not only to the rural community, but to society as a whole” (37). Scholars focusing on Appalachian communities specifically highlight this exchange between insiders and outsiders as vital to regional organizations.

## COALITION BUILDING

Richard Couto and Catherine Guthrie in Making Democracy Work Better provide examples of successful and unsuccessful organizations and analyze various organizational strategies. Couto and Guthrie point out that in order for organizations (mediating structures) to survive and thus fulfill the democratic prospect of increased social and political equality, they need to pay attention to several “lessons learned.” Two specifically are that “ideas need to travel at the grassroots” and that “coalitions are crucial” (253, 259). Couto and Guthrie state, “some advocates of the democratic prospect view community-based mediating structures suspiciously partially because of their particularity” (253). Certainly the defunct Brumley Gap Concerned Citizens organization, which fought against proposed flooding of their valley for a hydroelectric facility and ceased operation after they fulfilled their immediate task, is such an example, as they were not able to make the connection between their particular objective and a broader vision (Couto 85-92). The idea that “ideas need to travel at the grassroots” implies that organizations need to make their ideas public for others’ benefit. Additionally, ideas can travel on a two-way street, and the main benefit for an organization to connect with outside entities is to improve the quality and accountability of their own organization. This can be particularly problematic for rural communities where distance might hinder relationship development between people and organizations. This also means that the connections are all the more important for groups that may feel like a lonely island.

Multi-issue membership-run organizations that are successful in coalition building and creating connections among diverse populations have the best chance at maintaining



themselves for the long term and, therefore, have the best chance at creating lasting positive change. So explains Stephen Fisher in his concluding chapter to Fighting Back in Appalachia (Fisher 329-330). This is really a way of saying that organizations need to think holistically. Fisher points to organizations like Save Our Cumberland Mountains and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth noting that, “unlike the narrow, single-issue organizing of the past, these groups’ primary concern is to empower their members for the long-haul—to provide a schooling in politics” (Fisher 329). The type of politics that Fisher refers to here can be defined broadly. It could be training people to run for political office, or, as in the case of High Rocks, developing leadership skills in teenage girls. The common denominator is *empowerment*—the move away from quiescence toward participation.

Ultimately, Feminist action and community development have the potential to overlap in beneficial ways for Appalachian communities. Many lessons learned from the fields of Appalachian studies, women’s studies, and community development provide a backdrop for important work still to be done. I place High Rocks at the intersection of these ideas in order to provide a context for the significance of the organization as a model for this type of work and to examine issues where High Rocks is making headway.

### CHAPTER 3. THE RESEARCH PROCESS

I first became involved with High Rocks as a student in Dr. Elizabeth Engelhardt's capstone women's studies class in the spring of 2003 at West Virginia University. In the class we focused on transnational feminism by looking at feminist perspectives in different countries and cultures. In this vein, our class participated in a service-learning project with High Rocks. We read and learned a little about High Rocks before we traveled from Morgantown to Pocahontas County for a day of helping out. Our class helped clean up some areas of the lodge and we helped plan and carry out an after-school activity at the local elementary school. During this interaction with High Rocks I learned about their summer internship program, and I decided to apply for the position. I worked at High Rocks for the summer of 2003 as an intern where I had experience in the planning process and in actual programs. I helped devise evaluations for the program, clean up the campground, design and teach classes at camp, supervise the junior counselors, and work with girls individually. I returned to High Rocks the following summer to volunteer as a guide on the annual backpacking trip. I left these experiences with the sense that I participated in something unique and valuable in West Virginia. I had an overwhelmingly positive experience at High Rocks, and I continued to think of it often.

Between 2004 and 2007 I had little contact with High Rocks other than receiving newsletters or hearing random updates through e-mail or people I knew involved in High Rocks. Then, after starting the Masters Program in Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State

University, I attended the Appalachian Studies Association Conference in 2007. At this conference I attended a session about gender and Appalachia. Barbara Ellen Smith was one of the panelists, and I was struck by her saying something about the need to envision what a women's movement in Appalachia would look like. When she said this I remember thinking it would look like High Rocks. At this same conference I ran into Brynn Kusic, a High Rocks staff member. After our brief conversation, I was reminded of how interesting and unique High Rocks was, particularly in terms of an intersection of women's studies and Appalachian studies. After this conference, I decided to pursue High Rocks as my thesis topic. At this point in my graduate studies, I was also becoming more interested in communities and community development. I knew there was a connection between these three areas of interest, and that I had witnessed this intersection at High Rocks. Thus, I started to think about how to convey High Rocks's significance to feminist community development in Appalachia.

My research on High Rocks is not purely objective (nor is any research). Specifically, I am a supporter and proponent of the work that goes on at High Rocks. Although I have personal experience and a connection to High Rocks, in order to work toward objectivity, I followed social science research guidelines and incorporated participatory and qualitative research to form the basis of my data.

## TYPES OF RESEARCH

At the beginning of my research, I already had a basic knowledge of High Rocks from the time I spent working there. However, to fully explore this thesis topic I used two data-gathering methods. First I conducted interviews with fifteen High Rocks pledgetakers.

Second I used participant observation to reacquaint myself with High Rocks and to observe High Rocks at work. Through both of these methods I reconnected with many people and met some wonderful new people. This process deepened my personal connection to High Rocks and opened a window for an exchange of ideas. Part of my research plan was to provide something mutually beneficial for the organization.

## INTERVIEWS

I set out to interview four sets of informants: current staff, pledgetakers (not currently at High Rocks), High Rocks girls that graduated from high school in 2007, and local High Rocks affiliates (board members). In the end, I interviewed people from each of these categories, but during the course of the interviews, I realized that they were more or less arbitrary categories. First, there was a lot of overlap among the groups. For example, I interviewed two board members that were also former High Rocks girls. The second group, "pledgetakers," included all kinds of people with varying types of relationships with High Rocks. Some were former High Rocks girls and were still involved, others were interns for a year, and others were seasonal staff. Thus, I now put all of my informants in the "pledgetakers" category, but I recognize that each informant holds a unique relationship to the organization (see Appendix D for a list of informants and their role within High Rocks).

I did not interview active High Rocks girls. The purpose of this thesis is to look at the theories and practices at High Rocks that are relevant to feminist, community development, and Appalachian themes. Although active girls could certainly provide some of this, I decided along with the co-directors of High Rocks that staff and alumni would be able

to provide a better perspective, having either worked in planning and organization capacities or having gone through the entire program.

Despite the fact that I didn't end up with the kind of balanced sample I originally intended, the sample that materialized included a solid mix of key informants that have been with High Rocks from the beginning and High Rocks pledgetakers that had first-hand experience with the transformative nature of the program. I conducted interviews individually and in person when possible. Informants living beyond the scope of my ability to travel participated in telephone and e-mail interviews. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and an hour and a half, and I used a tape recorder and hand-written notes to record the information. The exceptions to this were two e-mail interviews where I emailed the interview guide to the informants and they typed their responses and e-mailed me back. Bias existed in the sample as a result of finding people to interview. In coordination with High Rocks, the first group I interviewed was a group of nine people working at High Rocks in March 2008. From there, High Rocks gave me a list of other informants that fit my criteria. Then, the remaining six people I was able to interview all responded to my request for an interview. Thus, I only ended up with one informant that wasn't really actively involved with High Rocks. No one I interviewed had an overall negative opinion of High Rocks. Finally, looking back I wish I had included a male as part of the sample. Although High Rocks is mostly women, several men have been key volunteers, and there is currently one male staff member. It was clearly an oversight not to get a male perspective. This data could have contributed to my argument for how feminist action relates to the community at large.

I interviewed informants about their opinions on the significance of the High Rocks and their experience with feminism and community development indicators in the

organization. I also asked informants to discuss what they thought was the connection between the High Rocks organization and its geographic location. See Appendix C for a list of interview questions in the interview guide and Appendix D for a list of informants. I did not ask every question during each interview. I focused on some questions more than others with informants that had particularly strong experience in one category over the others.

### PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

I walked through the door at High Rocks for the first day of my interviews, and I was greeted by a group of people sitting in a circle in the dining room. Co-director Sarah Riley motioned for me to join them, and I became incorporated into a “getting to know you” discussion with a group of alternative spring break students from Haverford College. This was an appropriate way for me to start my day there because it brought me, as the researcher, back into the mix of people working at High Rocks. I became a participant again before I started interviewing people, and this helped me understand the context of what was happening at High Rocks that week and what kinds of projects staff were working on. During that trip I was also invited to attend the weekly staff meeting. This was another great opportunity for participant observation because it allowed me to get a first-hand account of the planning process and what issues were being discussed on a staff level. Additionally, I was not merely an observer of the meeting, but my input was requested, so I got to feel what it was like to be part of those discussions and decisions.

I also participated in two more informal activities during my stay. High Rocks hosted a family style welcome dinner for the Haverford students, and then we took a trip to Lewisburg to see *I'm Not There* at the movie theater. Again, these activities helped bring me

into the group so I felt less like some random person there to ask a bunch of questions for a couple days. I got to reconnect with old friends and hang out with new people.

Soon after the initial round of interviews, I attended two academic conferences that became part of my participant observation research. The first was the 2008 Appalachian Studies Association Conference in Huntington, WV. I presented some of my initial research on High Rocks (Terman). Happily, High Rocks staff member Jaime Madden was in the audience with two High Rocks girls. Former High Rocks intern Ada Smith was also there. At the end of the presentation several people commented on the complexity of using the term "feminist" to describe High Rocks, and after we discussed it for a couple of minutes, Jaime interjected and asked one of the High Rocks girls to share with the whole room what she had just said. The girl asked, "What's wrong with being a feminist?" This was a great moment that put things in perspective. Presenting a paper is a good way to get feedback, and it was particularly exciting to have other people from High Rocks in the audience to comment on my work. It certainly made me think harder about the status of feminism at High Rocks. I was also invited by Jaime Madden to help present on High Rocks at the Southeastern Women's Studies Association Conference that April along with Ada Smith. Again, this provided me an opportunity to talk about my work with two other High Rocks pledgetakers who were also thinking critically about the organization. It also gave me a chance to lend my help with the presentation.

In May of 2008 I was invited to teach a seminar on Women in Appalachia as part of the High Rocks intern training. Then, in the fall of 2008, I hosted a group from High Rocks on a stop at Appalachian State during one of their college tours. Most recently, I stepped in at the last minute to help Sarah Riley present at the 2009 Appalachian Studies Association

Conference in Portsmouth, Ohio when another staff member was unable to attend the conference. In each case I was participating in the social capital created by the High Rocks network. They gave me material for my research, and I reciprocated by volunteering my knowledge and resources.

In tandem with this research project, I tried to develop a connection between Appalachian State University and High Rocks. I think there are many students at ASU that would benefit from such an exchange. In light of the various activities and programs at High Rocks, students in Appalachian studies, women's studies, education, psychology, sustainable development, biology, business, and possibly other fields would get a lot out of participating in the organization. I also wanted to use this development process to bolster my argument about the translocal nature of the High Rocks network.

At first I wanted to develop a paid internship for ASU students at High Rocks. I met with Traci Royster at ASU who was in charge of internships at the time, but I wasn't able to get a sense of where to start in terms of looking for funding. Meanwhile, I had interviewed a few recent High Rocks interns, and learned that a new part of the intern program included the prospective intern securing funding for themselves with the help of High Rocks. This seemed significant in integrating fundraising with the intern experience, so I wasn't sure if trying to get funding for someone else was the best approach. I then started to think about organizing an alternative spring break for ASU students at High Rocks. This, I reasoned, would expose several ASU students to High Rocks and might result in some of them applying to be an intern or some of them organizing another trip for the next year. Unfortunately, I was unaware the deadline for proposing a trip at ASU was in the fall semester, and I was unable to organize an official trip this year. I attempted to organize a smaller group through the ASU



Women's Studies Club, but I was unable to get enough commitment to make the trip happen (see Appendix E).

Even so, I'm trying to organize a time to take a couple of students who were interested in the trip up to High Rocks during the summer of 2009. I hope that a student or teacher from the Center for Appalachian Studies or the Women's Studies Club will want to sponsor something like this for next year. Appalachian State University's alternative spring break program is very popular, and I think this would be a great addition to their line up. Furthermore, it would be very low cost for a small group. High Rocks has room for lodging and a full kitchen so a group could make their own meals. The biggest cost would be fuel for the four and a half hour drive.

Participant observation supplemented the data I gathered from interviews and gave me a more accurate understanding of what my informants told me. I recorded information about organizational style and new projects at High Rocks. Participating in conferences with High Rocks staff provided me with feedback on my developing ideas for this thesis. Additionally, I was able to contribute some of my own knowledge and skills to the organization and see where my research might be beneficial to High Rocks. Through participation, my relationship with High Rocks was strengthened.

The combination of qualitative and participatory research gave me excellent data for this thesis. I learned about the development of High Rocks since the last time I was involved with them over five years ago. I was able to talk at length with all of my informants, and I got the sense that people were really glad to express their thoughts and opinions about High Rocks. Many of my informants talk about High Rocks all the time as part of their job. Yet they all took the time to provide me with thoughtful and detailed answers. I chose not to keep

my informants' names anonymous as I was trained to do. I gave the option of anonymity to all of my informants, but no one took me up on the offer. High Rocks is a really open and honest place, even though there is a sense of reclusiveness in their mountain location. As an organization, High Rocks strives to be transparent in many ways. An example of this is when they invited me to participate in their staff meeting. To remove my informants' names from my research would be to remove them from their work and thoughts. I wanted the individual voices of High Rocks to be present in the research. I strove to maintain a balance between objective data and my own interpretation from my participant observation. The following chapters examine the data I collected and my interpretation of how feminist, community development, and Appalachian themes reveal themselves in the data.

