

ONGOING CURIOSITIES IN POST-FORMAL EDUCATION: MAKING KIN,
BECOMING KIN, AND BECOMING KIN(D) WITH/IN A STORY FAMILY SOJOURN

A Dissertation
by
HEATHER ANNE THORP

Submitted to the Graduate School
Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2022
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Reich College of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Brooke Anne Hofsess, PhD
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee

Alecia Jackson, PhD
Member, Dissertation Committee

Sally Atkins, EdD
Member, Dissertation Committee

Vachel Miller, PhD
Director, Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Marie Hoepfl, Ed.D.
Interim Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

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Heather Anne Thorp
BSW The Ohio State University
MSSA, Case Western reserve University
Ed.D Appalachian State University

Dissertation Committee Chairperson: Brooke Anne Hofsess

In a year-long inquiry, called a Story Family Sojourn, women participants who had completed their formal education met with each other in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The purpose of this expressive arts-based inquiry was to explore what would emerge through knowing by making together and thinking/theorizing together with/in a Story Family composed of women, time, expressive arts, and storyplace. This inquiry is based in a theoretical framing of feminist posthumanism, feminist new materialism, and phEmaterialism. Creativity, sacredness (affect), and social and environmental justice provide a felted conceptual triad throughout the inquiry. The findings are based on data creation of stories and photos culminating in ongoing curiosities. The implications point toward the entanglements of the matter and discourses intra-acting to create Story Family members, human and other-than-human. This emergent study points to the need for attention and intention to be applied to invitations for doing community education and educational leadership differently in other storytimes and storyplaces.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Brooke Hofsess, who offered me mentoring, kindness, and creative entanglement, in addition to rigorous and respectful accountability. I acknowledge Dr. Sally Atkins, the founder of the Expressive Arts Collaborative at Appalachian State University. Within the Postgraduate Certificate in Expressive Arts, I found a “home” in and a resonance with expressive arts materials and practices. I acknowledge Dr. Alecia Jackson for the inspiration to combine my lifelong feminism with new-to-me feminist theorizing. I acknowledge Mary Neal Meador from the Appalachian State University Writing Center, who walked with me through this journey with writing expertise, presence, and humor.

Special thanks to the women listed above, along with all my friends and family who acted like midwives and doulas along the way. With gratitude, I thank the women who agreed to be part of the Story Family Sojourn and share stories in a community of becoming kin(d). I acknowledge the rich storyplace of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Dedication

At the age of 19, Monica Teixeira Pombo moved from Brazil to pursue her undergraduate degree. She left her beloved country to escape military rule, to pursue a career in education, and to live her life as a lesbian. At that time marriage equality, or same sex marriage, was not legal. The only legal option for her to obtain a green card was to become an expert in her field. I dedicate this dissertation to her. She became my partner, our son's other mother; obtained a PhD in communication; received tenure; and became assistant chair in her first teaching position at Appalachian State University and a United States citizen before she died at the age of 45. Her life and her pursuit of education has inspired me and continues to inspire me. Saudade, dear one. I also dedicate this dissertation to our son Alexandre Teixeira Thorp, our greatest earthly blessing.

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Epigraph

She moves from flower to flower, gathering words and phrases, offerings from spring. She strings them together. Nonsensical, they stare back at her. She examines them more closely, as if her intention for clarity and understanding would inspire translation. She moves them into different configurations, still no revelation of their secrets. She touches them lightly with her fingertips, moves them gently, slowly, as if her breath was the momentum. Each word and phrase begins to seek its own order. She just ushered their congregation. Lines of a poem writing itself, as she gently holds their attention. The poem became a letter, the letter became a promise, the promise became a key. She whispered the words, her lips almost touching the tree, a butterfly wing's thickness away. The key, the lock, the door, the dream, the journey—this time.

Invocation

I begin with the “where”—or the setting: the “story place” (Haraway, 2016, p. 39) of this inquiry. In this year-long study, making together and thinking together occurred in the Southern Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina, on women’s land or in their homes, and in local parks, including the Blue Ridge Parkway, Elk Knob, Mount Jefferson, Mountains to Sea Trail (MST), Bass Lake on the Moses Cone Estate, and Price Lake. During this inquiry, the women participants, who had completed their formal education, and I met two times per month to explore complicated sociopolitical and environmental times through expressive arts (EXA) and create with/in process-oriented intermodal EXA practices (the process of moving between mediums movement, visual arts, writing, play, and ritual). My intention was for women to gather to write, create, and build community, to spin yarns, mundane and fantastical. The women participants were not necessarily academic writers. However, early in the inquiry I proposed that in their writing and art-making (creating art in all of its modalities, singly or intermodally) or arting, theoretical whisperings would be present. I posit that learning must be given time to explore the place a person lives in now, the “story place” (Haraway, 2016, p. 39), both through time and with attention to what is happening in the community, the world, and the environment. I conceptualize the “story place” as an actual place but also a place in time in this current period, recognizing that both past and future are embedded in the present moment.

I became fascinated with trying to build on my lifelong conceptual structure of the entanglement of creativity, sacredness, and social and environmental justice. Like Gloria Anzaldúa, my writing and arting practices have been “epistemological, intuitive and

communal” (Anzaldua, 2015, p. xii). I built on my history of gathering groups of women to create together, write together, and study together. I enacted these practices again in my own research, as I wanted to move beyond my own thinking/feeling/doing to be in a community of learners, makers, and thinkers, with women who were not in school now and had completed their own formal learning. I hoped to see what emerged in attunement and attention to time, to EXA materials and practices, and to place. I chose to delve deeper into learning about this particular area, the mountains, including the flora and fauna, history, and geology where I and the participants live, our “story place” (Haraway, 2016, p. 39). I invited the women participants to learn through creating together and theorizing together.

Prior to the Story Family Sojourn, I dreamed of learning deeply about where the women in the inquiry and I reside, call home, even though only one of the women grew up here. I wanted to see what engaging in EXA practices in this “story place” (Haraway, 2016, p. 39) would offer us. What would emerge and be co-created? I sought to learn more about the Southern Appalachian Mountains and, specifically, the area where the inquiry was going to occur. What would we learn from and with each other by walking in the woods and creating outside? How would this contribute to our post-formal education? I wanted to ask these questions, and I wanted to invite other women to do this with me. My inquiry is an invitation to the people who read and engage with this dissertation to re-educate themselves with intention and attention to creativity, sacredness, and social and environmental justice, which is often missing in various ways in educational settings.

I have long believed that there is a need for “home” schooling that incorporates these threads. I wanted to invite other women to experience these concepts in an educational setting that is communal, sense-based, and creative in the “classroom of nature.” My own

curiosity included looking at homeschooling in the woods or other outdoor places through embracing theories that challenge traditional research paradigms and embrace new ways of doing, playing with, and creating data. I envisioned an inquiry comprised of a group of women using arts-based ways of knowing, as we would explore the act of making in community in this storyplace embedded in precarious environmental and social/political times (Haraway, 2016; Ringrose et al.; 2018; Tsing, 2017; Yusoff, 2018). When formulating my inquiry, I envisioned a type of lab (Manning, 2016) or open art studio (McKniff, 2004, 2011) to continue to explore what attuning to time, EXA, and storyplace would enable. “Story place” (Haraway, 2016), what I am now calling storyplace, is the location the participants reside in and their relationship with it, particularly the mountains, woods, seasons, and weather.

It is through particular spaces and places that new thinking, or “training the mind to go visiting,” can occur (Haraway, 2016, p. 27). In examining the “place” of an inquiry, Erin Manning (2016) builds on the concept of the “undercommons,” a term coined by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (p. 9). Manning (2016) describes the undercommons not as a specific place but as “an emergent collectivity that is sited in the encounter” (p. 8). She further describes it as “a tentative holding in place of fragile comings-into relation, physical and virtual” (Manning, 2016, p. 8). The concept of the undercommons is congruent with the inquiry of the Story Family. I created the term Story Family to indicate the members of the entanglement, which include humans and other-than-human members, such as the participants, EXA materials and practices, time, and the Southern Appalachian Mountains. In the Story Family, not only are all the members emerging and felting themselves together, but also changes continue to appear, as the mountains themselves move and are shaped by the

weather, water, erosion, and pollution, along with other human impacts. Although the mountain's movement may be imperceptibly slow to the human eye, the movement provides a background for this emergent collectivity in Story Family Sojourn. In the entanglement of the Story Family members as an "emergent collectivity" (Manning, 2016, p. 8), I recognize how the members engage to create agency for the purpose of attending to curiosities through making together and theorizing together. Returning to the same place with the same women could only be different each time, contributing to the generative space of the unknowing. Story Family Sojourn unfolds, with these particular participants and all they brought to the entanglement, in the location of the Appalachian Mountains.

Within this particular storyplace, women participants joined the inquiry through a local writing group I was a part of and through word of mouth. Two women who were involved in the writing group agreed to participate in the inquiry. The other women who agreed to participate were women whom I knew in the local community, women who were suggested to me, or women who volunteered when they heard about the project. There were several other women who wanted to be part of the study; however, they were not able to participate due to work or personal reasons. To varying degrees, I knew all but one of the women. Many of the women did not know each other. Seven women, plus myself as a participant researcher, comprised the human participants. The participants were in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, and the group included mothers, women childless by choice, and grandmothers. They were lesbians and heterosexual women. Their occupations included minister, hospice social worker, environmental advocate, director of a nonprofit organization for a girl's school in India, internship director, and T-shirt buyer at a local business. All of the women had undergraduate degrees, and some had graduate degrees. One woman had a PhD in Social

Work. Half of the participants had studied EXA therapy, and the other half had no training or familiarity with EXA. The women were comfortable or uncomfortable to varying degrees with visual arts and writing, the main modalities used in this inquiry. All women but one identified as White.