#### CHAPTER 4. FEMINISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE AT HIGH ROCKS

*"I think that it's a word that can scare a lot of people off, and if what we're doing is espousing feminist ideals, then does it really matter if that's how we're advertising ourselves?"* (Samantha Mitchell, 18 November 2008).

*"If everyone had a High Rocks, you wouldn't even need to use the term 'feminism'"* (Susan Burt, 11 March 2008).

I have struggled to determine if High Rocks is a feminist organization. High Rocks certainly falls under basic definitions of feminism widely accepted by western culture. Intrinsically, because they are an organization to improve the lives of girls, they generally support the definition of feminism as advocating "political, economic, and social equality of the sexes" (Merriam-Webster). Additionally, during my research I found that a broad, intentional, and organized feminism exists at High Rocks. Feminist action occurring at High Rocks goes beyond advocating for equality of the sexes. They engage in profound consciousness-raising that includes actively promoting diversity and confronting racism and other social bigotry. Yet two thirds of informants hesitated or declined to call High Rocks a feminist organization, though all informants were able to cite feminist theory and action at work within the organization.

The primary reason I hesitate to call High Rocks a feminist organization is the nature of its geographic community. The rural community in which High Rocks is located is conservative and a place where in many situations using the word “feminist,” as Sarah Riley put it, “means something pretty bad” (10 March 2008). Furthermore, while it would still be easy to characterize High Rocks as a feminist organization, I wasn’t sure if the staff or girls would want to be labeled as such. The ultimate question is: if an organization is feminist by definition, is it acceptable to name it as such regardless of the context? Further, does it matter what we call it? And to whom does it matter?

During the interviews I conducted I asked my informants specifically about the status of feminism at High Rocks. In addition, questions I asked on other topics elicited responses that spoke to feminist theory and action at High Rocks. Responses varied, but overall there was an acknowledgement that High Rocks is a feminist organization, but that it depends on the definition of feminism, and more importantly, to whom you are talking.

Moreover, I found examples of radical-cultural, radical-libertarian, and socialist feminism at High Rocks.<sup>4</sup> According to Rosemarie Tong in *Feminist Thought*, radical cultural feminists question whether women should embrace masculine traits at all, and claim, “that it is better to be female/feminine than it is to be male/masculine” (47). Tong cites radical cultural feminist Mary Daly who says, “to become whole, a woman needs to strip away the false identity—femininity—patriarchy has constructed for her. Then and only then will she experience herself as the self she would have been had she lived her life in a matriarchy rather than a patriarchy” (61). Radical libertarian feminists, on the other hand, posit androgyny as the solution to sexism. Tong cites Kate Millet’s philosophy that “to

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<sup>4</sup> Again, these are not terms that I’d use if I were hanging out at the Dairy Queen in Marlinton, WV, but they are important theoretically to this thesis.

eliminate male control, men and women have to eliminate gender—specifically, sexual status, role, and temperament—as it has been constructed under patriarchy” (49). Socialist feminists argue that the capitalist system and the patriarchal system must both be overthrown in order to achieve true equality (Tong 118-120). This includes empowering all members of society while paying close attention to empowering women.

Evidence of these ideas came through in informants’ thoughts and actions that I observed while participating in this research. Informants didn’t express themselves in a way that the aforementioned theorists would, but it is important to acknowledge that the fundamental ideas were present. Examples of these theories and other evidence of feminism are discussed in the following sections. Thus, a feminist philosophy and language exists at High Rocks.

#### FEMINISM IN THEORY AT HIGH ROCKS

A philosophy for social change at High Rocks probably started thirty years or more before High Rocks was founded. Several people who have been involved with High Rocks at some point have roots in the Civil Rights Movement, Peace Movement, the Women’s Liberation Movement, and regional development. First, Virginia Steele, who donated her land so that High Rocks could begin, helped start Freedom Schools in the South and was a friend of Civil Rights leaders Stokely Carmichael and Robert P. Moses, who also founded The Algebra Project, a program out of Alabama with similarities to High Rocks (Riley 6 April 2009). Another connection to social change movements is Gibbs Kinderman, High Rocks founder Susan Burt’s former husband and Sarah Riley’s father, who was part of the Appalachian Volunteers in the late 1960s/early 1970s and is now the coordinator of

community radio and VISTA volunteers in the High Rocks area. Additionally, Susan Burt mentioned a couple of women on the High Rocks board from the generation of second wave feminism who see the High Rocks as an outlet for feminist participation. Susan said, "I think people see it as a feminist organization, and I think a lot of our board members...say, 'God, I've always been such a feminist, and then I feel like we lost it, and I haven't known what to do with it, and the movement has sort of fallen apart, and I don't know what it means anymore, so I just feel like this is a great way that I can support these girls with what I know now'" (11 March 2008). All of these examples show how feminist theory and social change theory was brought to the High Rocks organization in some part by connections with veterans of social movements. In a way, High Rocks is a manifestation of second wave feminist progress and other social change movements of that era. As an organization for girls run largely by young women, High Rocks is able to interpret the ideas of previous generations in ways applicable to third wave or region-specific issues.

New ideas in feminism also arrive through the network of people involved in High Rocks. As I pointed out in chapter 2, High Rocks benefits from "bridging social capital." In other words, High Rocks has access to outside resources that influence and help develop the organization. New ideas are part of what makes High Rocks "not institutionalized, but a living, breathing organization" (Kusic). This exchange comes from a variety of sources, but two that are relevant here are seasonal staff and interns. One seasonal staff person that has been integral to High Rocks is Dr. Elizabeth Engelhardt, a university professor in women's studies and American studies. She has been influential in developing women's studies and Appalachian studies at High Rocks. I think this is partially the reason why most people at High Rocks have a pretty good understanding of women's history in the U.S. Younger

women are often criticized for their ignorance of women's historical struggles. While most people have to go to college to learn anything about women's history, High Rocks teaches women's history courses and Appalachian women's studies to girls and interns. In addition, a key function of their internship program is to make the connection between theory and practice, not just in feminism, but also in education, sustainable development, social change, etc. Interns gain practical experience, and High Rocks gains new ideas from interns. The internship is a vital part of idea exchange through bridging social capital.

Feminist language and theory is commonly used by High Rocks pledgetakers. Phrases like "girls' empowerment," "helping girls find their voice," and "helping girls become independent thinkers" were repeated in every interview. Indeed, the High Rocks motto is "educate, empower, inspire." Jaime Madden points out that even basic things like math classes during summer camp are feminist actions. She also compared time spent driving in the van to consciousness raising groups. Participating in High Rocks necessitates driving because girls are coming after school from distances up to an hour away. She said these times are great for personal conversations where girls will discuss personal issues and then figure out how they fit into larger systems—the equivalent of that second wave mantra "the personal is political" (10 March 2008). Thus, the language of feminist theory is used by pledgetakers to describe functions at High Rocks.

Feminist values are also reflected in some of the fundamental principles of High Rocks. First, sisterhood is a primary goal for girls when they start the program. Jaime Madden, citing an oft-repeated phrase of Susan Burt, said High Rocks "teaches [the girls] to be one another's sisters instead of staff becoming their mothers" (10 March 2008). Thus, girls are able to support each other and feel a sense of responsibility toward one another.

Second, High Rocks is supposed to be a “sex free place” (Westbrook). Participating at High Rocks is supposed to be a time for girls to remove themselves from sexual tension or pressure in order to focus on their individual pursuits. Akin to radical-libertarian feminism that claims that woman’s sexuality is what limits her, High Rocks promotes a sex free environment. However, the way they achieve this is through same-sex education and a celebration of their femaleness that fits better with radical-cultural feminism. Their website states,

Single-sex education is something that has been celebrated by women's colleges and the American Association of University Women for decades. We have found that girls need to do several things to grow as healthy as they can. Girls need to play. Girls need to speak up. Girls need to figure out who they are and what they stand for. We have found that girls do this best in a same-sex environment, where sexual energy is minimized, body self-esteem is positive and non-judgmental, and girls focus on their own education and development. (“Frequently Asked Questions”)

Ultimately, High Rocks attempts to foster girls’ uniqueness as human beings. In doing so, they probably use a combination of feminist theories. Girls are celebrated equally for activities like taking a hike in the woods, learning algebra equations, and helping to make dinner. These core principles—sex free space and encouraging feminine and masculine characteristics—have been a part of the High Rocks identity more or less since its inception. While the concept of sisterhood is probably more pervasive in feminist theory, same-sex education and sex free environments apply to specific feminist theories and same-sex educational traditions.



## FEMINISM IN PRACTICE AT HIGH ROCKS

The feminist ideas that flow in and out of High Rocks form the basis of much of the feminist action at High Rocks. The vision and organizational plans of High Rocks are feminist in nature. From their twenty-year plan to the way they run their staff meetings, this women-run organization has created innovative ways to maintain and sustain their commitment to educating, empowering, and inspiring young women.

As High Rocks has become a successful women-run non-profit, it was set up to be taken over by the High Rocks girls when they get older. This was the vision of High Rocks founder, Susan Burt, and perhaps this is an extension of the responsibility of sisterhood. The leaders at High Rocks put this theory into practice by listening directly to the girls and developing programs based on what the girls say they want and need. This socialist feminist technique of putting the future and responsibility of the organization in the hands of the young women it serves is highly developed at High Rocks. All informants mentioned this aspect of the organization. In addition, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, Kendra Vincent discusses this important aspect of High Rocks in her master's thesis, and finds that it is a significant success factor in third wave feminist programs focused on girls. Now, as High Rocks turns thirteen years old, this vision is starting to become reality. High Rocks maintains a network of 100 active alumni, many girls have returned to be interns, volunteers, or VISTAs, and four former girls now hold seats on the High Rocks board, including one officer. Still, it is too early to see any solid long-term data. Developing a High Rocks alumna to this extent is really more of a twenty or thirty year process (Riley 28 March 2009). If girls continue to become leaders in the High Rocks program, it will prove not only that they

became empowered women leaders, but that they also feel a responsibility toward the organization and their home communities.

A good example of everyday feminist action that I discovered during my research was the High Rocks staff meeting. I participated in a meeting while I was on location conducting interviews. After it began, I quickly realized this was not your father's staff meeting! First, we started with a few stretches. After that moment of zen, the groups launched into the most efficient yet simultaneously democratic staff meeting I've ever witnessed. The meeting begins with "context." One person briefly summarizes what's been going on at High Rocks and things they've accomplished recently. Then, one person gets up and creates a chart with two categories, "info" and "issues." Then everybody takes turns calling out items to be added to the list. Finally, they quickly prioritize each item by consensus. The following diagram is an example of how the meeting is structured:

Diagram 2: High Rocks meeting agenda

INFO	ISSUES
2. Final draft of grant is due Monday by 4pm	3. Need raffle items for Saturday fundraiser
1. Fundraiser starts at 8 am Saturday	2. Transportation for tutoring this week
3. Laura, Jaime, and Suska are recruiting this week	1. Schedule for alternative spring break group this week

They give themselves exactly one hour to get through every item on the list. This method removes any hierarchal element; it allows everyone to talk but also keeps everyone focused on working efficiently. When each item has been taken care of the floor is open for "kudos

and confessions.” This is a time for people to recognize the hard work of others and thank staff members for various things. This is also time for people to apologize for any disagreements or parts of the week that they are less than proud of. Finally, meetings are completed with “wisdom.” Usually one person prepares something to bring to the meeting to share that is relevant or interesting. This could be a newspaper article, a conversation they had, a poem, or a story. At the meeting I attended I was asked to contribute to the “wisdom” portion of the meeting. I talked about the impetus for my research at High Rocks and what it was like to come back after five years.

When High Rocks girls participate in these types of activities they may not realize they are engaging in feminism. However, many come to realize they are feminists once they go to college. When they are exposed to the theory in college classes, they understand how feminism describes much of what they experienced at High Rocks. Sarah Riley described the dynamic as such:

...[T]hey go to college and take a women’s studies class [and] they write back and say I never knew I was a feminist!...we certainly call it women’s studies, but we don’t really call it feminism, and feminism is a word they tend to discover more when they’re not here. And I think that’s fine. I think it’s what we’re starting with when we’re teaching them women’s studies and having them start thinking about women’s studies is what they need for the foundation while they’re in high school so that they can discover and take the next step while they’re in college. (10 March 2008)

Susan Burt reiterated this viewpoint, and added that even though High Rocks doesn't specifically teach girls about feminism, the girls tend to become "really good little feminists" (11 March 2008). Thus, even when girls or staff do not claim to be feminists or even identify with feminism, they become the "end result of feminism" (Burt 11 March 2008).

## NAMES AND SEMANTICS

When asked to define the primary function of High Rocks, Sarah Riley had trouble naming one purpose. She gave a list including "restoring the fundamental basis of democracy in America, women's empowerment and leadership, social change, making the world [and] specifically West Virginia a better place, to have a place where [all different kinds of] women support each other to succeed." She went on to say,

There's some secret language that we're going to discover where they all mean the same thing because to me, those are all the same thing. But we use those words in so many different contexts in society that they mean different things than they do when I say them. I say them, and you lay them all together like color slides then it says the things that I'm trying to say. It is one purpose." (10 March 2008)

Could feminism be the idea that encompasses all these goals? Danielle Stollack commented, "I think staff are here for a lot of different reasons, but to support the same kind of goal, to bring feminism to these girls, to create strong girls" (11 March 2008).