I specifically did not study the Appalachian people whose families have lived here for many generations. I also did not study the Cherokee, the Indigenous people of this region, although I did learn more about their presence on the Qualla Boundary farther west in North Carolina. Instead, the women who were invited and participated migrated to this area from other states or other parts of this state. The ones who moved here had all been here longer than 15 years, and one participant grew up in this area.

While I invited women participants, who volunteered to be part of this inquiry, I wanted to avoid privileging humans over nature or the materials used in the inquiry. In order to look at the interaction between place, arts, and the participants, I have chosen to write from the perspective of “she” (Stewart, 2007) in the data created and written about in the Making Kin section. Once, in a doctoral course I participated in, my fellow students and I were asked to write narratives about place, voice, and person. It was during this course that I found my own voice in writing, and it is what is traditionally thought of as third person. Therefore, instead of writing in “I” for these exercises, I wrote as “she.” As I wrote this dissertation, writing in the third person voice resonated with me. However, I employ third person voice not only to decenter my own human voice but also as a literary movement to decenter all of the individual voices into a collective voice, a “they.” In addition, I use “she” when discussing affect and materiality, not only when I refer to the human actors. Kathleen Stewart (2010) asserts that “affect is the commonplace, labor intensive process of sensing

modes of living as they come into being” (p. 340). While I give recognition to the human who senses and writes about the commonplace modes of living, the shift, though seemingly subtle, is also unusual. Often in qualitative research, descriptions are about the human and, subsequently, the researcher seeking “Truth.” My choice to use “she” shifts the focus from personal, individual thoughts and feelings and shifts the focus to be on what can occur when the senses are given value. What can arrive when a collective is experiencing the present moment, the light, the wind, the sound of leaves rustling, the “dense entanglement of affect, attention, the senses, and matter” (Stewart, 2010, p. 340)? Consequently, I will use “she” or “they” throughout the document to represent less the voice and more of the becoming-entangled, becoming-Story Family. In traditional qualitative inquiry, collecting individual voices is often about seeking truth through stories. In this inquiry, as I will explain in detail later, I challenge the idea of the researcher giving the participants a voice or the participants finding their truth. The Story Family members (women, time, place, arts) and their relationships are not a fixed entity to be studied but are instead seen as emerging, growing, moving, or becoming. The purpose of this study is not to explore the differences but to see what chorus can evolve while focusing simultaneously on the individual parts as well as the whole piece. “I” becomes “she” becomes “we/they.” Individual women join together in this inquiry with other-than-human beings, time, arts, and storyplace, thereby enacting a “we/they.”

In my study, I do not intend to discuss only individual women or only what happened during my inquiry but also *how* it happened, the entanglement. Consequently, I challenge the notion of giving women “voice” or asserting that women’s stories are fixed, waiting for capture. I trouble the notion that the researcher and researched are confined to explicit roles,

as our stories are co-created within the entanglement of the Story Family. This merging of voices and stories into a collective “she” thus embraces “the similarities and differences, through a shared consciousness of being and becoming” (Bhattacharya, 2013, p. 616). Bhattacharya (2013) further writes that “our voices are collective, yet distinct” (p. 616). While the expressions of the women are created together through storytelling and art making, I have no expectation or illusion that the collective is unified with no differences.

At the beginning of my study, I envisioned that it would require a commitment from each of the women, a pause in the lives of the participants in order to engage in the inquiry for the purposes of moving beyond my individual curiosity of theory and exploration of knowing by making through EXA. In my inquiry, I relate pause to a member of the Story Family: time. We paused for each gathering as we were able to. Therefore, I chose to call both the entire study and the individual gatherings “sojourn,” meaning *temporary stay*. The entire study, Sojourn, will be denoted with a capital “S,” and the individual gatherings, sojourn, with a lowercase “s.” The use of the word “sojourn” for each time we met is intended to denote a further deepening of the generative pause of the entire study.

Ultimately, my desire is for the reader not only to see this dissertation as a product but also to be invited to witness the process or journey that led me to the doctoral program and to subsequent theorizing. This dissertation tells the story of what emerged during my inquiry. The traditional five-chapter dissertation is transformed into a structure consistent with arts-based research (Atkins, 2012). The dissertation will be separated into three parts: Making Kin, Becoming Kin, and Becoming Kin(d), which will provide the “chapters,” or guideposts, through this theory/story/journey. By theory/story/journey I mean I envision this entire dissertation as a combination of the story of the emergent nature of this inquiry, the

theories that informed this inquiry, the recounting of the journey of the Story Family members in this yearlong study, and the journey now of the reader of this document. Thus, although I acknowledge a beginning and an ending of the study and this dissertation, I also recognize the continuing emerging nature of this inquiry through the engagement of the reader, their own “story place” (Haraway, 2016, p. 39), and, possibly, the arts and time.

Next, I introduce a feminist posthumanism (FPH)-informed inquiry and feminist new materialism (FNM) from the “story place” (Haraway, 2016) of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. I will describe FNM, FPH, and feminism in subsequent sections threading throughout this dissertation. Posthuman inquiry, particularly feminist posthuman inquiry, not only examines how to decenter the human but also recognizes that some categories of the human are not viewed as equal. This inquiry specifically draws on a feminist tradition that focuses not only on women but also on other marginalized individuals, including Indigenous people and people of color.

Re-search Curiosities

The purpose of the Story Family Sojourn was to explore questions I had been grappling with related to creativity, sacredness, and social and environmental justice. I proposed to think with theories and concepts related to postmodernism informed by feminism, or feminist posthumanism (FPH) (described in the section “Theories and Theorists That Inform the Sojourn.”) My purpose was to move beyond my individual musings about making and theorizing, to decrease the focus on only human participants. I wondered what happens when we collectively gather in storyplace and use EXA as the means to ponder and explore what we individually and collectively are curious about. I pondered what would emerge from the entanglement (Barad, 2007) of the members of the Story Family. Through

making art together with/in the storyplace of the mountains, I hope to contribute to a theoretical conversation between and within art and science.

RQ1. What questions emerge about social and environmental justice in post-formal education, among women who are knowing by making together and thinking by theorizing together with/in a Story Family?

RQ2. What gets co-created in the entanglement between humans and other-than-human participants of the Story Family?

As I entered this inquiry guided by the research questions above, I understood that during the sojourns, the participants might pose multiple additional questions that could be deeper, different, and collaborative. I posited that although I had proposed initial research questions, we would also ask questions throughout that would guide our time together. Thus, my questions were suggestions for an inquiry that would find its own wonderings. Through making together and theorizing together (Haraway, 2016), I posited that during the inquiry generative surprises, disruptions, gifts, and disequilibrium would arise.

Instructions

In the following paragraphs, I invite the reader to experience the moment as if it were happening now. Please imagine walking with me as you read. Later in this document, you will be invited to choose to listen to me as I read to you the stories that I created, to acknowledge the choices, or “cuts” (Barad, 2007), I made. Consequently, the stories emerge from the entanglement of affect, creativity, materiality, nature, and curiosity about justice¹.

¹ Note that the photos in this dissertation will not have figure numbers. While seemingly fixed as the reader becomes entangled with the images, change has occurred. Following Hofsess in her explanation, I assert that “the images made in the crafting of this essay are not numerically ordered here, so that they may shimmer and linger and flow in and through this body of text” (in press).



While writing with and through this inquiry, I walk in the woods on a trail close to my home many times a week. As I enter the woods, my heart beats faster as I walk up the incline. I feel at ease walking this familiar path. In fact, this is a place where I consistently feel hope and calm and safety. The trail is flanked by tall trees, dappled sunlight occasionally reaching the ground. I feel the cool breeze on my slightly sweaty skin. This is, and has been, my time to walk and think, walk and write in my head, walk and rest in the beauty and gratitude of where I live. I have seen chipmunk, squirrel, deer, snake, newt, box turtle. I have witnessed the wildflowers and foliage through all seasons. I have picked and eaten wild black

raspberries in the later summer. Drops of water fall on me as last night's rain, held in curled leaves, is stirred by the wind. Next to me, I hear the stream rippling over rocks.

As I round one of the last bends, I stop by a particular place where the caretakers of this trail have attached a bench seat fashioned out of a log. The bench seat is held by two trees. As I sit on this bench on this small piece of land jutting out into the curve of a stream, I rest, leaning back on the lichen-covered tree. As I leave this small sacred peninsula in the woods, I think about how sometimes I have passed mountain bikers, single and in groups, parents with children biking and walking, and families with small children playing in the stream. But usually, I see no one.



There were many times during my walks that I thought about learning and leading. What were the elements that resonated with my inquiry? As I walked, I thought about what was happening right then, in that present moment; what could I touch, smell, see, taste, hear? In that moment, I wondered about what I was experiencing as I engaged with the woods. I felt encouraged to think about the smallest of details in that present moment. In that specific moment and time, I felt invited to ponder who had walked this land before me, not only in recent times, but also in deep time. I imagined the Cherokee, the people Indigenous to this area, and the interaction of humans, flora, and fauna. Through my experience, I wondered about the movement of the actual mountain I walked on. I wondered, “How were the Appalachian Mountains formed?” and “What has happened throughout deep time to create this place right now?” I imagined how storytelling might assist in making-with and theorizing-with about these curiosities. Donna Haraway (2016) asserts the importance of storytelling and the need to tell about the places where we live. She asserts that “storytelling is a collaborative, ethical and material practice” (Haraway, 2016, p. 39). She writes that storytelling needs to include the “story place, this place, not just any place” (Haraway, 2016, p. 39). Through my own experiences in the mountains and with the writings of Donna Haraway about stories and places, I continued walking the path of this inquiry.