Unfortunately for proponents of feminism, and those looking for a way to easily describe High Rocks, many of the informants did not accept the term feminism as an appropriate term for describing the myriad functions of High Rocks. Most needed a specific definition of

feminism in order to claim High Rocks as feminist. The informants' ideas and perceptions of feminism varied widely, but two-thirds explicitly stated that High Rocks should not be called a feminist organization. Only one informant said that it should be called feminist, and four others said maybe, but that it would depend on the circumstances. Sarah Riley explained it this way:

There's something to me about the word feminist that has just always connotated something that's sort of militant. I don't think the High Rocks is militant at all. And there's something in feminism, to me that, just in the word, I mean this is my word association, I don't necessarily think it's justified, but that is angry, and I just don't think we're angry. I don't think High Rocks is an angry place. I think that it's a place where people come, you know, girls or young women come with anger and it's something that is transformed into hope and positive energy. And to me feminism is more about fighting for justice in the established system and less about making a leap of faith and starting to make a new world where things are different. I feel like there were a lot of women that felt like feminism didn't apply to them, it was about other women. And it's really important to me that all the women in this community feel like High Rocks applies to them, whatever their political beliefs are, whatever their life experience is, that it's a community of women, not a feminist organization in the public consciousness. (10 March 2008)

Suska Holtzman said High Rocks should not be called feminist because it's an "alienating term" and would cause problems with families of the girls and the local community (10 March 2008). Brynn Kusic, who holds a degree in women's studies, said that yes, High

Rocks is a feminist organization but shouldn't be called such for the same reason there is a need for the High Rocks—"Perception needs to change on a national level...[using the term is a] huge problem [because the] feminist movement has been kind of a disaster. People doing feminist work aren't associating with feminism" (11 March 2008). Chris Campbell said frankly, "I don't like the word 'feminist'" (11 March 2008).

This is not to say that all informants hesitated to use the term feminist. One third of the informants readily affirmed High Rocks to be a feminist organization. Jaime Madden said labeling High Rocks as feminist was important for the staff because it generated "fruitful, productive, and necessary" discussions about the organization's identity. She added that she would be "wary of any effort to not take on that label." Still, Jaime recognized that the eagerness to take on the feminist label would vary among staff and girls (10 March 2008). Danielle Stollack qualified her statement by recognizing the interpretable nature of the word feminism, but then became more absolute saying she didn't see how it could not be feminist, and, "to say it's not feminism is cheating people. Every organization should be feminist because if you're not you're ignoring women." Danielle also stated that she didn't identify as a feminist before she came to High Rocks, but now she does (11 March 2008).

Although I conclude that the term feminism does cover the primary functions of High Rocks, I agree that it is an inadequate term because of its propensity for misinterpretation. Thus, I propose the terminology "rural Appalachian feminist capital" as a more appropriate and useful way to describe the primary functions of High Rocks. High Rocks identifies itself as a "community non-profit dedicated to educating, empowering and inspiring girls" ("High Rocks for Girls"). Ultimately, High Rocks does not identify completely with either the feminist movement or the local community. Pledgetakers see High Rocks as a unique and

individual entity. Qualifying feminism in these terms connotes the specific culture in which feminist action occurs at High Rocks. Furthermore, adding the capital term places feminism in the system of community assets developed through High Rocks. In the next chapter I will discuss rural Appalachian feminist capital in more depth to include how High Rocks shapes the values and traditions of their community through women's education and empowerment.

I found this portion of the interviews and research highly significant. There is a feminist presence at High Rocks and in the Appalachian region. High Rocks is clearly doing feminist work. But what does it mean for the future of feminism in Appalachia if feminist organizations don't claim the label? At the very least, this does not improve anyone's perception of feminism, and it may be a barrier to a beneficial feminist network in the region. Still, it's important for people to know that while we may not have a cohesive feminist movement in Appalachia, feminist action is alive and there are opportunities for participation. I will discuss the significance of this further in Chapter 6.

In short, I conclude that it matters if High Rocks is labeled feminist. As I discussed in Chapter 2, feminism is strongest when the most people identify with that name. bell hooks argues that "the citizens of the nation cannot know the positive contributions feminist movement has made if we do not highlight these gains" (24). So for the sake of feminist movement, it is important that High Rocks label themselves feminist. However, it is simultaneously important for High Rocks *not* to label itself feminist because it could compromise its relationship with some people and the local community. Ultimately, although feminist thought is highly essential to High Rocks, the trust and support of the community takes priority over the name "feminist." High Rocks can still benefit from feminism without

using the word, but they can't benefit from the community without a recognizable relationship. Therefore, High Rocks is identifiable as feminist because it promotes feminist goals, but because the organization does not identify as feminist, it is not explicitly beneficial to the feminist movement.

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## CHAPTER 5. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AT HIGH ROCKS

*“I think it partly builds community because it builds a success story people can believe in, whether or not they’ve ever been here. It’s a different kind of community, but it’s really important.”* (Sarah Riley 10 March 2008)

*“I think this is one of the most quirky communities, and to ignore High Rocks is to ignore a part of the community. So I definitely say that [High Rocks] is part of the [local] community.”* (Danielle Stollack).

High Rocks became a community development organization gradually. Their interpretation of educating, empowering, and inspiring girls revealed a holistic approach to organizing. This led them to become involved in many facets of the community in which High Rocks girls grow up. What started as a primarily educational vision has turned into action for social change. Their current programs promote social, human, cultural, environmental, political, financial, physical, and rural Appalachian feminist capital. Interviews and participatory research show how High Rocks continues to become more involved in these efforts.

The High Rocks program exists to serve young women from the place-based community, and in turn has developed a close relationship with the local community. Efforts to build programs for local girls react to specific community factors, and in this way, High Rocks is a reflection of its place. Thus, a lot of the work at High Rocks results in local

community capital. This dynamic defines High Rocks as a community development organization.

### HIGH ROCKS HISTORY: FROM NEEDS TO ASSETS

High Rocks started with Susan Burt's needs-based idea and evolved into an asset-based organization. While High Rocks still addresses the needs of teenage girls in academics and self-esteem, the organization's purpose is focused on developing assets. By developing girls' abilities in school and life, High Rocks is increasing girls' capacities to become successful. In fact High Rocks is the very definition of community development as Green and Haines define it, "a planned effort to build assets that increase the capacity of residents to improve their quality of life" (xi). The High Rocks organization plans ways to build girls' intellect, social skills, work ethic, and many other characteristics with the express purpose of creating opportunities for the girls to improve the quality of their lives. This is summarized by High Rocks' mission statement (see Appendix B).

Significantly, this mission statement doesn't talk about specific problems or needs of the girls and communities in West Virginia. Instead, High Rocks is focused on ways to improve individuals' lives, and in turn, to help the community by promoting the "economic, social, intellectual, and democratic basis" ("Our History") for the community. Perhaps the goal of improvement suggests that there are needs, but the mission isn't a knee-jerk response to needs. Rather, High Rocks is working toward the "long-term betterment" and the "future" ("Our History").

According to this mission statement, High Rocks is primarily concerned with their “community.” Chris Campbell described the way High Rocks thinks about this process for the local community:

Even though they are three counties that border each other, they’re very different in their cultures, and [High Rocks] spend[s] a lot of time looking at that and saying, you know, this is the way it is here, and this is the way it is here, and this is the way it is here, and how can we use that as an opportunity for development. It’s not how can we change the culture, it’s how can we look at the culture and strengthen the culture to improve the quality of life, the community, the relationships, all of it. (11 March 2008)

This interview clearly shows that High Rocks is concerned with local issues; however, local community is not explicitly referenced in the High Rocks mission statement. Perhaps it is intentionally ambiguous. Although community is necessarily defined by “territory or place” (Green and Haines 2), High Rocks includes both place-based and communities of interest. All interviewees recognized a connection to the place-based community, but many don’t define High Rocks as a place-based organization. Even though High Rocks is separate in some ways, the system of integrated communities has a significant impact on local community asset-building.

Through interviews, participatory research, and other printed information on High Rocks, I examined specific ways that High Rocks builds local community assets. I looked for examples of activities and other indicators to document specific types of asset building that occur at High Rocks. I also looked for evidence of translocal connections that will help

explain the full scope and relevance of High Rocks not only to the local community, but elsewhere as well.

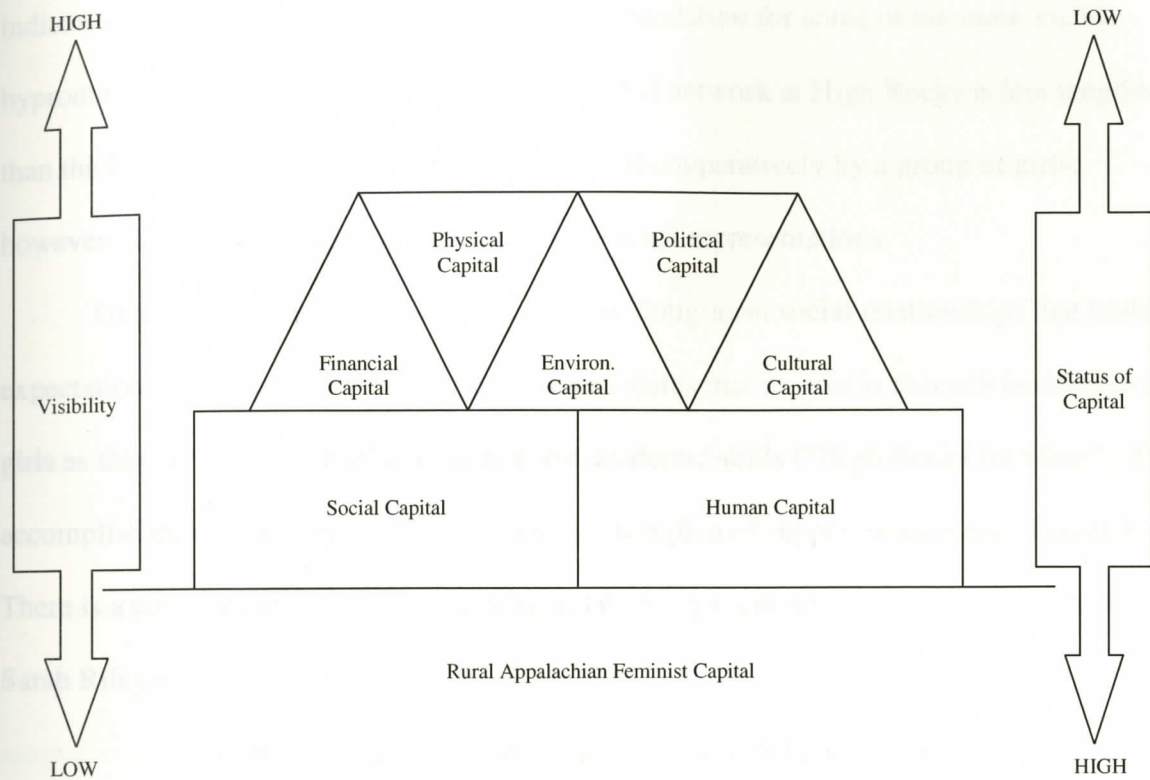
#### LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: HIGH ROCKS AT WORK

Just as the High Rocks organization reflects the definition of community development given by Green and Haines, High Rocks also deals with the seven types of capital profiled by Green and Haines. High levels of capital indicate the success of a community development effort to increase assets where little or none previously existed. Thus, an examination of capital is useful to determine the benefits High Rocks presents to the local community.

Not all seven types of capital are equally developed at High Rocks. Building social and human capital is the main focus at High Rocks, and this may seem obvious given its mission is to “educate, empower, and inspire girls.” However, other types of capital are present at High Rocks. Although they may occur more informally, financial, physical, environmental, political, and cultural capital maintain a significant status at High Rocks. Moreover, I argue that there is another asset unique to High Rocks: “rural Appalachian feminist capital.” I discussed this term briefly in Chapter 4, and I use it here to address the capital High Rocks unearths from empowered girls as a community of women in a rural area.

This system of capital provides High Rocks with the assets to maintain sustainable community development. Diagram 3 (shown below) illustrates the different types of capital as part of a structure. This structure is specific to the local community, meaning the three counties serviced by High Rocks. Some of the types of capital are relevant outside the community, and this will be discussed in a later section.

Diagram 3: High Rocks empowers young women through a community development system that includes at least 8 types of capital



As Diagram 3 illustrates, rural Appalachian feminist capital is the basis for all other capital development at High Rocks, yet this fundamental capital is the least visible. The challenge, then, is to find ways to highlight the highly important but less visible characteristics of the organization in a way that is accessible to those outside the group like grant committees and other possible benefactors. Nonetheless, each type of capital is evidence of High Rocks's identity as a community development organization. The following sections explain the role of each type of capital at High Rocks in more detail.

## SOCIAL CAPITAL

Developing social capital is one of two main functions of High Rocks. As Diagram 3 indicates, the development of social capital is a foundation for some of the more visible byproducts of the High Rocks operation. The social network at High Rocks is less tangible than the lodge where they work or a mural painted cooperatively by a group of girls; however, its presence is apparent through such visual representations.