Making Kin

The title of this section, Making Kin, is inspired by Donna Haraway's book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). Haraway asserts that we need to create relationships with other people and nature in addition to and outside of the common understanding of kin. "Making Kin" is commonly used as a term to describe families formed by marriage or birth or through legal means, such as adoption. In the following section, I illustrate how I use the concept of Making Kin to describe the relationships between theory and concepts that inspired this inquiry. In this section, the reader will find key concepts (which I am calling felted concepts), terms used to tell this research story, a literature review, and theories and theorists who inform inquiry.

Felted Concepts

Prior to entering the doctoral program, I had been drawing a triangle in journals or notebooks that was a visual representation of my own conceptual framework. At each point of the triangle are concepts that have guided my own path and continue to undergird this theoretical journey. At some point, I realized that the concepts at the points are theoretically too distant from each other. I realized these concepts are more like a braid or even more like felt, integrated into a whole. Throughout my life, I have been drawn to the aesthetic of felt and felted objects. At one point, I took a felting course at the Cleveland Institute of Art, not wanting to be only a consumer of art but also a creator of art. In that hand felting workshop, I massaged two pieces of raw wool together with soapy water. The fibers wrapped around each other, never to be separated. If the felt was cut later, the original fibers would be present and

would never completely untangle. I carried the concept of the felt triage into my doctoral program. As I found theories and theorists who resonated with my own felt conceptual triad, my ponderings began to be informed by theory. In the following section, I point to some strands of the concepts in my felt triad, recognizing that they are no longer separable, and describe the concepts that have journeyed with me throughout most of my life. Three qualities I bring to this inquiry are the felt concepts of creativity, sacredness, and social and environmental justice (SEJ).

Creativity

Ellen Dissanayake (2000) asserts that creativity is innate, not something that is learned but is, instead, accessible to everyone, a birthright. In the broadest sense of the word, creativity “is the use of the imagination or original ideas, especially in the production of an artistic work” (Lexico.com, 2022, n.p.). In my inquiry, I see creativity as “poiesis” (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Knill et al., 1995; Knill et al., 2005), or the use of the arts as a way of knowing (Allen, 1995). The view of the arts as a way of knowing that encompasses the innate creativity of all people is mirrored in the guiding principles of the profession and practice of EXA (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Knill et al., 1995; Knill et al., 2005). Consistent with my inquiry, which is informed by expressive arts therapy, consultation, and education, creativity is not limited to fine arts or art education and includes attention to a sense of altered time or liminality, the process being as important as the product, and the embodied use of all the senses (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Atkins & Williams, 2007; Eberhart & Atkins, 2014; Plato, 2015; Turner, 1969). I agree with Ellen Dissanake that creativity is part of being human; however, many messages about creativity, within both society and families, result in art wounding. Subsequently, these messages result in the embracing or rejecting of innate

creativity. Within this inquiry, my belief that creativity is innate informs my research.

Additionally, expressive arts practices, which are process oriented, provide a philosophy that encourages creativity as a birthright.

Sacredness

For the purpose of this study, I do not imbue the word “sacredness” with a particular spiritual or religious tradition. Instead, sacredness is an embodied sense of something special, different, or meaningful occurring. Similar words come to mind that partially, but not fully, describe the concept of sacredness, such as mystery, synchronicity (Iris van der Tuin, 2020), affect (Ahmed, 2010; Berlant & Stewart, 2019; Stewart, 2007; Stewart 2010), surprise, liminality (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Atkins & Williams, 2007; Eberhart & Atkins, 2014; Plato, 2015; Turner, 1969), seasons and cycles (Atkins & Snyder, 2017) intuition and intention, attunement (Kossak, 2009; Stewart, 2011), “the non-rational, the spiritual, magical, and witchy” (Strom et al., 2019, p.21), and attention. I do not intend to explore sacredness in all of its iterations, but I will reveal through my writing how it appeared in the inquiry. Instead of sacredness, I chose to use the concept of affect.

In exploring affect in my inquiry, I found theorists writing under affect theory. Although there is not a congruent understanding of the meaning of affect in posthuman theorizing, there are two different groups: those who write about affect as emotion and those who write about it as flows and embodied senses. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) refer to affect as shimmers and rhythms. Estelle Barrett (2013) asserts that affect is interwoven in aesthetic experiences and often triggers a bodily sensation essential for knowledge production. Stewart (2007) describes affect as “a problem or question emergent in disparate scenes and incommensurate forms and registers; a tangle of potential connections” (p. 4). Throughout

my inquiry regarding the Story Family entanglement, I will pay attention to embodied sensations, a sense of knowing and unknowing, mystery, and the ebb and flow of time and matter. I will encourage the participants to do the same.

Social and Environmental Justice

For the purposes of this inquiry, “sociopolitical and environmental awareness/justice” (SEJ) is the recognition of how human-made and nature-made systems interact to impact each other (Haraway, 2016; Kimmerer, 2013; Yusoff, 2018). On an individual level, SEJ necessitates knowing our own histories in order to not “other” people or repeat unjust history. It involves attention to privilege and responsibility, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017; Truman, 2019), and marginalized people. Specific to the topic of the environment, SEJ refers to an awareness of how people use power and capitalism to destroy the earth and its resources (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Ringrose et al., 2016; Yusoff, 2018). I believe that the place and time of the inquiry cannot be separated from the social, political, and environmental times we live in currently, and I argue that traditional education has not taught us the whole story about the implications for particular humans or for nature. In order to continue post-formal education, lifelong learners may choose to reeducate themselves with a different, complicated, sometimes hidden story that includes marginalized voices and histories of women, people of color, and Black and Indigenous people.

My desire for this inquiry is to infuse the felt concepts of creativity, affect, and social and environmental justice into education. My own formal education included sitting at my desk and walking down the halls in quiet, gendered lines. Education then, and even more so now, comprised results-driven, dispirited journeys with little attention to the natural world (Graham, 2007; Jones & Hoskins, 2015). As I began my inquiry, I realized that formal

education had not offered me alternative stories of women's ways of knowing, making, or surviving in the world. My education had not given me women's stories, only stories of the patriarchs, often of wars and other conquests. After graduating from high school, I began a lifelong journey to reeducate myself, to school myself outside of, and in addition to, formal education. I began to wonder how cultural narratives that continued to reflect powerful images and systems created and administered by patriarchal institutions shape me and other women.

Mapping the Path

In this inquiry, I conceptualize "Story Family" as the collection of attunements, engagements, and co-creations with women, time, arts, and storyplace. My initial intention for this project was to explore the entanglement of the Story Family members, human and other-than-human, with science, social science, and expressive art. The concepts of Story Family and Sojourn arise from my own engagement with theories and theorists who informed the direction of this inquiry. This inquiry allowed me to examine with other women how particular theorists, theories, and methodologies like expressive arts, arts-based research, feminist posthumanism, and feminist new materialism were introduced to each other in lively, generative conversations with agreements and differences. In doing so, I brought my own curiosities and questions and invited the participants to share their questions and wonderings. In order to explore the curiosities, I proposed that we engage in creative explorations, such as making journals, writing and arting in them, painting, creating ritual, collaging, and spending time in the woods in this particular area of the place we live in and in community. I wondered what could emerge in living and learning, particularly as they related to social and environmental justice.

The term “nature” itself has been a contested catchall, referring to human nature, the natural world, scientific definitions of nature systems, and power relations related to nature. Theorists writing with/in feminist new materialism have suggested moving away from solely linguistic and discursive theorizing to incorporate materiality (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). In perpetuating the nature/culture binary, great harm has been done to both nature and also to “women, Third World People, Indigenous people, people of color, and other marked groups” (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 4). For the purposes of my inquiry, the concept of “nature” includes humans and other-than-humans and where they are currently located in place and time (Haraway, 2008). As one of the members of the Story Family, I have chosen to call the setting of this inquiry “storyplace.” The combining of story and place into “storyplace” indicates the entanglement of both.

In addition to the broader meaning of nature, or what I am now calling storyplace, this inquiry also examines the specific place of the Southern Appalachian Mountains and its geological history. I recognize the political and scientific implications of studying a specific place embedded with/in histories that include people, flora, fauna, and politics as challenging yet inviting. With this background in mind, I next focus on education outside of the academy, located instead in the current environment or place of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Other(s’) Educational Theorystories

In the following section, I begin by discussing education through a feminist lens and, particularly, women’s engagement with learning outside of formal education. I then discuss how storytelling, a practice consistent with one of the art traditions in the Appalachian Mountains, has historically valued some stories over others. I further discuss the literature related to post-formal learning and conclude with recommendations about how Story Family inquiry could contribute to the discourses related to post-formal education. Jackson and

Mazzei (2012) assert that “discourse is not literally what is said. Discourse is what enables and constrains what can be said” (p.115). I posit that this is a time in history in which creativity, imagination, and sites of community-building and learning beyond the classroom are needed (Jones & Hoskins, 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al.; Taylor, 2016). The guiding question for my literature review is what studies exist that are related to women’s learning outside post-formal education? Outside of formal education, people desire to learn about the environment, politics, and culture as the world changes. Women throughout history have sought and created multiple sites to gather and exchange personal, political, and emotional information. Some sites of community learning were the consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s and 1970s, which emerged during a time when women were finding each other through telling stories of their lives, claiming and naming themselves (Burns & Chantler, 2011; Hogan, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016). Some feminists have described feminism as going through waves (Ukockis, 2016). While this inquiry will not go into detail about the wave model and its critiques, second wave feminism informs my own understanding of feminism. In addition, the participants in my study were at an age that they also would be familiar with this time frame.

From the 1960s through the 1990s, particularly in the United States, feminism was described as being in its second wave (Davis & Craven, 2016). During this second wave of feminism, women sought to emancipate and empower themselves and other women. Subsequent thinking through feminist post-structuralist theory challenged the essentializing of these stories and identities and asserted that truth was not singular but multiple, partial, and situated (Haraway, 1988; Weedon, 1997). While there continue to be multiple definitions of feminism and refutation of the concept of waves, in the feminist waves description, third

wave feminism began around the 1990s. Third wave feminism particularly focuses on diversity, intersectionality, and global issues affecting women (Ukockis, 2016).

bell hooks (2015) defines feminism as “the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression” (p. 33). As long as sexism, in addition to heterosexism, continues to exist, we need to create community to tell stories about women’s and lesbians’ lives (Ahmed, 2017). Women have used words to learn about themselves and other women’s lives through reading, creating, discussing, and writing about their varied experiences. I propose that women’s community groups organized around activism or the arts can be described as the consciousness-raising groups of the current time. During the second wave feminist period, Robin Morgan (1970) writing in the book, *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, coined the term “herstory” to challenge the education that focused on “his” story or history. While the term herstory has been used for decades, I posit that it is still a useful term to describe the stories that the women in this inquiry will write, speak, art, and imagine.

Words, both oral and written, fail at times or are at best inadequate to contribute to the imagination necessary to learn in this time (Grusin, 2017; Haraway, 2016). Although language can be useful for clarity, it can also decrease complexity. The arts, then, can offer a nonlinear way of expressing that can reveal what written and spoken language may not (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). This inquiry invited women to a site of community-based, post-formal learning with/in storyplace to tell stories with and beyond words, through their embodied experiences of the arts, which include entanglements with history, place, objects, and nature.

In this inquiry and social science in general, I posit that it is essential to know history but with the awareness and knowledge of who gets to tell the story. Exploring the

Appalachian Mountains has been and continues to be an invitation to follow traces of all kinds of stories through formal learning and outside of formal learning, back in history, and forward in imagined futures with critical thinking about implications of the stories we tell and receive. As formal education continues to be guilty of only telling certain stories and only in certain ways, there is an imperative to re-member history (Barad, 2017) or decolonize education (Tuck, & Yang, 2012; Tuck et al., 2014). By re-member history, I mean put the members of history, humans and other-than-humans back together and into the story that already exists but may not have been told. The concept of “re-member” will be used throughout this dissertation to indicate not only putting something back together but also remembering something but with new information. I assert the fluid nature of history and memory in this inquiry. In the following section I will describe the literature I reviewed related to this theorystory.

Post-Formal Educational Theorystories

Using library databases, I searched the time frame of 2010-2021 using the search terms “post-formal education” and “women.” The search included both international and United States references. I looked for studies that recognized lifelong learning, learning that included creativity, adult learning that recognized how place affected learners, and learning that included attention to affect and recognized justice.

I found literature that explored how adults, past their formal education, learn through a variety of outlets including social media (Smith, 2015), community classes (Wahab & Hamzah, 2013), discussion groups and learning communities (Plato, 2015), and books (McLean, 2013). From these studies, I discovered the variety of settings and modes that

adults use for learning after formal education. However, I did not find studies related to post-formal learning in nature.

Multiple studies have examined post-formal education for adults related to third-age learning (Garnet et al., 2018), “social movement learning and public pedagogy” (Walter, 2013, p. 521), self-directed learning (Schugurensky, 2000), incidental learning (Schugurensky, 2000), and non-formal learning (Walter, 2013). While a variety of terms have been used to describe adult learning, each has a slightly different meaning yet informs the current inquiry.

I found descriptions and analyses of formal education related to children and youth under a posthumanist lens, which this work does not intend to match (Gannon, 2016; Holmes & Jones, 2016; Ivison & Renold, 2016; Jagodzinski, 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016; Ringrose and Renold, 2016). Although there has been some theorizing of adult education within posthumanism theorizing (Jackson & Mazzei, 2016; Quin, 2016), there appears to be a lack of studies related to post-formal adult educational learning related to posthumanism. I found literature about adult learning in graduate courses related to pedagogy of feminist posthumanism research concepts (Chappell et al., 2021). The literature related to learning through a posthumanist lens is predominantly connected to formal educational institutions. This inquiry posits a different examination: one of using a posthumanist and FNM lens to explore *post-formal learning*.

Theorizing in these complicated social and environmental times, Susan Reed (2017) asks how we can provide education in a time of “the sixth mass extinction event,” (p. 57) recognizing the profound environmental destruction occurring during the current epoch, or the Holocene. Social and environmental justice related to climate change and its impact

particularly on marginalized people and other Earth dwellers will necessitate education about these topics. Due to the complexity of these issues, I assert that thinking-making-doing within education and outside of education will be needed. Scholars have written about what K-12 education might look like under a FNM lens informed by FPH and the combined PHEM (Edwards, 2010; Holmes & Jones, 2016; Gannon, 2016; Hood & Kraehe, 2017; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Strom et al., 2019; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019). In such studies, the traditional concept of life-long learning or post-formal education is challenged, as it favors a focus on the human (Edwards, 2010) and also tends to favor evidence-based practices, which St. Pierre (2006) argues concretize the “right way” to think, learn, and research. Edwards (2010) asserts that posthumanism moves away from learning as a goal toward ethical experimenting instead. Kang (2007) asserts that “postmodern critique rejects locating human actions, including learning, within any foundational certainty” (p. 206).

Under FNM informed by posthumanism as part of a renewed attention to materiality, I explore the entanglement of matter (including humans) and discourses, particularly around SEJ together. Theorizing under FNM contributes to deconstructing the binary between nature and culture and reconceptualizing them as entangled. Donna Haraway coined the term natureculture to designate that nature and culture are embedded or entangled in each other. (Latimer & Meile, 2013). In an interview with Karen Barad from *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012), Barad also uses the term natureculture and agrees with Haraway that nature and culture are already entangled with/in each other.

There has been and continues to be a rich debate in academia through journals, feminist theorizing (FNM, FPH, and PHEM), Indigenous philosophy, and conferences about

the concepts of nature and culture (Neimanis, 2014). The Story Family Sojourn adds to this theorizing through the use of expressive arts-based research (EXABR) (Clark/Keefe & Gilway, 2016). I will explore the resonance between FPH, FNM, and EXABR in further sections, as well as the much-debated term “nature.” As I began this study, I named one of the members of the Story Family nature. However, as I read deeper into the literature and discovered the concept of natureculture (Haraway, 1988), I determined that my conceptualization needed to be more nuanced. Please note that throughout this dissertation, I have used the word storyplace to indicate the place and the story that is being told here in the physical location of the Appalachian Mountains. I also use the word “environment” in relation to environmental justice that refers not only to the climate crisis but also to the complicated network of issues that the climate crisis contains and evokes, such as colonization, racism, capitalism, and the negative impacts on human and other-than-human beings. I assert that my inquiry would be served by the use of FNM and FPH in order to decenter the human in the human/nature binary, explore affect, and explore materiality and discourses.

Although studies in education have examined post-formal adult education (Gannon, 2016; Jagodzinski, 2013), there have been few studies on learning through EXA. Although it began as a therapeutic intervention, EXA has expanded to recognize the use of intermodal artistic practices for education, leadership, consulting, and inquiry (*International Expressive Arts Therapy Association, 2017*). As such, this Sojourn hopes to provide additional insight into community learning through intermodal arts-based groups. While numerous studies have identified informal learning situations, literature has not revealed analytic attention to the entanglement of women, time, arts, and nature in learning situations. I address this issue by

demonstrating the need for educational research that includes attention to post-formal learning in nature. This study, however, pushes against the binary of human/nature to focus on how learning occurs through the use of the entanglement of EXA, time, place, and matter.

While my inquiry may appear to be a humanist project, my initial desire was to examine and challenge the human-nature binary in order to move beyond human exceptionalism, which privileges “I” not “we” and specifically not a “we” that includes both humans and nature (Somerville, 2016). My inquiry differs from other work within the field of education in that I paid attention to the vital possibilities that were co-created with materials and adult women learning in a particular storyplace. As I began my scholarly journey, I was introduced to writing and studies that would become my kin, traveling with me. I searched for examples that would reinforce my trinity of creativity, affect, and SEJ and also provide a possible contribution to a theoretical conversation. I sought studies that would reinforce learning differently, through a relational and material ontology that honors nature (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Kimmerer, 2013; Reed, 2017; Somerville, 2013). As I moved through the inquiry, I desired to add to the conversation around entanglements in post-formal education in the current social and environmental times.

Theories and Theorists That Inform the Sojourn

In this section, I describe feminist posthumanism, feminist new materialism, and phEmaterialism. I focus on two key theorists, Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, and concepts of theirs that I used in the inquiry. These theories and theorists, along with their concepts, which were introduced to me during my doctoral coursework, traveled with me through my program and, more recently, have informed this Story Family Sojourn. After discussing theorists and theories that I used in this inquiry, I describe the emerging concepts that I created to think with and through this inquiry.

As I followed a path that led to writing that was both theoretical but also aesthetically beautiful, theoretical writing that in itself was infused with descriptions that painted pictures of concepts by researchers and practitioners, I was able to deepen my knowledge of current feminist theorizing, particularly about sociopolitical environmental challenges (Bird Rose, 2017; Davis & Turpin, 2015; Grusin, 2017; Haraway, 2016; Somerville, 2013). These writings inform my theorizing about felt concepts of creativity, sacredness through the lens of affect, and SEJ. The theorists who have resonated with my research questions and subsequent inquiry are Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, in addition to others grappling with and theorizing about the current entanglement of the times, which includes climate changes and political unrest impacting all of the Earth and its inhabitants, with profound consequences for the natural world and marginalized people. I posit these are times that invite creative feminist imagination through the use of theory and artistic practices.