Green and Haines define social capital as “long-term social relationships that build expectations and reciprocity” (110). High Rocks states that its goal is to teach leadership to girls as they develop personal confidence and academic skills (“High Rocks for Girls”). To accomplish this, the leaders of High Rocks follow a plan of support among staff and girls. There is a conscious effort to build trusting relationships among everyone at High Rocks. Sarah Riley said,

I think it builds trust between teenage girls most of them who have never experienced that before. I mean they might have experienced it with one person, but usually that one person has let them down in some critical way, or they will let them down in a real critical way in the next four years. But they've never felt trust as a community of peers, particularly as a community of peers of girls with other girls. Most of them have never had a trust relationship with someone who was in their twenties or somebody that was in their thirties and a new mom or somebody that was in their sixties. They may have a teacher that they have sort of a jocular relationship with, but in terms of really being able to trust somebody enough to play with them, to be straight

with them, and to talk about things that you're really struggling with, that's a really deep level of trust. (10 March 2008)

It is significant that High Rocks works to build relationships not only among the girls but recognizes the need for trusting relationships across generations. Building social capital is essential to healthy functioning and developing the network of support for the organization. High Rocks incorporates this effort into daily operations.

High Rocks is not an anonymous work environment, partly because it is a small staff, but also because staff members know they have to provide an environment of trust to foster similar social networks for the girls. Trusting relationships are an asset that staff members work to turn into an expectation for girls. Reciprocally, girls are expected to be trustworthy, and specifically, the staff wants the girls to support each other ("WVMR story"). This is initially done by breaking down social "cliques" during the first year summer camp and then emphasizing relationships and trust among the whole group. This process happens directly through an ongoing camp session called "girls group" in which the girls talk about emotional and personal issues in a supportive atmosphere moderated by a highly experienced staff person. It also happens more informally when staff may try to pair up girls that don't know each other as well to help each other with their homework or do a chore together.

The High Rocks model for creating a supportive network of girls and adults produces indicators that reflect Green and Haines' concepts of trust, norms and social networks—the building blocks of social capital (111). A High Rocks girl describes these indicators in her own words:

One way that I think that HR [High Rocks] changed my life is by helping me see that the present does not have to be the future. I think if you open your

heart and let somebody in once in a while you will soon realize what your meaning in life is. As soon as I received this program it was hard for me to trust somebody, but the HR became part of my family. If I had to go back in time I wouldn't change my decision to try to get into HR for anything. I think that HR has definitely changed my life a lot. When I look back onto what I was when I entered HR I was a person who thought that life was nothing but a stupid little thing we all had to cooperate with and that I had no control over my decisions. Well now I know that change is possible and with the help from the High Rocks family and support that they give each girl that comes into the program, I am very confident that they are helping us change the world one step at a time. (Anonymous)

This girl describes how High Rocks helped her to trust others, allowed her to envision new norms and expectations for her life, and gave her the opportunity to join a social network that she refers to as "family." This is just one example, but the successful continuation of the organization is a testament to the high level of social capital at High Rocks. Staff members continue to work passionately for High Rocks, parents and relatives of girls become volunteers for High Rocks as part of the social network, and girls want to continue the program. Indeed, there is an 89% retention rate for the four-year program. Thus, High Rocks is building social capital that girls can rely on as a resource to improve their lives.

Developing social capital at High Rocks benefits not only the High Rocks community, but it also extends into the local communities in Pocahontas, Greenbrier, and Nicholas counties. Several informants alluded to the development of trust between High Rocks and the local community during the past thirteen years. This was often brought up



when I asked informants if they thought High Rocks should be called a feminist organization. Several people cited the suspicion that surrounded High Rocks when it first started, and that some people thought it was a bunch of witches and lesbians on top of a mountain. Since that time, High Rocks has gained the trust of many people in the community. It's not surprising that a trusting relationship developed gradually between the local community and High Rocks because, as Brynn Kusic put it, "Loyalty to High Rocks grows out of their experience at High Rocks" (11 March 2008). Part of this development happens through word of mouth from parents and girls that have good experiences with High Rocks. Parent volunteers are an example of the benefits of a trusting relationship with the local community. High Rocks has also developed trust through outreach. For example, one of the first community service projects the High Rocks girls came up with was a program called "Use Your Noodle" where the girls and staff met at the local elementary school to lead after-school activities for elementary school students. The students, teachers, and parents involved in this program then had a personal and reliable connection to High Rocks.

Another way High Rocks builds a relationship with the community is through Youth Community Action. Girls meet on Thursdays in their respective counties to work on local service projects. The High Rocks website states,

The goal of the "Youth Community Action" program is to give teens the skills to plan, organize and implement direct service projects in response to needs they identify in their communities. Girls meet with staff after school to discuss their community's needs, and are empowered to do something positive to address these needs. ("High Rocks Girls Make a Difference")

Projects the girls have created include a women's self-defense class, a youth magazine, attending city council meetings, oral histories, a creek clean-up, founding an annual Arts and Beautification festival, after-school programs, and working to prevent child abuse. Significantly, High Rocks girls encourage other teens not already involved in High Rocks to become involved in these teen community action projects. When High Rocks is able to engage others in participation and make connections to individuals and groups outside the High Rocks community, a reciprocal relationship can be developed. Further evidence of this relationship will be discussed in the physical capital section of this chapter.

While these projects also represent efforts to build other types of capital in communities (political, cultural, and human), they all reveal a consistent effort to develop High Rocks's relationship with local communities. These projects also provide evidence of a strong social network within High Rocks. The girls and staff are eager to spend time together, and as a group they are able to put their social assets to use. Thus, as Diagram 3 represents, social capital at High Rocks is a feeling of connectedness and trust that isn't a visible object. However, the high level of social capital manifests itself as a network of people that work to affect positive change in their communities.

## HUMAN CAPITAL

Human capital development is the second main function of High Rocks. Green and Haines say, "human capital includes labor market skills, leadership skills, general education background, artistic development and appreciation, health, and other skills and experiences" (85). High Rocks focuses on labor (job) market skills, leadership skills, and general education background in developing human capital.

Building human capital at High Rocks is planned in four parts. First, High Rocks has a strong educational focus. Part of founder Susan Burt's original vision was to keep girls in school and interested in school so they would have more options as adults. In keeping with this vision High Rocks holds academic classes in math, science, English, history, business, and other relevant subjects during the summer camp sessions. These classes are designed to keep the girls involved in academic subjects over the summer so they will be better prepared in the fall. High Rocks staff members teach these subjects in alternative ways to foster a deeper understanding and interest in academics. For example, math classes focus on individual attention to ensure each girl masters basic math skills, and instead of working on problem sets, math teachers have the girls practice math in practical purposes or in riddles. High Rocks also pushes the girls to achieve beyond expectations by offering "college level" classes. Examples of these are a woman's history class taught by a college professor and a business class offering community college credit. Then, throughout the school year, the girls come to High Rocks at least once a week for tutoring. Most girls get individual tutors to help with their homework or general academics. The staff instills a strong sense of responsibility for schoolwork, and again the social network provides support.

The second way High Rocks promotes human capital is through college trips and a general expectant attitude that the girls attend college or another post-secondary program. Sixty-five percent of High Rocks girls will be the first in their family to attend college. The prospect of attending college can be daunting to a young person without a family role model. Still, 92% of High Rocks girls who completed the program attend a post-secondary institution ("Program Statistics"). Along with holding girls to the expectation to attend college, High Rocks staff members take groups of girls to visit regional colleges and

universities. This effort exposes the girls to opportunities and gets them thinking about their long-term plans. This is also closely related to bridging and bonding between communities, which I will discuss later.

The third way High Rocks builds human capital is through employment opportunities which provide on-the-job training in community development, education, non-profit work, counseling, management and administration. Employment opportunities are available for staff and girls. Staff members learn job skills and leadership skills. Sarah Riley, High Rocks co-director, calls the High Rocks program life changing for all involved "whether they're 13 or 30 years old" (6 September 2007). This statement speaks to the fact that the High Rocks organization sees everyone in their community as a worthwhile investment. As the staff members become more fully developed workers, they have the opportunity to be promoted or go on to other careers. For example, Erica Lipps started working at High Rocks as a science teacher during the summer. She was then hired as the program coordinator, and this past year she became co-director. Kendra Vincent came to High Rocks for a school project, and was then hired as an Americorps VISTA. After two years working at High Rocks, she went on to get her M.A. in Women's Studies and now works as a teacher in Florida. In terms of opportunity for the local community, paid internships at High Rocks provide summer jobs for local college students who are back at home for the summer. The internship improves the worker's job skills and experience at a higher quality than the alternative fast food jobs. In addition, these local jobs provide a viable opportunity for keeping talented young workers in the area.

For girls, High Rocks has set up a system of employment opportunities as junior counselors and then as interns. Girls are eligible for the paid junior counselor position during

their junior and senior years of high school. This group works at High Rocks over the summer to help prepare for camp, and then they attend the first year camp with more responsibilities. They have to organize the younger girls for chores, set good examples, and put their leadership skills to work. The internship program is an employment opportunity for girls after high school. These paid internships are open to those not from High Rocks as well, but usually one position is kept for a returning pledgetaker. This position requires even more responsibility as interns help lead the camp and help teach classes. They also assist in the office throughout the summer working on relevant High Rocks projects. These positions build human capital not only for the workers gaining experience and job training, but also for the other girls who see these workers as role models for responsible employees.

The final way High Rocks promotes human capital is by providing continued support for girls in college and after college when they start navigating their careers. Pledgetakers turn to High Rocks for letters of recommendation, contacts, and general advice. Sarah Riley contributed this anecdotal evidence of how the High Rocks network becomes an asset for human capital:

I mean an alum called me last week and said, "I'm getting ready to graduate from Berea and I want to go to DC and do a six month internship, would you write me a letter of recommendation?" And I said, "Sure, I'll write you a letter of recommendation...and I'll help you with something else, and I'll look in the High Rocks database and email everyone that's in DC that's a High Rocks supporter, and say, 'hey, will you help out?'" And within half an hour five people had responded and said, "yes, she can go with me to these eco-meetings" and "we'd love to have her over for dinner" and "I think maybe this

person has a place to stay,” and she called me back, and was just in tears, and said, “Sarah, sometimes I feel like I just work so hard to make things happen, and it’s so hard to make things happen, but when I’m in High Rocks world, people are just so willing to help you, you know?” (10 March 2008)

This type of resource would be helpful to anyone, and seems akin to the professional benefits of belonging to a fraternity or sorority in college. But for many girls at High Rocks who are the first person in their family to graduate from college or move somewhere where they don’t know anyone, this support would seem essential for their success.

The combination of these four planned efforts closely fits what Green and Haines describe as an “asset-based approach [that] builds on the experiences and interests of individuals and communities and matches them with the needs and opportunities of the region” (85). High Rocks starts by establishing girls’ interest in academics, follows through with tutoring and job experience, encourages girls to continue their development after high school, and provides continued support in academics, careers, and other life decisions. Again, as with social capital, the level of human capital at High Rocks is not always visible; it is the breadth of knowledge and skills that High Rocks staff and girls possess. However, the manifestation of these assets are represented by the educational opportunities and success for girls, and by job and leadership training available to staff and girls.

#### FINANCIAL, PHYSICAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

High Rocks develops other kinds of capital as well, but less ubiquitously. The following five types of capital are not specifically stated goals of High Rocks. However, each

is influential and essential to the High Rocks operation. As Diagram 3 shows, financial, physical, environmental, political, and cultural capital are all byproducts built on the scheme to fulfill the main purpose of High Rocks. These are the most tangible assets for the High Rocks community; however, the depth of these assets is not nearly as extensive as social or human capital.

First, financial capital is an important asset at High Rocks. Green and Haines focus on credit markets in their discussion of financial capital (149-164). However, financial capital at High Rocks does not follow this definition. In fact, financial capital at High Rocks hardly needs to be defined; it's the money, honey! It is what every person, family, organization and corporation needs to keep afloat. So of course, the effort to develop financial capital at High Rocks is always on the minds of staff members. Since High Rocks is cost-free to the girls, funding comes from grants and donations. The more money the organization gets, the easier it is to provide programming for girls, and the better results the organization has in order to receive more funding. In addition, more funding provides more job opportunities at High Rocks and therefore even more activity at High Rocks. The more people are employed and participating at High Rocks, the more money is recycled in the local economy. Workers rent or buy houses nearby and spend their money locally, and activities at High Rocks require supplies which often come from local establishments like paint from the local hardware store in Marlinton and pizza from the local gas station in Hillsboro.

Financial capital is not the goal of High Rocks, a non-profit organization, but it is a necessity for their survival. Moreover, the proper development of financial capital at High Rocks generates more than just money; it visibly produces positive economic outcomes for

the High Rocks organization and the local economy. It also provides an example of a successful women-run small business in rural West Virginia. I will discuss the significance of this further in Chapter 6.

Physical capital has been built at High Rocks, literally. Green and Haines define physical capital as buildings and infrastructure, and say that it is significant because “to a great degree, physical capital endures over a long time and is rooted in place” (123). This is certainly true at High Rocks. Virginia Steele, who lived in a house that still stands on the property, donated the land. Since then, High Rocks has built a lodge, a camp with over ten buildings, and a new classroom building modeled after an old one-room schoolhouse. In addition, after Virginia Steele passed away, her 100 year-old farmhouse was renovated to accommodate the summer interns.