During the Story Family inquiry, I was drawn to theories that would resonate with my original felting of creativity and SEJ. I found theoretical partners in PHEM informed by FNM and FPH and diffractive reading of science and social science studies. Diffraction is a concept discussed by both Haraway and Barad to look for difference as opposed to reflection, which uses “mirroring or sameness” (Barad, 2007, p.71). Thus, diffractive reading is reading with attention to the differences with the recognition that even boundaries between disciplines include discourse about power and the power to set the boundaries (Barad, 2007). I was curious to see how EXA, with its attention to creativity and affect, could converse with science and activism. In this grand diffractive conversation, Story Family sojourns would be a way to explore how these theoretical partners might inform and contribute to practices and discourses about women and learning outside of post-formal education. The following

section includes theories and theorists, companions on this Story Family journey. In many ways, they were already members of this Story Family.

Feminist Posthumanism/Feminist New Materialism

As I began my doctoral studies and, later, my inquiry as a feminist becoming-scholar, I was drawn to postmodern theories. While my feminism was grounded in Second Wave Feminism, in which organizing around identity was crucial, I learned about feminist post structural theory, which aspires to deconstruct binaries, particularly around language, through discourses. I later gravitated toward feminist posthumanism, which theorizes the deconstruction of the binary of human and nature, and feminist new materialism that explores a re-newed look at materiality, often called the material turn in theorizing.

Jessica Ringrose, Katie Warfield and Shiva Zarabadi (2018) write about some of the “feminist foremothers” (p. 2) of FPH and FNM. They point to the contributions of Deleuze and Guattari who theorize about the individual, society, and power demonstrated by their collaborative theorizing. Another author noted is Rosi Braidotti, who builds on the work of Deleuze and Guattari to deconstruct the concept of “man” and critique naming of the anthropocene as still being male centered. They also identify Donna Haraway (1988), who offers her critique of the nature culture binary, coining the term “natureculture.” As I will discuss, she also contributes examples of art and science combinations in research consistent with the Story Family process. Finally, FNM and FPH share the key work of theoretical physicist Karen Barad, also explored in further sections.

FNM challenges both the ontological and epistemological systems embedded in higher education and research. FNM and FPH offer a challenge to seek exploration of creative entanglements that traverse many disciplines; however, this type of exploration is

still rife with uncharted territory, which provides both a challenging and generative invitation to scholarly work.

Throughout my research, I have found phEmaterialism (PHEM), which combines FPH and FNM and often arts-based research in educational settings, to assist in thinking with and through my research curiosities. In the following section I will describe phEmaterialism in greater detail.

PhEmaterialism

In 2015, the Feminist Posthuman and New Materialism Research Methodologies in Education: Capturing Affect conference attracted researchers, artists, and activists (Strom et al., 2019). During the conference, organizers conceived of the combined term “phEmaterialism.” PHEM is “grounded in a genealogy of post structural, postcolonial, intersectional feminist and queer work in education” (Strom et al., 2019, p.3).

PhEmaterialism traverses many disciplines and provides a broad array of concepts or areas that correspond to my research questions and subsequent inquiry. Povelli (2016) states that “scientists, philosophers, anthropologists, politicians, political theories, historians, writers, and artists must gather their wisdom, develop a level of mutual literacy, and cross-pollinate their severed lineages” (p. 36).

Alyssa Nicolini and Jessica Ringrose (2019) posit that PHEM “includes feminist posthumanism, feminist new materialisms, and feminist affect theories” (p. 2). In the editorial of a special edition of *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, Strom et al., (2019) states that “phEmaterialist entanglements show how politics, activism, affect and art are all critical components of educational research” (p. 6). Under PHEM, human essentialism and exceptionalism are challenged, which assists in disrupting dominant

thinking that nature is here to be consumed, captured, owned, or controlled in the service of progress. Progress that attempts to consume, capture, own, or control nature has had a profound impact on humans and non-humans alike. Progress that seeks economic or political gains at the expense of marginalized people and nature privileges a short-term solution for a small number of people and may ultimately have an impact on the earth and its inhabitants (Braidotti, 2018; Haraway, 2016; Yusoff, 2018).

I posit that PHEM provides the theory that is broad enough, but also defined enough, to tell the story of this inquiry. Sally Atkins and Melia Snyder (2018) refer to theories as stories, research stories. I use the concept of “theory as story” in this inquiry in order to move toward arts-based research and to challenge the traditional, and often inaccessible, concepts in scientific research. As Haraway (2016) reminds us, it matters what stories we use to tell other stories. I assert that it matters what theories we use to tell the research story.

Conducting an inquiry that includes place, time, geology, geography, history, and the arts necessitated the transversality of examining various disciplines and their contributions to this theory story. While this inquiry does not intend to go into depth regarding the geography of the Appalachian Mountains or deep time stories of this region, the inquiry does invite participants and readers to become curious and learn about each of these areas in depth.

Thus, I invite the reader to learn the theory stories in order to explore deeper stories.

FNM and FPH offer a renewed look at science studies and political and material realities, particularly of women. (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2008; Haraway, 2008). I recognize and embrace the junctions and disjunctions that these concepts and theories offer to my inquiry. One of the tensions within my inquiry occurs between different views of matter and its agentic qualities. However, in multiple Indigenous belief systems, nature has

its own agency separate from human interaction (Povinelli, 2016; Somerville, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tuck et al., 2014). While the disjunctions may seem inconsistent, part of the purpose of this inquiry was to invite seemingly disparate theorists and theories to the dinner party, so to speak, to converse, intra-act, and find commonalities and generative differences. In conceptualizing my inquiry, I had hoped to move beyond conventions of qualitative research in order to allow myself to un/settle and play/theorize in this arts-based research (ABR) and EXA-informed inquiry. At my imagined dinner party, I invite scholars and practitioners of ABR and EXA in addition to scholars theorizing with FNM and FPH. Thought of as the founding mothers by scholars writing with/in the theories of FPH and FNM, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad are often cited in feminists' writing with FNM, FPH and PHEM (Ringrose et al., 2019). In the following sections I will explore the contributions to this inquiry of theories by Haraway and Barad.

Donna Haraway

In my own explorations of theory, I have been inspired by Donna Haraway, a feminist and a scientist, particularly through her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). She introduces language and examples that articulate and creatively demonstrate how we are entangled in the current times of urgency (Haraway, 2016). She offers creative and imaginative visions of addressing the generative intersections of science, environmentalism, politics, and the arts. In the following section, I will discuss some of her key concepts, which informed my inquiry. Some of the key concepts I will explore are Chthulucene as a response to the Anthropocene, string figures, making kin, sympoiesis, and the inspiration for the concept of Story Family.

Pulling apart a felt entanglement of concepts such as creativity, affect, and SEJ is daunting. However, in order to situate my study in the particular sociopolitical environmental epoch we are currently within, I assert that a background knowledge of the concept of the Anthropocene is important. By the early 21st century, concern articulated by climate activist scientists, geologists, and social scientists had increased about how humans' ways of consuming and using resources have a profound impact on our Earth and its many inhabitants who are increasingly marginalized (Coole & Frost, 2010; Davis & Turpin, 2015; Grusin, 2017; Haraway, 2016; Povelli, 2016). Claire Colebrook (2017) states that the evidence of this particular geological, ecological, and cultural time is marked by "intensive agriculture, changes in the earth's biomass, nuclear energy, colonization, industrialization, capitalism and so on" (p. 17). In order to understand Donna Haraway's response to the current times and the terms she created to describe this time, I posit it is crucial to understand the concept of the "Anthropocene." The term "Anthropocene," coined by Eugene Storer in the 1980s and popularized by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, heralds the end of the prior epoch, the Holocene, which began at the end of the last Ice Age (Davis, 2018; Davis & Turpin, 2015; Grusin, 2017; Haraway, 2016; Povelli, 2016, Tsing, 2017). The term "Anthropocene" is used to indicate that human effects on the Earth have overtaken our ability to reverse the outcomes of human consumption and capitalism. By 2008, Anthropocene and its subsequent "myriad research projects, performances, installations and conferences in the arts, social sciences, and humanities found the term mandatory in their naming and thinking" (Haraway, 2016, pp. 45-46).

The term "golden spike" indicates the moment when the Anthropocene or any epoch has begun. Scientists currently have no consensus about the golden spike, or date, for the

start of the Anthropocene (Hannah & Jeremijenko, 2017; Yusoff, 2018). However, Kathryn Yusoff (2018) suggests that three specific times could be considered the time/place to insert the golden spike: (a) the European invasion of Columbus and the first slave trade, (b) the Industrial Revolution, and (c) the nuclear age. Povelli (2016) argues that the launch of Sputnik could also be a time in history to place the golden spike, thereby marking the beginning of the Anthropocene.

Posthumanist research views attending to human and nonhuman entanglements as critically important in the Anthropocene (Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016). Rosi Braidotti (2018) characterizes the Anthropocene as “a multi-layered posthuman predicament that includes the environmental, socio-economic, and affective and psychic dimensions of our ecologies of belonging” (p. 2). While the concept of the Anthropocene has been taken up in the physical and social sciences, as well as other areas of study, robust critiques and debates continue, including whether it is a concept that is a generative and accurate one to use when describing current times. One of the critiques of the Anthropocene is that, once again, it describes what “mankind” has accomplished or destroyed without examining how not all humans are implicated equally. Colebrook (2016, 2017) also argues that the naming of the Anthropocene actually shadows the discrepancies between differential embodied lives by asserting humans as one category, filed under “man.” I posit there is a need for scientists and artists alike to continue to look at how historical and current political and environmental collective decisions make a differential and disproportionate impact on marginalized people, meaning groups of people living with situations including economic, gender, and racial disparities (Yusoff, 2018).

Yusoff (2018) argues that the Anthropocene garnered attention when its impacts reached White liberal communities. However, she argues that Black and Brown bodies have historically lived under environmental racism and have disproportionately carried the burden of its physical, emotional, and economic consequences. Historically, women, Indigenous, and Black and other people of color have not been afforded the rights of White men, have not been considered fully human, and have even been the property of other humans. St. Pierre (2021b) states “the Anthropocene provides ample evidence of the destructive consequences of separating human being from the rest of being....” (p. 485), including nature and other-than-humans. Anna Tsing (2017) argues this is not a time for empathy only and encourages us to think about the material interdependence between humans and between humans and other-than-humans. She asserts that the story of progress has dominated our cultural and educational stories and that there is a need to refocus on what has been ignored. Furthermore, she articulates the need to “look around rather than ahead” (p. 22). In other words, Tsing claims that it matters what stories/theories we use to tell the story of our current times (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2017; Yusoff, 2018). Consequently, deconstructing or challenging the story of progress, which is detrimental to both humans and other-than-humans but benefits others, is crucial.

Both Yusoff (2018) and Haraway (2016) suggest that science fiction writers, geopoetic writers, and artists of all ilk provide sources for re-membered and re-imagined stories, in addition to imagined futures. They agree that this is a time for neither eco-optimism nor apocalyptic overwhelm. Yusoff (2018) challenges us to use the arts as one of the ways to deconstruct the Anthropocene, suggesting the use of “poetry to refashion a new epoch, a new geology that attends to the racialization of matter” (p. 101). I posit that we need

to continue lifelong learning filled with creativity and imagination, which I explore in this inquiry through the apparatus (Barad, 2007) of an intermodal, community-based EXA group called the Story Family.

Chthulucene. Haraway (2016) writes imaginatively about the Anthropocene. She refers to not only the Anthropocene, but also the Capitalocene, a term coined by James Moore. She challenges her readers to think beyond the Anthropocene, which focuses on the *anthro*, or man, and instead uses the word “Chthulucene,” reflecting the strands of a spider web and the tentacles or legs of the spider that the spider uses to feel or sense. She writes, “Unlike either the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene, the Chthulucene is made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming within times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen yet” (Haraway, 2016, p. 55). Haraway explains that her crafting of the word “Chthulucene” starts with the spider *simoa cthulhu* and makes a slight change to the word, to Chthulu, to name this epoch. She asserts that the image of the spider with its many legs or tentacles generates imagination necessary for living in the current times, which invite or even demand multiple ways or “myriad tentacles” for telling the story. (Haraway, 2016, p. 31). She asserts that what is happening in our environment has implications for marginalized people, particularly during a time referred to as the “sixth mass extinction” (Povelli, 2016, p. 10). Haraway’s (2016) description of “myriad tentacles” therefore contributes to my theorizing with the entanglement in the Story Family Sojourn, leaving me with this question: How will intermodal EXA contribute to telling the story of this epoch, regardless of the name or the historical timeplace of the golden spike?

String Figures. Another concept that Haraway discusses is the string figure, which I use to think about EXABR and the current time frame the inquiry occurs in, the Chthulucene. Haraway builds on the concept of the spider and the strands of a spider web, referenced in her creation of the concept of the Chthulucene, to describe the string game. Common in many cultures, this game involves string that is wrapped around a person's fingers in a specific way and then passed to another person, back and forth, changing and moving form as two people create something together. String figures require holding still in order to receive and pass (Haraway, 2016). This act of stillness and a different sense of time informs my thinking about time in this study: the pause. Haraway expands on the string game, referred to sometimes as cat's cradle, by writing that she works "with string figures as a theoretical trope, a way to think-with a host of companions in sympoietic threading, felting, tangling, tracking and sorting" (Haraway, 2016, p. 31). In addition to the string figure, or SF, she introduces other SFs --"speculative fabulation, science fiction, science fact, and speculative feminism" (Haraway, 2016, p. 31)—to describe what is needed in order to address challenging environmental, political, and cultural times.

Embedded in the playing of the string game, I recognize the need to create together, to become-with each other, in a relational ontology.² Haraway (2016) challenges notions of being, a fixed ontology used in knowledge production, that seek to claim that what can be known is only what can be seen. In challenging the notion of "seeing is believing is truth" she asserts a need for an ontology of becoming, recognizing that even if we cannot measure or quantify what is considered knowable, movement and change is occurring (Haraway, 2016). An ontology of becoming recognizes the dynamic process of movement of what can

² Ontology refers to what can be known, often referred to as being, and epistemology refers to how something can be known.

be known and reflects Haraway's assertion that truth is "multiple, situated, and partial" (Haraway, 1988).

Throughout this dissertation I have used the word "becoming" as opposed to "being," a fixed ontology or *what* can be known. Becoming moves from asking the question "What is this?" to "How does it work and what does it do?" (Strom et al., 2019). I refer to becoming-with and becoming-scholar and later discuss the last two sections as Becoming Kin and Becoming Kin(d). Haraway builds on the idea of becoming-with as she explores the "arts of living on a damaged planet" (Tsing et al., 2017). Haraway identifies Anna Tsing as one of her companions in "science studies, anthropology and storytelling" (Haraway, 2016, p. 5). Building on the image of the string figure as an arts-based way of describing becoming with, Tsing et al., (2017) further assert, "String figures are thinking as well as making practices, pedagogical practices and cosmological performances" (p. 14). In the following section, I describe a making practice that I and the women in the Story Family Sojourn used throughout this inquiry.

Sympoiesis. In addition to becoming-with, my inquiry uses the concepts of sympoiesis to tell a research story, expanding on the term "poiesis." Poesis is a foundational concept in EXA that means knowing by making (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Levine, 2011). Atkins & Snyder (2018) state that "the process of creating is inherently reciprocal and interdependent" (p. 49). "Sympoiesis" is a term coined by M. Beth Dempsey (1998), who posits that sympoiesis is a collective system without spatial or temporal boundaries. Instead, information and control are distributed among components of a collective system. Haraway (2016) writes that sympoiesis, or making-with, is what is called for to reinforce an ontology of becoming-with. During the Sojourn, the women and I enacted sympoiesis, or knowing by

making, both writing and creating in each other's presence and also making collaboratively, using EXA materials and practices with/in storyplace.

Kin. Donna Haraway (2016) invites us to make kin. She explains that her conceptualization of making kin goes beyond biological, ancestral, or genealogical relations. She asserts that all humans and other-than-humans are already kin. In my study, not only are the women participants past a time of formal education, the women are past the age of childbearing, yet they yearn for ways to build community and learn with each other, or make kin, in these precarious times (Haraway, 2016). Haraway describes the need for creative ways of being-with and making-with each other during this current historical time frame. It is with this new understanding of kin or family that we can take up her invitation to stay with the trouble or face the challenging times we are in, not just individually but also in community, both locally and globally. In the following section, I discuss another key theorist, Karen Barad, and their concepts.

Karen Barad

Karen Barad is a physicist and a feminist. Along with others, they refute binaries, such as human/nature, as unsustainable for the times we live in. Their transversal thinking and theorizing, which is informed by philosophy, feminism, and physics, has inspired and informed many social scientists, especially thinking with PHEM, FNM, and FPH (Nicolini & Ringrose, 2019; Truman, 2019). Their theoretical work informs multiple concepts used in this Sojourn, the relationships between and with the researcher and the participants, what is possible to know, and how it can be known (Nicolini & Ringrose, 2019). The concepts from Barad that inform this Story Family inquiry include agential realism, agency, intra-action,

entanglement, cuts, and apparatus. In addition, I will discuss their concepts about time, which they have termed spacetime mattering.

Agential Realism. In the following section, I describe concepts that Karen Barad offers and which I will use to discuss the Story Family Sojourn. Agential realism is the term that Karen Barad uses to frame their assertions about ontology and epistemology. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) assert that “the practices of knowing *and* being cannot be isolated from each other,” but are described more accurately as “knowing in being” (p. 116). They assert that through intra-action, as opposed to interaction, both discourses and materiality are created in knowledge production (Barad, 2007). Barad (2007) further argues that when agents, both human and other-than-human, interact with each other, it is more accurate to say that they intra-act. Interaction implies separate entities that produce a causal relationship. Barad uses the concept of “intra-action” to refute the idea that individuals cause or create agency themselves, a topic often discussed within FNM, FPH, and PHEM. Agency is a concept that is taken up in FNM, FPH, and PHEM. For this study, the concept of agency is understood to mean what is enacted in the already entanglement of discourses and materiality through the apparatus of expressive arts (Barad, 2007; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Barad (2007) asserts a relational ontology, which refutes a power over or power to give agency to another entity. In my inquiry, I explore how intra-action operates with the members of the Story Family women, time, arts, and storyplace to create agency. I wonder how intra-action operates and what it does. Barad argues that we can focus on a particular entanglement in the intra-action but that we are actually already entangled with and in each element prior to the study. Echoing Barad’s concept of agency through intra-action, Donna Haraway writes, “Nature, cultures, subjects, and objects do not preexist their entwined worldings” (Haraway,

2016, p. 13). For the purposes of my study, the use of intra-action recognizes that agency is co-created through the intra-action in the entanglement with members of the Story Family; the felt concepts of creativity, affect, and SEJ; and the materiality and discourses that are embedded and embodied in them.