In addition, physical capital at High Rocks allows for reciprocation with other people and organizations in the area. Sarah Riley explained that,

Soon the community will be able to rent it, but we've also offered it to people that we've partnered with if they want to have a board retreat or...the library's going to have a meeting here, the radio station's going to have a meeting here, the Snowshoe foundation is going to come and have a meeting here, and those are all people that have supported High Rocks or were partners in other things that they let us use their space. (10 March 2008)

Thus, the buildings and land at High Rocks provides the organization physical capital that they can use to trade services with other local groups. These arrangements also contribute to closer connections and shared trust among the local community.



Furthermore, the High Rocks land holds a special place in the minds of pledgetakers. High Rocks promotes a bond between the girls and the land. Susan Burt explained, “We have always said the HR [High Rocks] land belongs to the whole HR community, and the girls are part of it and can always come back, and [we] are trying to encourage them to come back whenever they can” (29 April 2009).<sup>5</sup> When girls come to High Rocks and go through the intensive summer camp, they form a relationship with the land and the wilderness that surrounds the camp. Many consider it a sacred place. Valerie Monico put it simply, “for High Rocks, it’s important to be tucked away” (11 March 2008). In this sense, the land becomes a safe space for many people.

Flora, Flora, and Fey warn that “concentration on built [physical] capital while ignoring social capital [can lead to] rural sprawl or ‘gentrification’ of rural areas” (190). The development of High Rocks probably won’t contribute to rural sprawl or gentrification in the sense that Flora, Flora, and Fey note, but the land was almost sold to a developer before Susan Burt got the chance to raise enough money to match the price the developer was willing to pay. Furthermore, it is significant that physical capital at High Rocks works in tandem not only with social capital, but also human and cultural capital. Most of the buildings, with the exception of the lodge, were built with the help of High Rocks girls. During camp, girls take a building class where they learn construction and teamwork skills and help build new camp shelters and other small structures. As mentioned above, Virginia Steele’s house, which stands on the High Rocks property, was renovated and put to use instead of being torn down. In addition it prompted a High Rocks parent to connect with High Rocks:

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<sup>5</sup> Legally, the High Rocks board members are the owners of the High Rocks land. Currently, the board includes four former High Rocks girls.

George Rose has been a very special "Bright Star" to High Rocks not only this year but over the last 3 years. George entered the High Rocks galaxy soon after his daughter April did, in the fall of 2002. He'd come up to pick up April, at first waiting in the car, but as we got to talking, he started volunteering to help out here and there. George doesn't brag much (except about his family), so it took awhile for us to realize how many things he was good at. Since then George has done electrical work, fixed every engine we've had on the place, made plans for better water supply, hauled it when we ran out, done plumbing and carpentry, and taught both the girls and staff how to do lots more things. In the spring of 04 we had a crew of AmeriCorps volunteers here trying to work on an old farmhouse on our property. They were doing repairs, patching the ceilings, and drywalling the kitchen to have a place for summer interns to stay while working at camps over the summer. Thank God George showed up to teach them how to do it all. He visited about every day over the next 2 weeks to give pointers and help them out. Turns out his aunt, Georgia Thompson, used to live there in the 50's and George used to visit her here as a young teen. But the thing we are most thankful for is George's friendship and faith in what we're trying to do at High Rocks. He has taught us that nothing that happens is something worth giving up or getting mad over. He has taught us that if we're patient things will work out for the best. His example of not judging other people and taking life as it comes is relaxing and inspiring to us. George is a supporter we could have never done without. (High Rocks for Girls 2006:5)

This example says a lot about High Rocks, but in terms of developing physical capital on the

High Rocks property, it shows an attention and reliance on social capital and a reverence for the history and future (cultural capital) of the community. Again, although physical capital is not part of the main purpose of High Rocks, it is a visible asset and essential to High Rocks operations. Plus, the development of physical capital has fostered local social, human, and cultural capital.

When I first started writing about High Rocks for this thesis, I did not have the impression that High Rocks had any sophisticated plans to address environmental capital. After getting up to date on this issue and conducting interviews, I now see that environmental capital is becoming more and more a focus of High Rocks programs. Green and Haines discuss environmental capital in terms of controlling land development with respect to natural resources (169). It is true, as Sarah Riley put it, that the environment “has always been a factor...[even] before ‘green’ was a buzzword” (10 March 2008). The most obvious way High Rocks has addressed environmental capital is in its maintenance of the land. The land that High Rocks now owns was donated, and in turn, the organization had it sustainably logged. High Rocks then used the profits from the timber to pay the original owner for the land and build the lodge. Presently, High Rocks has developed part of the land for the camp, lodge, and horse pasture, but most of the hundreds of acres that belong to the High Rocks are wilderness. This land abuts the Monongahela National Forest, and this is good for the local community in terms of environmental capital because it provides additional undeveloped land that serves as a buffer between protected forest and developed land.

The primary way High Rocks addresses environmental capital is through educating the girls about their community’s natural resources. This element of the program has its

roots in basic wilderness experiences. High Rocks knows it has a wonderful resource in the surrounding forests, and this is impressed upon the girls. A challenging nature hike is part of every camp, and girls that enter the program after their first year of high school are required to participate in a three-day backpacking trip through the Monongahela National Forest to the High Rocks property. In addition, science and wilderness survival classes taught at camp focus on local environmental assets like animals and edible plants. Respect for the land and living things is reinforced by the idea that the High Rocks land belongs to the entire High Rocks community—the point of which is to instill ownership and responsibility for the organization and in every girl.

Environmental education and action has become even more integrated at High Rocks in the past few years. In large part due to the influence of co-director Erica Lipps and site and sustainability coordinator Matt Tate, educational activities have shifted to more action-oriented projects and trips. As part of “trip camps” designed to get girls to “learn to navigate unfamiliar environments and meet people with different perspectives and backgrounds,” High Rocks has taken girls around the state to investigate watersheds (High Rocks for Girls 2007: 8-9). This included trips to various rivers, a mountaintop removal site, the office of the Department of Environmental Protection, and the governor’s mansion.<sup>6</sup> This spring, staff members Erica Lipps and Missy Westbrook are taking the girls for an “eco-action” trip to the Weirton, West Virginia/Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania area to see firsthand how coal mined in West Virginia is used for northern power. They will also be meeting with an urban

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<sup>6</sup> The High Rocks girls really got a chance to use their voices when they spoke to West Virginia First Lady Gayle Manchin. The girls raised their concerns about mountaintop removal.

agriculture organization called Grow Pittsburgh and continuing their work with watershed organizations.

High Rocks has indeed taken proactive steps to increase their impact on environmental capital. The addition of a sustainability coordinator to the staff is evidence of the investment and priority given to developing environmental capital within High Rocks. Education alone won't increase environmental capital in the local community, but education combined with stewardship of the land and focusing on technical skills will create an experienced and knowledgeable group of people. Knowledge and experience has the potential to become an asset to the community.

Developing political capital among the girls at High Rocks is building democracy. Green and Haines define political capital as "influence over major development projects and other issues affecting the quality of life of residents" (197). This is particularly important for High Rocks in creating a sustainable organization. High Rocks leaders want the girls to be involved with the development and decision-making process at High Rocks and in the rest of the community. The more experience and sense of civic responsibility the girls have in their community, the more likely they will be to take over leadership at High Rocks after the founding leaders are gone. High Rocks appoints girls to membership on the board of directors for High Rocks. This promotes a sense of duty towards the organization and gives girls power in decision-making.

High Rocks leaders also recognize that real change won't happen without political capital. High quality democracy is essential for resources to be distributed fairly. Helen Lewis asserts that taking political power is one of the twelve steps toward creating sustainable communities, and that "political activity becomes essential in order to challenge

and change policies and to redirect resources to the community” (Lewis 2007:321). The main way High Rocks builds democracy is by promoting a sense of civic pride and responsibility. The rural communities that High Rocks serves are probably not exciting to teenagers. There’s not a lot for them to do, and this negatively impacts the girls’ sense of the worth of their community. High Rocks teaches the girls to value their home and take responsibility for making changes. Chris Campbell said an important function of High Rocks is to help the girls understand “what it means to be from Appalachia, and instead of being ashamed of that to embrace it and be proud of that, and all the programs definitely encourage girls to give back to their community, to strengthen them, as opposed to saying, ‘well you just have to get out of here’” (11 March 2008). Fostering pride in the local community can have a dramatic effect on other efforts in community development as well.

High Rocks encourages girls to be active in local and state decision-making. One example of this is when some High Rocks girls were invited to give a presentation at a public policy forum on children’s issues in Charleston at the state legislature. They wrote the following poem as a group to present at the forum:

*Group Poem*

I am smart.  
 I am dependable.  
 I am a stepdaughter.  
 I am a caring youth trying to make  
 a difference in my community.  
 I am a cowgirl.  
 I am a survivor.

We are the next generation of adults.  
 We are the High Rocks, everyone,  
 everywhere.  
 We are a group together, ourselves  
 united by a very tight bond.

We are one.

Together we can take a stand.  
 Together we can help other people in need.  
 Together we can make a life-altering impact  
 on the people around us.  
 Together we can make  
 a difference in our community.  
 Together we can change the world.  
 Together we can do more, be more,  
 live more.

I will not give up.  
 I will be honest and be the best I can be.  
 I will get an A in science.  
 I will try to change the world.  
 I will make decisions for myself,  
 love, trust, care.  
 I will accept others.  
 I will put aside differences  
 and help other people.  
 I will be the change.

We need to stop fighting  
 and listen to one another.  
 We need to be respectful  
 and try to make a change.  
 We need to be accepted.  
 We do not need to be degraded.  
 We need support.

Help me understand life better.  
 Help me help people that are in need.  
 Help me be more, do more, help more.  
 Help me to be aware,  
 which is not the same as being wary.

I am confident, honest, beautiful, strong.  
 I am a girl, the world, the stars.  
 I am the girl you shunned, but look at  
 where I am now (High Rocks for GIRls 2004: 4)

This is a perfect example of political capital. The forum was an outlet for the girls to express themselves politically, and it was an opportunity for state leaders to gather political advice

from actual members of local communities.

Political capital could almost be the third major goal at High Rocks along with social and human capital. Perhaps as time goes on, the extent to which High Rocks is creating political capital will be easier to determine if, for example, an alumna runs for office or takes over one of the leadership roles at High Rocks. Until then, political capital is easy to see as an asset that High Rocks girls practice as part of the program and in their local communities.

Cultural capital is developed at High Rocks in two primary ways. First, as discussed in the “physical capital” section of this chapter, High Rocks was able to preserve the farmhouse on the High Rocks land. Additionally, the newest structure built on the land was designed in the style of a one-room schoolhouse. Both the oldest and the newest buildings at High Rocks sustain the culture of the community. Green and Haines point to urban renewal programs that contribute to community character. They say, “Art districts make important contributions by transforming abandoned buildings and vacant lots into more productive venues” (221). The urban development that Green and Haines refer to doesn’t quite translate to a place like High Rocks because the High Rocks land and buildings are somewhat hidden from the public. Still, the land and buildings certainly impact the High Rocks girls’ and staffs’ sense of culture. Moreover, when the High Rocks buildings become available to the public, the rest of the local community will be able to enjoy the High Rocks cultural capital.

Second, cultural capital in the form of art is created at High Rocks mostly through painting and theater projects that the girls work on during camp. Cultural capital can be expressed in other ways besides artistic endeavors, and I will discuss this in the next section. Green and Haines focus on the arts as the primary way communities can harness cultural capital for community benefit (211-223). Art at High Rocks is an important way of



reinforcing the social network and community. The most visible examples of this are the murals that adorn the High Rocks property. Every year, the new first year High Rocks girls create a group mural that they paint onto a building somewhere at camp. The girls decide as a group what will go into the mural, and everyone paints part of the picture no matter their artistic ability. These murals serve as a reminder of all the girls who have been at High Rocks and their unity as a group.

In 2006, the High Rocks girls painted sixteen individual life-size abstract portraits of themselves as their mural project. These pieces were put on display in Carnegie Hall in Lewisburg, WV, and then at the monthly art walk in Charleston, WV (High Rocks for Girls 2006:4). In this way, High Rocks is developing cultural capital within the organization and then providing this capital to the local community. These and other art projects at High Rocks serve an important purpose to the girls and the community; they create a sense of pride in local artistic expression.

In some ways, artistic creations are a visual byproduct of social capital at High Rocks. Diagram 3 represents how this kind of cultural capital is built upon social and human capital. High Rocks pledgetaker Molly Must is a great example of how cultural capital, social capital, and human capital all intersect. In addition, her story provides an example of the translocal nature of community development at High Rocks. Molly came to High Rocks as a girl in high school and became a junior counselor during the summer of 2003. Molly is an artist, and at camp that summer she helped teach the mural class (with the author of this thesis, incidentally). When I interviewed Molly five years later, she was director of the Asheville Mural Project in Asheville, NC. As we talked about her involvement in High Rocks, she realized that High Rocks had been the site of her first mural leadership role. She now works

to integrate art and community in her professional life. Molly also stays in touch with High Rocks and recently helped them design a logo for their marketing materials (13 May 2008). This example shows how building cultural capital at High Rocks can translate to leadership, professional, and translocal community assets.