Barad (2007) argues that “entanglement” does not refer to individual strands or elements that come together, positing instead that entanglements are also ways we are responsible for each other, human and other-than-human alike. Furthermore, Barad (2007) defines an ontology of entanglement as a process of meaning and matter intra-acting. They assert that multiple dichotomies, including self and other, are no longer fixed (Barad, 2010). Although Haraway does not discuss entanglement in her theorizing, she does describe the action in playing the string game and its relation to agency. She states that “the partners do not precede the knottings; species of all kinds are consequent upon worldly subject-object-shaping entanglements” (Haraway, 2016, p. 13), echoing Barad’s assertion that agency is co-constituted in the playing of the game, and, thus, in my inquiry. Indigenous scholars Alison Jones and Kawehau Hoskins (2015) also provide theorizing that is consistent with Barad’s concept of agency. They assert that matter is not “discrete or independent” (p. 81) but is in relationship with all that is around it, human and other-than-human. Haraway (2016), Barad (2007), Jones, and Kawehau Hoskins (2015) resonate with agency being co-constituted with and between various types of matter.

Cuts. Barad (2007) also uses the concept of “cuts” to indicate that while science may appear to be neutral, the choices the researcher makes are informed not only by ontological and epistemological beliefs but also by ethics. Scholars theorizing with FNM, FPH, and PHE recognize that researchers are immersed in knowledge production that requires an ethics of

“accountability and response-ability” (Taylor, 2021). According to Barad (2007), part of the ethical response-ability is recognizing that what is observed necessitates clarity of what is included and what is excluded, thereby making a “cut.” While Barad asserts that agency emerges through an entanglement, they also recognize that in order to study something, a researcher must temporarily make separations or smaller “cuts” in order to follow their curiosity or research question. Barad states that agential cuts allow certain parts of research to come into focus. I have made particular cuts in choosing the members of the Story Family to include women, time, arts, and storyplace. By making these cuts, what emerges as agentially real allows me to deepen my theorizing individually to theorizing together, which has implications for educational practices, especially post-formal education. The cuts encourage focus on how expressive arts could intra-act with FFM, FPH, and PHEM to encourage collaborations and conversations between researchers and practitioners.

Apparatus. Another concept Barad (2007) refers to, and that I will be using to think with/in Story Family, is “apparatus.” Profit & Pritchard (2015) state that “an apparatus is not just the set of instruments or mediating devices needed to perform an experiment, instead, it is the arrangement of nonhuman and human material-discursive forces through which particular concepts are given definition and through which particular physical properties are produced [2]” (p. 399). As a physicist, Barad introduces the concept of indeterminacy to explain waves and particles and the consequences of the observer being embedded in the apparatus, thus refuting that there is a defining line between the observer and the observed. Instead, the observer becomes part of the apparatus. Barad’s theory contributes to their concept of entanglement and the necessity for ethico-onto-epistemological attention and attunement in research. This concept, then, has implications for research ethics and

qualitative inquiry. Researchers using Barad's paradigm are encouraged to explore their own responsibility or their ability to respond. In the Story Family Sojourn, EXA practices in storyplace, along with myself as the researcher, operates as the apparatus, enabling both social and scientific processes.

Diffraction. Karen Barad and Donna Haraway both come from a science background and use scientific concepts to examine social sciences. In the 1990s, Haraway wrote about the concept of diffraction as an alternative to reflection and the assertion of objectivity in science (Geerts & van der Tuin, 2016). Barad (2007) expands on the term to include diffractive reading, which refutes a hierarchy of theories and methodologies and asserts the need for reading texts through each other. They also echo a similar understanding of agency as an enactment or co-constituted, which for Haraway (2016) appears through her writing on becoming-with.

Emerging Concepts

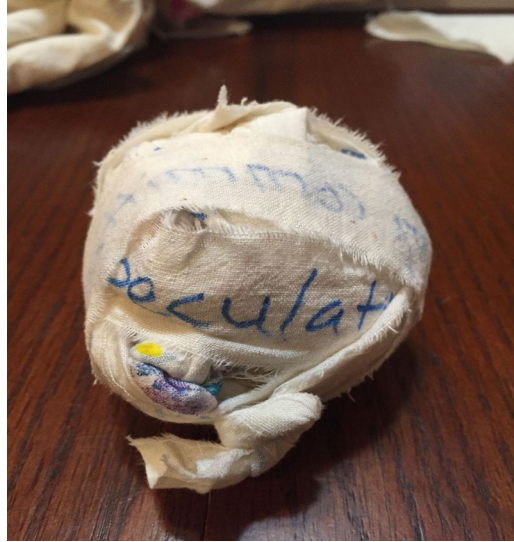
In the following section, I write about words and concepts I created, which were inspired by and emerged from my doctoral journey as well as my readings of theory, particularly by Karen Barad and Donna Haraway. In the following section, I will describe the concepts of dinner party, theory root ball, Story Family, symtheoria, becoming kin, and becoming kin(d) that deepen and contribute to my inquiry.

Dinner Party. As a becoming-scholar, I thought about how my own emerging concepts and theories developed throughout the doctoral program: theories that explored materiality, feminism, science, time, memory, and the arts. I was inspired by scholars writing with and through PHEM who assert that arts-based research “challenges old claims of evidence, measurement, and positivist claims to knowledge” (Ringrose et al., 2019, p. 7).

Playing and theorizing with and through concepts of time, I chose the time I conceptualized the dinner party as one of the golden spikes of my inquiry's beginning. In the following section, I recount the nascent theorizing that occurred and how the journey of my thinking arrived at the current theoretical entanglement. I wonder how my original felt concepts of creativity, affect (sacredness), and social and environmental justice could intra-act, revealing the entanglement of discourse and materiality theorized in FNM and FNM. I also wonder how EXA, including attention to nature or story place, would inform ABR and vice versa. My doctoral curriculum introduced me to the exercise of inviting theorists to an imaginary dinner party and "listening in" to their conversation, hearing where they might agree and where they might disagree and how their pairings created something new. In addition, I began to envision an arts-based way of exploring, explaining, and showing how my envisioning of the theories the scholars were talking about might visually intra-act.

I imagine a dinner party with the guests being my theoretical kin. I send the invitation for dinner hoping for rich conversation about creativity and EXA, theory, feminism, sacredness, affect, and our current socio-political and environmental times with and between Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Sally Atkins, Alecia Jackson, Brooke Hofsess, Lee Evans, Jenny Campagna, Eva Thorp, Mary Neal Meador, Jessica Ringrose, and Rosi Braidotti. These women, whom I claim as my theoretical genealogy, are joined as my sisters, both blood and chosen. Standing behind each individual woman I imagine the specters of theoretical and familial kin, living and deceased, that have supported or inspired each of these women. A long table set with tablecloths and flowers is in a clearing in the woods. We eat a local and lovingly prepared meal or, like women's gatherings often do, possibly a

potluck. We drink and laugh and argue. I look around the table and smile, as we do when some of our favorite ideas and people get together.



Fiber Root Ball. Inspired by the dinner party of my chosen theoretical kin, I wanted an arts-based way of showing how the theorists and their theories were intra-acting together. I created a visual image for myself that helped me understand how each of the theories I gravitated to was intra-acting with the others. As a visual thinker, I needed to imagine or create an arts-based way of knowing. I imagined how theories and concepts could be put together and pulled apart, then reassembled in other generative ways. From this idea, I created the concept of the fiber root ball. What would happen if the theories of the dinner party guests in these conversations visually came together into a ball of thick roots and tiny mycelium strands? I imagined the dinner guests' words reaching toward each other, interacting, becoming something different, and supporting or challenging each other's ideas through these theory story strands of conversation.

I imagined these root strands reach for and attach to theory as I processed with women mentors/scholars/friends. I unrolled the conceptual theoretical fiber root ball and looked again at separate strands, each one transforming the other by mere proximity. I

worked on creating this multidimensional piece of scholarly work, and concurrently it worked on/in me. We are entangled with each other; we are co-creating. I rolled and unrolled my ever-growing conceptual framework/theoretical fiber root ball, and I became aware of both the need to focus on specific parts, yet I continued to be mindful of larger entanglements.

The concept fiber roots wrapped around my ankles, threatening my balance. I leaned into the passion of wanting to convince others about the importance of the arts and particularly EXA. I asked myself, who are these others? I have an embodied experience of the power of the arts for personal and community well-being and a belief in the arts for social change. Fibers pulled me this way and that, competing for my attention.

Theorists (living and dead), theories, expressive artists, professors, mentors, and friends walked with me and contributed to the fiber/theory root ball as I continued to roll and unroll, focus on a small part, and then view the whole project. Each theory strand working separately but together. I allowed the process to disorganize me, to cause disequilibrium, in order to entangle myself with other fiber root ball strands as I continued becoming-scholar.

My education and subsequent theorizing have included making connections— weaving, and felting ideas together and also pulling fibers apart to examine them individually—and then putting new concept fibers together in hopes of contributing to theorizing around women making and thinking in storyplace, particularly in Appalachia. In many ways, language is inadequate to “show” the complexity of these ideas; therefore, I will attempt to pull fibers apart to craft an explanation. An entanglement is just that, entangled or felted together. In a past felting workshop, I experienced the embodiment of this as an art practice and a theoretical concept, as I took two or more groups of fibers and massaged them

together, never to be separated again. Even if I cut a portion of the felted product, pieces of each of the original fibers would be present in the part I cut away. For the purposes of explanation, I will detangle the strands; however, whispers of all other fibers are still present in the individual strands. As I proposed this inquiry, I recognized that as I weave and am woven, the fibers will never weave back together in the exact same way.

Story Family. Inspired by Haraway’s creative descriptions of “art science worldings,” including “speculative fabulation, science fiction, science fact, and speculative feminism....so far” (Haraway, 2016, p. 31), I propose an additional “SF”: Story Family. I conceptualized the members of the Story Family involved with my inquiry as a group of women in the Appalachian Mountains or storyplace, time, and arts materials and practices, all gathered together to explore ideas and concepts that I had been theorizing about in isolation. My own individual theorizing prior to my inquiry included disconnections and intersection between feminism; social and environmental justice; relationships between space, time and matter; EXA; and ABR. I wanted to use EXA to explore deeply the place of the Southern Appalachian Mountains with a community of women who are past formal learning. I value community and life-long learning, and I invited women to gather to participate in the arts while in the place of the woods, co-exploring concepts inspired in large part by Haraway’s writing and theorizing. The Story Family members were included, invited to make kin, in this Sojourn. I proposed that we would move from my individual exploration to a community exploration through making together and theorizing together. Each meeting was a sojourn, or a pause, from the regular routines and rituals of daily life.