#### RURAL APPALACHIAN FEMINIST CAPITAL

Development of rural Appalachian feminist capital is the basis for the development of the previous seven types of capital at High Rocks. Briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, rural Appalachian feminist capital is the terminology that most usefully describes the primary function of High Rocks. This concept honors the important feminist work at High Rocks but places it in a more specific and descriptive context. "Rural Appalachian feminist" is distinct from the common understanding of "feminist." Using the term "rural" and "Appalachian" connotes the type of community in which High Rocks is located, and therefore what issues might be priorities over others. The word "capital" refers to the capacity of women's empowerment as a resource for community development. Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora in the third edition of Rural Communities: Legacy and Change define capital as a resource or asset that when invested creates new resources (17). Investment in empowerment at High Rocks has increased the capacity of girls and staff to contribute to the seven other types of capital. Green and Haines's discussion of cultural capital is useful to understanding the relevance of "capital" in this terminology. Green and Haines cite the three states of cultural capital as discussed by Bourdieu: embodied, institutionalized, and objectified. Green and Haines's explanation of Bourdieu's embodied state includes the "values and traditions that people inherit from their family and community" (213). Thus, when girls experience

empowerment at High Rocks they are not only able to recognize oppression as women but also as people living in a specific community with specific issues. Rural Appalachian feminist capital is a consciousness-raising of the girls and staff to develop themselves as individuals in their community and allows them to pursue the previous seven types of capital.

Rural Appalachian feminist capital is probably *not* something you would hear if you were hanging around the High Rocks community. Even though they don't explicitly use the term "feminism," the goals and mission of High Rocks is reflective of basic feminist principles, and as I argued in Chapter 4, feminist theory and action is pervasive at High Rocks. Therefore, I use the term "feminist" confidently when referring to High Rocks because they are clearly practicing feminism.

Evidence of rural Appalachian feminist capital is found by looking at how High Rocks passes on customs and traditions of strong, confident, smart, rural women leaders. High Rocks boasts that 93% of participants graduate high school, as opposed to a graduation rate between 82% and 85% for the high schools the girls attend ("West Virginia Public Schools"). Additionally, 89% of girls complete the four-year High Rocks program, 60% of girls have leadership positions or jobs, 75% are active in community service, and 92% go on to college, military, or vocational programs (High Rocks for Girls 2008). These statistics are just a few examples of how High Rocks is able to keep many girls focused on creating meaningful lives for themselves. These successes often result from a many-year struggle to develop empowerment for an individual girl. This is a group effort as the entire High Rocks community works to support the girls in this pursuit. In this way, High Rocks has created its own cultural tradition.

A cultural tradition of women leaders is significant to the local community. Women's leadership has been found to be an important asset in rural communities. Jean Richardson, in Partnerships in Communities: Reweaving the Fabric of Rural America, says,

Rural development often employs outside expertise but does not adequately use some of the most important local resources: women and senior citizens. Placing more women and senior citizens in leadership roles can be the key to creating successful programs...I have found that appropriate leadership development that can draw more women into leadership positions is a centrally important factor for sustainable rural community development. (34)

Indeed, High Rocks makes sure to place women in leadership roles and has an effective system for drawing them into those roles. Many High Rocks pledgetakers have taken on leadership roles. Examples include: four former High Rocks girls are now board members; a former High Rocks girl became an activist against domestic violence after a personal experience; Molly Must's mural leadership experience at High Rocks followed through to her position as director of the Asheville mural project; Maribeth Saleem-Tanner started as an AmeriCorps VISTA and became a Co-Director of High Rocks; Erica Lipps started out at High Rocks as a summer camp science teacher and ultimately became a Co-Director of High Rocks. These examples indicate a high level of rural Appalachian feminist capital, an asset that allows women and girls to act on the feminist tenets of equality and leadership. High Rocks girls use rural Appalachian feminist capital to positively affect their communities.

Rural Appalachian feminist capital is the least visible and hardest to describe asset operating at High Rocks. Yet, it is the foundation and philosophy on which all other capital development at High Rocks is based. It is the fundamental consciousness of the people

working for High Rocks that relies on the assumption that investing in girls is the right thing to do for rural community development in West Virginia.

Ultimately, all eight types of capital are essential and influence each other. Danielle Stollack pointed out that every activity or program at High Rocks is an opportunity to gain experience and skill:

I think it's really important that there is such a diverse staff to bring so many different things because I think each staff member is correct. It is really important for them to make these videos to have them introspect and to learn how to use technology in a new way, and it is really important for them to learn how to do a business, and so the girls are really lucky that they do have all the resources that...give them these skills from all over the place." (11 March 2008)

Diagram 3 (p. 65) illustrates how these entwined assets fall into place in the community development system at High Rocks. In light of this evidence, High Rocks is certainly a significant part of the local community. The next chapter will examine ways High Rocks is significant as a model of community development in a broader sense. The characteristics of High Rocks discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 reveal examples of successful feminist and community action relevant to rural and Appalachian communities.

## CHAPTER 6. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FEMINIST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN APPALACHIA

*“When people hear about what the organization is doing, it’s really exciting for people who care either about young women or care about Appalachia” (Ada Smith 4 April 2008).*

According to political scientist Stephen Fisher’s analysis, successful organizing in Appalachia is multi-issue and membership-run. Successful long-term organizations provide space where people connect their experience with societal phenomena, confront racism and other social problems, and empower themselves to do something about it (329). Richard Couto adds that coalition building is a crucial element to successful organizing in Appalachia (259-263). Additionally, I argue that translocal community development is highly beneficial to organizations in the Appalachian region. Similarly, feminist scholars have argued for many of these same tactics. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Karen Offen and Claire Moses both advocate an expanded definition of feminism to include multiple voices and multiple issues. Further, consciousness-raising, confronting racism and social problems, and empowerment have all been key elements of the feminist movement throughout its history in the United States. These are issues where feminist action can provide lessons and models for higher quality community development efforts. Finally, like community development, the success of the feminist movement depends on the ability of diverse groups and people connecting under a similar purpose and the promotion of exchanging and merging ideas (Offen 156). The ways in which all of these criteria overlap create a significant dynamic between community development and feminism.

High Rocks provides a particularly relevant model of the interaction between feminism and community development in the Appalachian region. First, High Rocks is a model of multi-issue organizing. This is detailed at length in Chapter 5, but I will briefly highlight the implications for Appalachia specifically in this chapter. Second, High Rocks is a model of a membership-run organization. Here, again, I will provide examples of how this characteristic benefits the Appalachian region. Third, High Rocks is a model for coalition building. This is partly a result of the translocal community formed from the strong bonds created by a membership-run philosophy. Here I will focus on partnerships between High Rocks and other organizations in the region and the possibility of an Appalachian women's movement. Fourth, High Rocks is a model for connections among diverse people. This is an issue that High Rocks is currently struggling with, and examples here are highly relevant to the complexities of diversity in Appalachia. Finally, translocal community development ensures the maintenance of multi-issue organization, coalition building, and connections among diverse people at High Rocks. All five organizational qualities have gradually developed at High Rocks and continue to evolve. The processes serve as useful examples of how to incorporate these qualities into community efforts in Appalachia.

#### MULTI-ISSUE ORGANIZING

Chapter 5 examined the myriad issues involved in community capital development at High Rocks. Every issue at High Rocks is an offshoot of the primary goal—women's empowerment. In turn, women's empowerment ideally leads to long-term benefits for the community. The High Rocks mission statement exemplifies the holistic character of the organization's philosophy (see Appendix B). This broad and open-ended approach to helping

girls takes into account various barriers in society and also various opportunities for improvement. Thus, unlike other efforts to fix problems in Appalachia that only focus on single issues like creating jobs or promoting education or repairing someone's "Mountain Dew mouth,"<sup>7</sup> multi-issue or holistic organizing is better able to confront the underlying reasons for problems. Community or regional problems do not exist in isolation.

Not only does a multi-issue agenda make for a far-reaching organization, it also helps to ensure longevity. During the session I participated in with High Rocks at the 2009 Appalachian Studies Association Conference, one audience member asked what needed to change for High Rocks not to be needed anymore. This is a curious question for an organization to consider because on one hand, the purpose of the group is to make a change. However, when the change is made, then there is no need for the organization. If people's jobs are on the line, then the question becomes, does the organization really want to become obsolete? High Rocks has so far avoided this dilemma by widening their scope and following new paths in response to the girls' needs. Thus, while specific issues might change, the need for High Rocks will likely remain. High Rocks' ability to envision broad goals allows it not only to affect the community's economic, social, intellectual, and democratic basis, but it also ensures that the High Rocks will continue to be an asset to the community.

Empowerment of the community requires continuous maintenance.

The High Rocks model is particularly interesting because it incorporates multiple issues while remaining focused. This requires a lot of critical thinking, discussion, and problem solving at an organizational level. It also requires some experimentation. Elizabeth Engelhardt noted that High Rocks's rural location factors into the success of the organization

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<sup>7</sup> Mountain Dew mouth, or MDM, is a condition highlighted by Diane Sawyer's ABC News segment "Hidden America, Children of the Mountains" in February 2009.



by allowing for experimenting without the pressure of being closely monitored. She said, "When no one's looking you just do what you want to do, and when it works you can say 'See here it is!' and when it doesn't no one had to notice and you modify it and make it better" (31 October 2008). Engelhardt added that although word can travel fast in small communities, institutionally speaking, High Rocks developed somewhat under the radar. Therefore, as High Rocks gradually took on more issues and became more visible they also became a stronger, more evolved organization.

#### MEMBERSHIP-RUN ORGANIZATIONS

In order for High Rocks to maintain its commitment to girls and keep in check its secondary purposes, the organization has to respond to the needs of the members. In this sense, High Rocks is a membership-run organization. Of course there is a group of staff members who carry out the bulk of the organizational work, but all this work is in response to helping the girls. High Rocks is able to stay true to this codependent model of direction by constant and consistent evaluation. Formal and informal methods of evaluating the organization are a priority at High Rocks through survey evaluations, personal conversations, observation, and group brainstorming.

A codependent authority between girls and staff is integral to the continued relevance of High Rocks. However, when Fisher includes "membership run" as a criteria for a successful organization, he means not only should members have a voice in decision-making, but also feel a sense of responsibility to the mission of the organization. Richard Couto defines this characteristic as "sweat equity" where "people who take on this role worry about the organization and its work and invest a portion of themselves as collateral for the

community-base mediating structure” (Couto 241). The investment of members’ selves into an organization provides needed labor, ideas, and connections to more potential members. Moreover, invested members represent the organization to the community at large and can generate interest and support. This last part may be particularly relevant to rural Appalachian communities where word of mouth can have significant influence. Ultimately, in order for an organization to survive, younger members will have to take over for the older people that ran the organization. Thus, the larger the amount of invested members in an organization, the better likelihood the organization will continue.

High Rocks is certainly aware of this fact, and one of their long-term goals has been to instill a sense of ownership in the girls so that one day they will be able to take over High Rocks. This has not yet come to fruition completely, but there are positive-looking signs. First, many girls have returned as interns and continue to be involved through volunteering, sending money, or keeping in touch. These are probably the most common examples of girls’ continued involvement. Girls have also come back to serve as VISTA workers at High Rocks, and there are currently four former High Rocks girls on the High Rocks Board. Additionally, changes in the leadership show that High Rocks is preparing for the long haul. Susan Burt, the founder and long-time director of High Rocks stepped down from the directorship a few years ago. When I interviewed her in 2008 she said, “This is the first year that I feel like I could jump off and it would be OK” (11 March 2008). This is a significant transition for a grassroots organization with a charismatic leader. Many times without the original leader a group will dissolve. Another example of the younger generation taking over for the older generation is Sarah Riley’s career at High Rocks. Sarah, Susan’s daughter, started helping out with High Rocks from the beginning when she was home for breaks from

college. Eventually she made the decision to return to West Virginia permanently, and she is now co-director of High Rocks. Sarah recently received the distinction of being named one of The State Journal's "Generation Next 40 under 40 West Virginians." These are all examples of steps taken from being an organization run by the girls' ideas to being an organization run by the girls. In time, the true effectiveness of sweat equity at High Rocks will be revealed.

If Appalachian communities can become places where young people are engaged and where opportunities exist, problems like the brain drain and aging communities will be lessened. Of course this is a very tall order for one organization, but the High Rocks model is useful as an example of programming that keeps young people engaged and creates a long-term bond between individuals and community. Additionally, High Rocks is one resource in a coalition that empowers young people and creates a mutually beneficial relationship between young people and their communities. This is one example of the role coalitions need to play in the future of the Appalachian region.

## COALITION BUILDING

High Rocks is a model for coalition building. This is partly a result of the translocal community formed from the strong bonds created by a membership-run philosophy. The extended network built around High Rocks is due in part to the deep connection and responsibility pledgetakers feel as part of a membership run organization. In this section I focus on partnerships between High Rocks and other organizations in the region and the possibility of an Appalachian women's movement.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Couto and Guthrie explain that coalitions are vital to successful organizing because they allow “ideas to travel” and increase the quality and accountability of organizations (253-263). Working in isolation can be useful for experimentation, as I discussed in the previous section; however, grassroots organizations need support from other entities and eventually need to be critically examined.

Over the years, High Rocks has made connections with many individuals and other organizations. Notably, they developed their intern program from one that was focused mostly on educational experience to one focused on social change (Sarah Riley 10 March 2008). This allowed for a group of interns with a greater variety of backgrounds. Thus, not only do interns provide new information and different perspectives, they also create a connection to other groups. For example, High Rocks has built an internship and alternative spring break exchange with Haverford College and the Haverford Center for Peace and Global Leadership as well as the Berea College Appalachian Center. Additionally, I am encouraging the development of an alternative spring break trip for Appalachian State University students to High Rocks. Through each of these connections, students have the opportunity to create contacts with an organization relevant to their studies. Likewise, High Rocks gets to build their network of students from different backgrounds.

High Rocks is also now involved with several leading social change organizations in Appalachia as well as smaller groups affiliated with work at High Rocks. Sarah Riley’s nomination for The State Journal’s 40 under 40 nomination reads,

Sarah works with partners to share wisdom about our work here. She works closely with the Berea College Appalachian Center, the Appalachian Fund, the Haverford Center for Peace and Global Citizenship, Appalshop, the

Highlander Research and Education Center, the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, the Brushy Fork Institute, public libraries, child and youth advocacy, family services, public schools, several small foundations, and others throughout the state and region who are interested in learning from and contributing to the High Rocks mission and magic. (Riley 10 April 2009)

The web of pledgetakers at High Rocks has created a significant network including the above list of organizations. All of these are important to idea exchange, mutual support, and accountability.

Still, a good quality coalition isn't just a group of loosely related organizations. A coalition must share goals and work together. There does seem to be some evidence that High Rocks is part of a micro-resurgence or new outlet for the women's movement in Appalachia. As I discussed in Chapter 4, a couple of board members expressed their interest in High Rocks as a way to be active in feminism. High Rocks has served as a link between theory and practice for several women's studies students, including myself. Even so, as I discussed in Chapter 2, there has never really been a cohesive feminist movement in Appalachia, and that makes it hard for any new effort to get off the ground. Moreover, as an organization, High Rocks isn't interested in being a hub of an Appalachian feminist movement. However, it is a nexus for many feminists in Appalachia, and it may be important for those people to form a coalition and pursue conversations about feminism in the region. This could be a positive byproduct of the High Rocks network. Further research and dialogue about feminism in Appalachia, particularly third wave feminism, is needed.

## CONNECTIONS AMONG DIVERSE PEOPLE *In future, High Rocks may decide to*

*recruit* The perception of the Appalachian region as a hotbed for racism remains unmitigated, particularly after the 2008 presidential election when the region was portrayed as unwilling to vote for a Black candidate by many media outlets and confirmed as unwilling by many voters. This is not to say that Appalachia is homogenous or that racism is any worse here than elsewhere, but Appalachian communities and organizations have yet to amply confront racism and xenophobia. Efforts toward this end are important to learn from and recognize.

*an effort* High Rocks is struggling with these issues, and has improved in dealing with sexism and class differences. This is probably due to the nature of the program (to empower *girls*) and the insistence that High Rocks is a place for all girls, not just the most economically destitute or ones that can pay the most. Therefore, girls from a variety of class backgrounds are able to connect and respect each other as equals.

*confront* High Rocks is still trying to figure out how to approach issues such as racism and homophobia in the best way. The racial make-up of the area is predominately white. Regardless of the level of racism in this area, people of color are an extreme minority, and thus their status as a group is likely low. Self-selection has always been part of the process at High Rocks. Recruiters from High Rocks visit the schools for information sessions, but there is no effort to recruit certain girls. The individual girl has to want to come to High Rocks. The only requirement is that the girl want to make a change in her life. Since High Rocks girls are self-selecting, there is no effort to go out and specifically recruit girls of color. This is an issue discussed among the staff, but they have not yet reached a clear solution (Campbell). Confronting racism is a crossroads for High Rocks where the leaders have to decide which direction to take: moving towards becoming more active for social justice, or

refocusing on service to the self-selected girls. In the future, High Rocks may decide to recruit actively for diversity, but for now, they are sticking to self-selection.

Nonetheless, High Rocks currently confronts racism in two main ways. First, High Rocks relies on its intern program to attract people from outside the community from different backgrounds to the program. Second, they take girls on trips to areas where the population is more dense and diverse. For example, High Rocks volunteer Naomi Cohen takes a group of girls on a service trip for Habitat for Humanity every year. Part of this trip is an effort to immerse the girls in a community unlike their own. In 2007 and 2008 they went to Birmingham, Alabama and worked in predominately Black neighborhoods. This year they are traveling to Jacksonville, Florida. They have also traveled to Washington, DC to do work at homeless shelters where they interacted with homeless people, another population they don't see in their home communities because homelessness is less visible in rural communities.

Sarah Riley relayed a small anecdote that describes the impact of these trips on the girls:

...and the National Alliance which is a neo-Nazi organization over the hill, they're less active than they used to be, but...we definitely have a set of High Rocks parents that are sympathizers and taking their daughter on a trip to Birmingham to the Civil Rights museum and having her put that on her MySpace identifier page...this picture of her and this African-American friend that she made while she was on that Birmingham trip, smiling away. Social change right here! (10 March 2008)

These trips won't change the lack of ethnic diversity in the local community, but they offer girls the experience of interacting with people they might otherwise never know. This affects the inherited racism that can be a part of rural Appalachian communities.

Another prominent issue that developed at High Rocks over the past few years is same sex relationships between girls. One of the fundamental tenets of High Rocks is to remove sex and romantic relationships from the girls' environment. When I was an intern we were discouraged from engaging in conversations about boyfriends around the girls. The logic is that removing this element from the girls' lives for even a short period will allow them to be themselves and focus on learning about themselves and their academic life.

This, of course, becomes a major conflict when same sex relationships are a factor. High Rocks is struggling to find a way to maintain the benefits of a sex-free zone but at the same time recognize girls that are lesbians or questioning their sexual identity. The High Rocks program is a transformative experience for the girls, and adolescence is a ripe time for sexual development. Thus, as an organization, High Rocks staff need to be ready to help girls navigate this territory. Meanwhile, the organization is still overcoming suspicion from some in the local community. Some of my informants wished that High Rocks would take a more vocal stance in support of gays and lesbians, but also recognized the complications in doing so. Missy Westbrook said, "I don't know if [High Rocks] can reach out in a broader sense without disturbing trust with the community if the community thought High Rocks was promoting lesbianism" (19 August 2008). Again, High Rocks must walk a thin line in maintaining trust with the local community and also allowing girls a safe space to explore and be full people.



To be sure, the staff is more aware and more prepared to deal with this complexity now. Pledgetakers I interviewed who were involved with High Rocks as recently as five years ago had little to say when I asked them how High Rocks confronts sexuality issues. In fact, some interpreted the question to mean sex education rather than sexual orientation. However, all of the informants active at High Rocks within the past two years were able to respond about ways High Rocks confronts this issue. Even informants that attended High Rocks before sexual orientation became a common issue had a sense that High Rocks would be open and accepting. Cassie Hill said, "All those involved in High Rocks would accept anybody regardless of sexual orientation" (22 October 2008). Pledgetakers that were involved with High Rocks long enough to see this issue become more common described the initial steps the organization is taking toward incorporating same-sex relationship issues in High Rocks operations. Sarah Riley described the development of this issue at High Rocks:

We've had, probably in the last two years, five girls that have had sexual orientation identity crises over the summer. And we've definitely had interns and part-time staff members that were out which I think is really, really, really important for mentoring for those girls that are questioning whether, you know, I'm a lesbian or a bisexual. We've had girls that have been targeted in bomb threats. We had a girl who's bisexual and was targeted in a top five kill list on a bomb threat in Greenbrier County this year because she was bisexual. And so we talk them through a lot of those things. And that's just in the confines of camp, but over the last eight years, we've been walking with a lot of alums through the time they leave high school through six years after that of a lot of experimentation and wondering. (10 March 2008)

Riley's description reveals the supportive nature of High Rocks toward girls dealing with their sexuality, but for now the policy seems to remain limited to an individual case-by-case basis rather than program-wide action. Along that same line, many informants also talked about the need to maintain balance of support between viewpoints. Samantha Mitchell said:

I think that we try to be really fair and diplomatic about it. It's part of the tolerance piece. We cannot tell the girls who have been taught that homosexuality is wrong that their cultural upbringing and religious beliefs are wrong...but we can teach them to accept the person for who they are and love them, even if they do not agree with their views. But we also support our bisexual and lesbian girls in being who they are and being open about who they are. It's a fine line that we walk, and we are constantly learning and revising how it is that we deal with such issues. (18 November 2008)

Significantly, Mitchell noted the revision process in dealing with issues like sexuality. One of High Rocks strengths is the ability to change and modify operations according to the girls' needs. As this issue continues to be on the table, High Rocks will develop new and better ways to overcome the challenge. The question remains: how long will this process take?

Perhaps these values should be a given at any organization, but it is noteworthy that High Rocks actively confronts these issues. Moreover, this is an area where the wisdom High Rocks has gained from dealing with these issues over the past thirteen years could be really useful to other organizations in the region that haven't begun that process. The fight against racism and other types of social injustice is a process that High Rocks continues to develop. The extent to which they achieve quality connections with diverse populations and the purposefulness of their stance on social injustice will determine the level of progressive

quality in the organization. In order to work toward the democratic prospect of social and political equality, all forms of inequality must be addressed. The holistic framework of High Rocks makes this a possibility in the organization and serves as a model for other organizations in Appalachia and all places where inequality exists.

## TRANSLOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Translocal community development is highly important in fostering a healthy and sustainable local organization that has a wide-reaching impact. High Rocks is able to be a multi-issue organization involved in coalition building and connections among diverse people because it invests in translocal community development. This aspect of the organization is a linchpin to High Rocks's significance in the Appalachian region.

When discussing community at High Rocks, there are two connected but distinct groups. First, there is the geographic (place-based) community that includes Pocahontas, Nicholas, and Greenbrier counties. Second, there is the High Rocks network that, as opposed to a place-based community, is a community of interest. Sometimes these two communities are indistinguishable. Other times large gaps exist. Asset building at High Rocks occurs between both communities, and the interaction between them can be mutually beneficial. Although community development usually refers to place-based communities, the research presented here shows how communities of interest create translocal connections that produce mutually beneficial exchanges.

Chapter 5 examined the ways High Rocks builds assets locally, but High Rocks doesn't necessarily think of itself as a local service. More than 50% of High Rocks girls leave the local community. According to co-director Sarah Riley, this isn't necessarily a

negative phenomenon. She says High Rocks's mission is to "change the world," not just the local community, and the girls and staff that leave High Rocks carry their High Rocks capital with them (Riley 6 April 2007). In turn, people from outside the community bring their own resources and capital to High Rocks. As the community gets bigger, High Rocks uses this network to its own advantage by taking the girls to visit High Rocks pledgetakers in big cities, colleges, and universities. Therefore the quantity and quality of the community are positively related. For example, after I was an intern at High Rocks, the staff brought a group of girls to visit West Virginia University where I was a student at the time. I was able to offer them a place to stay while they were there so they wouldn't have to pay for hotel rooms. During the course of this research project, I was able to bring a group of High Rocks girls to Appalachian State University for the first time (thanks to thesis committee member Dr. Maggie McFadden for giving the High Rocks group free lodging at her home)! This is one example of the way High Rocks uses their wide network to increase the services it offers girls. The connection between High Rocks and West Virginia University became mutually beneficial. Moreover, there is the potential for coalition building. As High Rocks pledgetakers spread out into other communities, and as High Rocks makes more institutional connections, the exchange of ideas and community assets becomes greater.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, this system of reciprocity between people and locations is what Flora, Flora, and Fey refer to as "bonding and bridging social capital." High levels of bonding in communities occur when people are connected and know one another in multiple settings. This is true at High Rocks where the girls, staff, parents, and volunteers are connected through the mission of the organization and know each other as workers, students, and family members. High levels of bridging foster a "diversity of ideas and brings together

diverse people” from within and outside the community (Flora, Flora, and Fey 61-62). This is also present at High Rocks as interns, staff, and board members come from outside the three-county High Rocks service area. In addition, High Rocks leaders seek out diverse people within the community to increase the breadth of the program. New faces at High Rocks mean new interests and projects for the organization. The multi-issue character of High Rocks detailed in Chapter 5 is largely the result of the diverse interests of staff, volunteers, and girls. For example, they recruited Jay Martin, a local forester, to volunteer at tutoring. He then became a teacher for the building class at camp and a contact between High Rocks and the local forest service. Subsequently, his wife Jolie got involved at High Rocks and ultimately became a full-time staff person. Flora, Flora, and Fey use the diagram displayed in Chapter 2 (see p. 36) to show how high levels of bonding and bridging yield more successful community development. Based on Flora, Flora, and Fey’s diagram, High Rocks is an example of high bridging and bonding. They are a local group that has initiated change in girls’ opportunities for success, they are driven by community defined goals because they use the community’s input through the girls, volunteers, staff, and board members, and finally, they are linked to external resources for funding, staff, and other resources.

Thus, connections beyond the local community are important to the validity of the High Rocks organization. Jean Richardson echoes this sentiment and says, “linkages between communities” are “more likely to be beneficial, not only to the rural community, but to society as a whole” (37). High Rocks benefits society as a whole by providing opportunities to people outside the local community. By hiring staff and interns from elsewhere, High Rocks brings people and their resources (skills, ideas, money, etc) to the local community. While there, they are exposed to the High Rocks capital development system illustrated in

Diagram 3 (see p. 65), and in turn they help foster connections among diverse people with their own experiences and resources. Sometimes people stay and join the local community. Other times, staff and interns go elsewhere and take their skills with them. In addition, girls graduate and go away to college.

The assets developed at High Rocks are used in the local community and elsewhere. Although this effect may seem insignificant in the grand scheme of society as a whole, one person can still make a difference. For example, during my internship at High Rocks I got first-hand experience working with a women-run grassroots community organization in rural West Virginia. Now, almost five years later, I am writing my masters thesis on High Rocks. I am also working on creating a connection between Appalachian State University and High Rocks so that future college tours will be possible and other mutually beneficial exchanges can occur. During the course of this research I worked with the ASU Women's Studies Club to organize an alternative spring break trip to High Rocks that we hope to implement next year, and I worked with High Rocks on two academic conference presentations. This is another example of how translocal connections can be mutually beneficial in promoting community development.

The most recent result of the High Rocks network, and perhaps the most promising example of translocal community development, is a new High Rocks satellite branch that is opening in Huntington, WV in the summer of 2009. This development is an example of the long-term benefits of the High Rocks network. Sue Hatcher got involved in High Rocks at the very beginning when she helped get a group of prisoners to clear the land for the campground and lodge. Hatcher maintained contact with High Rocks throughout the years.

She recently retired and decided to take the idea of High Rocks and implement it in her own community. This "mini" High Rocks will certainly be interesting to watch as it develops.

Still, wouldn't it be better for girls and staff to stay in the local community and commit to promoting local change long-term? Can I really claim High Rocks is building local community if it encourages girls to leave town after high school? This may be a question that doesn't have a clear answer. A community college is available, but for girls who want a four-year degree, they must leave the local community. In addition, the local economy will have to be able to support girls who want to use their college degrees. At this point, it is too early to tell if a high percentage of High Rocks girls will be able to successfully return to their home community after college. Moreover, girls and staff that leave the area usually stay in touch with High Rocks, which serves to increase the bridging capacity between High Rocks and other communities. The future of High Rocks will depend on the ability to keep girls in the local community and maximize their connection to those in other communities.

Feminist and community organization are best practiced when open to diverse people and ideas. Just as the feminist movement was strongest when it was most inclusive, so is the impact of community organizations. High Rocks has developed into a multi-issue organization while still remaining dedicated to the girls whom are the primary focus. High Rocks has prepared itself for changes and new ideas as they build a coalition of supporters, both individuals and other organizations. As more people become involved with High Rocks, ideas will be exchanged and the capacity for diversity will increase. Further research is needed on the status of feminism in Appalachia. Surely there are women and men in

Appalachia that would be interested in an Appalachian feminist movement. Additionally, boys in Appalachia would certainly benefit from a program like High Rocks. High Rocks leaders have called for this many times, but insist men need to be the organizers of such an effort. Finally, a long-term analysis of High Rocks including a quantitative data set of all pledgetakers and a quantitative data set of families, friends, and schools of High Rocks girls would provide clearer answers on the overall impact of the organization. The true impact of High Rocks has yet to be measured, but meanwhile the High Rocks model is a highly useful resource for the Appalachian region.

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The first time I drove out to High Rocks in a van with a bunch of my classmates the road turned from pavement to gravel, and after we crossed the tiny bridge separating the gravel road from the driveway up to the High Rocks, I saw Virginia's old farmhouse for the first time. On that day, I felt as if I had crossed a bridge back in time. Now I look back and see that High Rocks is really a bridge to the future for women and communities in West Virginia. It's a place where feminism is integrated into the development of individuals and a community of people preparing to take on the challenges of their lives. If we all could make the journey through High Rocks our communities would be kinder, healthier, more productive, and more cohesive. Like its namesake, we in the Appalachian region can look to High Rocks as a symbol and model of the positive change that can occur if we have the knowledge to move forward.



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APPENDIX A

The High Rocks Pledge

*Honor Code Pledge* □ □

*I, \_\_\_\_\_, do solemnly swear to have respect for myself, respect for others and respect for this place, in order to uphold the tradition of loyalty, honesty, trust, acceptance and adventure founded by the girls that have come before me as I now am a sister of the High Rocks.*

APPENDIX B

The High Rocks Mission Statement

### THE HIGH ROCKS MISSION

The mission of the High Rocks is to support and strengthen young West Virginia women from all walks of life. Our purpose is to educate, empower and inspire girls, giving them the confidence to lead active lives and work toward the long-term betterment of our community. We believe that by investing in girls, we are creating a strong, vibrant, participatory community for all of us; we believe we are investing in the economic, social, intellectual, and democratic basis of our future.

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

## **Interview Guide for High Rocks Pledgetakers**

This thesis project will examine how High Rocks operates as a successful Appalachian feminist community development organization and determine what they contribute to their local community and other localities.

### **Grand Tour Question**

1. Why do you think High Rocks is an important organization?
  - a. Does it have an impact on the girls? The staff? The community?
    - i. Does it provide educational opportunity? Job skills? For whom?
    - ii. Does it build trust? Among whom?
    - iii. Does it build networks? Among whom?
    - iv. Does it raise consciousness? In what way? For whom?
    - v. Do you think the High Rocks land and building are important for the community? In what ways?
    - vi. Do you think High Rocks contributes financially to the community?
    - vii. Does High Rocks promote care of the environment in any way?
    - viii. Do you think High Rocks promotes democracy or political participation?
    - ix. Do you think High Rocks contributes to the culture in the community? In what way? Through art?
    - x. Has High Rocks made efforts to be a sustainable organization?
  - b. Can you give me some specific examples of the outcomes of High Rocks?

### **High Rocks Development and Community**

2. What would you say is the primary function of High Rocks? Does it have secondary functions?

3. Does High Rocks provide something that is not provided elsewhere in the community?
  - a. Is High Rocks reflective of its rural location?
  - b. Is High Rocks reflective of being in the state of West Virginia?
  - c. Is High Rocks reflective of being in the Appalachian region?
4. How would you define the High Rocks community?
  - a. Is it based in one location?
  - b. Is the High Rocks community separate from the local community?

#### **High Rocks and Alumni**

5. What is the relationship between High Rocks and alumni (girls, staff, others)
  - a. Does High Rocks rely on them? For what? (recruiting? Money?)
  - b. Do they rely on High Rocks? For what?
6. How have alumni carried on the work of High Rocks?
  - a. Have they tried to start something similar?
  - b. Do they participate in similar organizations?
  - c. Do they have leadership positions?
7. Is High Rocks important outside the local community? How? (local, state, regional, national, international?)
8. Sarah Riley told me that High Rocks' mission is to "change the world." What does she mean by this statement?

#### **High Rocks, Women, Diversity, and Equality**

9. How does High Rocks respond to the specific needs of girls?

10. How do High Rocks alumni go on to develop their capacities as women? (How do they use what they learned at High Rocks as women?)
11. Do you think High Rocks is a feminist organization?
12. Do you think High Rocks should be called a feminist organization? Why and/or why not?
13. Do you identify as a feminist?
14. Does High Rocks educate the girls about feminism?
15. Do you think the girls see themselves as feminists?
16. Has High Rocks dealt with issues of racism? Can you give an example?
17. Has High Rocks dealt with issues of sexual orientation? Can you give an example?
18. How would you describe High Rocks' attitude toward diversity?
19. How would you describe High Rocks' attitude toward equality?

### **Background Questions**

20. What is your position at High Rocks?
21. Where are you from originally?
22. Where do you currently reside?
23. Do you plan to live near High Rocks in the future?
24. What brought you to High Rocks?
25. What is your age?

If you have any additional comments please include them here.

Thank you!



APPENDIX D

List of informants

Originally from High Rock, WV, she moved to Charleston, WV, in 2005. She is currently a member of the High Rock community.

Originally from Austin, TX, she moved to High Rock, WV, in 2005. She completed her master's thesis on antiCorps VISTA for the High Rock community.

Originally from Marlinton, WV, she moved to High Rock, WV, in 2005. She earned a Masters of Public Administration and is currently involved with High Rock.

Originally from Denmoore, WV, she moved to High Rock, WV, in 2005. She was a member of the High Rock community during college in 2003 and is currently a board member and volunteer.

Originally from High Rock, WV, she moved to High Rock, WV, in 2005. She is currently a member of the High Rock community.

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Originally from High Rock, WV, she moved to High Rock, WV, in 2005. She is currently a member of the High Rock community.

**Chris Campbell** – Originally from Michigan, Chris came to West Virginia in 1982 and met Susan Burt when they were both teaching at the middle school in Marlinton, WV. Chris has worked for High Rocks since its inception as a tutor, teacher, camp administrator, and cook.

**Susan Burt** – Susan Burt came to West Virginia in 1972 and was a middle school teacher in Pocahontas County for 20 years before founding the High Rocks Program for Girls in 1995. Burt continues to work at High Rocks under the title, “Founder and Special Projects.”

**Elizabeth Engelhardt** – Originally from Hendersonville, NC with ancestral roots dating back to the 1790s in western North Carolina, Elizabeth first heard of High Rocks from a flyer she picked up at an Appalachian Studies Association conference. As a professor of women’s studies at West Virginia University, she was looking for a service-learning project and started bringing students to High Rocks in 2002. She is now a professor at the University of Texas at Austin and continues to volunteer and work at High Rocks during the summer.

**Cassie Hill** – Originally from Nettie, WV, Cassie completed the High Rocks program and is currently a college student in Colorado Springs, CO. She works for Cutco Cutlery and Progressive Future.

**Suska Hoffman** – Suska came to High Rocks as an AmeriCorps VISTA in 2005 after living in Washington, DC and working for a large non-profit. Suska held the VISTA position for two years and spent her third year at High Rocks as the Admissions Director and Office Manager.

**Brynn Kusic** – Originally from Weirton, WV, Brynn first came to the High Rocks as a volunteer in 1996 at the age of seventeen. In the summer of 2000, Brynn came to teach during the summer session and returned every summer through 2004. In the fall of 2004, she started her first full year position at High Rocks through the AmeriCorps VISTA program. Brynn Kusic worked at the High Rocks as a New Voices Fellow through the summer of 2007.

**Erica Lipps** – Erica first came to High Rocks as a science teacher for New Beginnings Camp in the summer of 2005. In 2006 she came back as the Program Coordinator, and then became Co-Director in 2007.

**Jaime Madden** – Originally from Austin, TX, Jaime was a High Rocks intern during the summer of 2006. In 2007 she completed her masters thesis on High Rocks and then returned to High Rocks as an AmeriCorps VISTA for the 2007-2008 year.

**Samantha Mitchell** – Originally from Marlinton, WV, Samantha completed the High Rocks program and recently earned a Masters of Public Administration at West Virginia University. Samantha continues to be involved with High Rocks as a board member and volunteer.

**Valerie Monico** – Originally from Dunmoore, WV, Valerie started High Rocks as a girl in 1997. She returned as an intern during college in 2002 and 2004. Valerie currently lives in Snowshoe, WV and is a board member and volunteer at High Rocks.

**Molly Must** – Originally from Hillsboro, WV, Molly completed the High Rocks program and is now a student at the University of North Carolina, Asheville. Molly is also Director of the Asheville Mural Project.

**Sarah Riley** – Sarah is a Co-Director of High Rocks, and has been involved with High Rocks since it began in 1995. Sarah has lived in WV her whole life (except during college at Harvard University). Her mother, Susan Burt, is the founder of High Rocks.

**Ada Smith** – A self-described “Appalachian nationalist,” Ada grew up in Whitesburg, KY and was introduced to High Rocks through a connection between Appalshop (where her parents, Herb E. Smith and Elizabeth Barret, both work) and High Rocks. Ada was an intern at High Rocks during the summer of 2007.

**Danielle Stollack** – Originally from Bryn Mawr, PA, Danielle was an intern at High Rocks in 2005. She returned to High Rocks in the spring of 2008 as the leader of an alternative spring break group from Haverford College. Danielle is the Life Skills Coordinator for inner city youth at a community center in North Philadelphia.

**Missy Westbrook** – Originally from Morgantown, WV, Missy was an intern at High Rocks during the summer of 2006. Missy returned to High Rocks in 2008 as an AmeriCorps VISTA.

Send your  
to, West Virginia  
spring break  
to, West Virginia

Volunteers needed!

APPENDIX E

Flyer for High Rocks alternative spring break trip

...to High Rocks...  
...alternative spring break...  
...volunteers needed...  
...High Rocks...  
...1994...

Spend your spring break in  
*Wild, Wonderful, West Virginia*

## **Volunteers needed!**

Looking for a meaningful way to spend your spring break?  
Interested in regional, non-profit organizing?  
Handy with a hammer and nails or want to be?  
Want to participate in important service to the Appalachian community?  
Enjoy being outdoors and exploring new places?  
Just looking for something different to do?

Join the group March 8-12, 2009  
traveling to High Rocks, an organization to educate,  
empower, and inspire young women in rural WV.

Opportunities for meeting new people, networking, education, spending  
time outdoors, and general inspiration!

**For more information**

**Please email Rachel Terman  
at [at78001@appstate.edu](mailto:at78001@appstate.edu)**

**Visit [www.highrocks.org](http://www.highrocks.org)**

**Sponsored by the ASU Women's Studies Club**

## VITA

Anna Rachel Terman was born in Morgantown, West Virginia on April 28, 1981. She is the daughter of Timothy Terman and Maureen Busch Terman. She attended the University of Maryland and West Virginia University as an undergraduate. Terman interned for High Rocks for Girls during the summer of 2003, and in 2004 she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from WVU in Psychology and Women's Studies. She earned the Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies from Appalachian State University in May 2008 and the Master of Arts degree in Appalachian Studies in August 2009. She began the Dual-title PhD program in Rural Sociology and Women's Studies at The Pennsylvania State University in August 2009. Her permanent address is 200 Wagner Rd., Morgantown, WV 26501.