Thinking with Donna Haraway’s SF, I wondered what SF I could create to use in this inquiry. In a discussion with my son about my research, he suggested an SF of Story Family.

It was a point that opened a possibility. I wondered what the golden spike of this story could be? Could there really only be one fixed point in time and place when/where this story actually began? At that moment, Story Family became the organizing structure for this inquiry. Haraway (2017) asserts that “these are the times of urgencies that need stories” (p. 37). While the inquiry occurs in what can be seen as a particular point in time, I also imagined gathering historical information—particularly in women’s lives and in the life of the mountain itself. I wondered about the stories of women in community, especially those related to craft making and also through activism. I am fascinated with different understandings of time, including Turner’s (1969) concept of liminal time and Barad’s (2007) concept of spacetime mattering. I wondered what possible futures had been set in motion by this one particular, seemingly insignificant, time of naming by a mother’s son in a kitchen in the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Symtheoria. Inspired by and building on the concept of sympoiesis, and coupled with my interest in theorizing with the participants, I propose a new concept. The word “theoria” means thinking or contemplation. With the addition of the prefix “sym-,” or together, “symtheoria” refers to thinking and theorizing with others. I initially proposed an enactment of this concept in the inquiry by inviting the participants to offer questions to explore in addition to my research questions. What were the participants curious about and drawn to learn about through making with and thinking/theorizing with?

Becoming Kin. For the purposes of this study, I will build on a description of making kin to include Haraway’s concept of becoming in order to discuss becoming kin. Becoming kin is not limited to making family in traditional ways through biological or legal means. The concept of becoming kin is closer to the concept of chosen family. I posit, however, that even

the concept of chosen family refers to our relationships with other humans, not with the natural world or art materials. In this inquiry, “becoming kin” refers to the relationships and entanglements not only between the women participants but also with storyplace and, specifically, the area around where the inquiry occurred, the Southern Appalachian Mountains. We explored how humans were becoming kin with each other and with time, EXA materials and practices, and this region. I ponder: How does attuning with and participating in intermodal EXA practices with/in storyplace assist us in becoming kin?

Becoming Kin(d). Building on becoming kin, I posit a further deepening of theory to becoming kin(d). Becoming kin(d) describes how we are in the process of becoming family, not just in the Story Family but also in the world with humans, more-than-humans, and other-than-humans. In theorizing becoming kin(d), I look to both how we intra-act with kindness and how we embrace each other as our kind.

Story Family Members

As I began to conceptualize the Story Family members and the inquiry or Sojourn, my focus, or cut (Barad, 2007), crystallized to include women, time, art(s), and storyplace. As I made the cuts to construct my inquiry, I looked more closely at how the felt concepts of creativity, affect, and SEJ were entangled with the members of the SF. They did not stay in neat separate categories. My challenge and honor is to pull the felt apart to reveal the individual fibers chosen for this inquiry. In the following section, I describe in greater detail some of the felting between Story Family members and creativity, affect and SEJ.

Women. As a lifelong feminist, I chose to invite women to my inquiry to continue my feminist theorizing, particularly as it related to the need for social and environmental justice. In my inquiry, I propose that women participants, including myself, are one member

of the Story Family. By not focusing on women as the only SF members, I employ Karen Barad's concept of intra-action, in which agency is co-constituted (Barad, 2007) with all the members of the family. Theorizing with/in FNM and FPH challenges the notion of participants as only human actors and expands to include human, other-than-humans and matter (Taylor et al., 2021).

In this Story Family Sojourn, women are both part of the entanglement and also provide generative tension between presence and decentering in the nature/culture binary. The choice of women as one of the members is a feminist enactment of my becoming-scholar. In the entanglement of science, culture, history, and the environment of our current time/place/space in history, deconstructing the binary of human/nature is particularly important to women. In the introduction to the anthology *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (2008) point to the particular impact of human consumption on nature, but also on “various women, Third World peoples, Indigenous people, people of color, and other marked groups” (p. 4). Scholars theorizing under Feminist Post Structuralism (FPS) caution against essentializing the category of women or pointing to a universal experience of all women. Under FPH and FNM, feminists are invited to view the particular experiences of the material world of women, as well as how women's bodies are continuously acting and being acted upon. Subsequently, within FPH and FNM there is a renewed recognition of environmental and institutional sexism, racism, and ableism (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016). Many women who have been othered in various ways through sexism, heterosexism, racism, and classism have often been on the forefront of working with other marginalized groups (Ahmed, 2017; Haraway, 2016; Hogan, 2016; hooks, 2015). The discourses surrounding marginalized women informed my choice of

including women participants. I wondered how the women participants would engage with social justice related to marginalized women. How could we look at our own privileges and experiences to both broaden the conversations and see ourselves specifically in the stories of marginalization and intersectionality.

Time. For my inquiry, I chose time as a member of Story Family, curious about the brief time humans are on this earth compared to the deep time represented in the storyplace of the Appalachian Mountains. I wondered about how history/herstory is told and taught throughout time, particularly in education. I was also interested in how stories that connect to the past through memory and are used to create possible futures are told. The concept of diffractive thinking, the practice of looking at concepts with and through each other (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016), invited me to look at time from two perspectives. In the following section, I draw from two sources for my understanding of time as related to this inquiry: the concept of liminality in EXA classrooms and gatherings and the entanglement of time, space, and matter, or spacetimemattering, in the writings of feminist scientist Karan Barad. I noticed the participants' sense of time as they created in storyplace.

Liminality. As I experienced the arts-based, process-oriented pedagogy of the EXA classroom, I learned of the concept of liminality. The word "liminal" comes from the Latin word *limen* or threshold (Turner, 1969). Liminality is a condition created intentionally by EXA teachers and leaders; it encourages the purposeful creation of spaces that invite attention and attunement. EXA educators and practitioners discuss the concept of liminal space, which is identified as an affect place where space and time possess a different quality. Atkins and Williams (2007) define this as altered time, in which "surprises or something unexpected can occur" (p. 20). Liminal space has also been described as flow

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), deep play (Ackerman, 1999; Levine, 1997), attunement (Kossak, 2009), third space (Eberhart & Atkins, 2014), transformational space, threshold, or, in the Celtic Earth-based sacred traditions, as recognizing the thin veil between worlds (Leavy, 2015; Atkins & Williams, 2007; Turner, 1969). The concept of liminality, particularly within the arts, is essential in order to embrace ambiguity and chaos and to navigate the uncertain historical, environmental, and political times we find ourselves in. Herbert Eberhart and Sally Atkins (2014) assert that mindfulness is needed to set up conditions that invite a different sense of time. As education becomes more focused on systemization, it is a political act to hold on to the arts and to value what is arriving and what is being co-created in post-formal learning. Artists, musicians, and writers, for example, offer their sense-making and solidarity-building skills at this time, the Anthropocene, as we pass through the threshold to a time/place different from what we have known individually and communally, as Haraway (2017) refers to as an SF, “so far” (p. 39). In learning within and outside of formal educational settings, liminality in community is essential, as it allows for a different sense of time disconnected from routines and busyness. The sense of community in Story Family Sojourn included the feeling of timelessness and unity between group members in the creative experiences of the individual sojourns. The concept of experiencing liminal space in a human and other-than-human community was useful in exploring the Story Family Sojourn. The liminality contributed to a slowing down and a focus that afforded the members the time to engage in the apparatus of expressive arts, to engage in expressing curiosity about community building and social and environmental justice.

One of my intentions for my inquiry was to create the conditions for choosing to step away from a privileged power over nature and other-than-human subjectivity, to decenter

self. Women in the study expressed a desire to be with each other, to create and to be in nature. Decentering of a singular self to create community or a collective she appeared to be the condition necessary for curiosities about other issues to emerge. Decentering the self in order to embrace a new ethics, politics, and ontology can only occur when we are in the in-between, the in-between of what was and what can and will be. The arts are a powerful way to invite a person into a place of letting go or a sense of timelessness through liminality. This sense of timelessness is also an essential element for learning/education and for healing self and the world. Change through a decentered self is not ever an endpoint but a becoming-ally to both humans and other-than-humans alike.

Spacetime mattering. Karen Barad (2007), coming from their background in physics, posits that space, time, and matter are all already entangled with each other. They assert that there is no dividing line between past, present, and future. They use the word “spacetime” and matter (Barad, 2007, p. 437) to describe this entanglement. Nicolini and Ringrose (2019) discuss how Karen Barad theorizes the entanglement of senses with time and with multiple disciplines, or what she calls diffractive reading (Barad, 2007). The generative place this inquiry contributes to relates back to my idea of the conceptual dinner party and who has been invited. I think of this as the diffractive conversation between EXA, FPH, FNM, feminism and ABR. Therefore, I have made cuts through inviting these particular guests to the dinner party. Consequently, the table is set in the woods for a diffractive reading and conversation with the food of theoretical sustenance. In this theoretical and imaginative dinner party specifically, and in the entire inquiry, I posit the concept of “spacetime matter” is a useful concept to think with. The entanglement of space, time, and matter within the time and place of the individual gatherings/sojourns, each Story Family member—women, arts,

and nature—holds traces of all space, time, and matter past and of times to come. In addition, the women were invited to think and art about what they were curious about, following particular stories throughout their own time and deep time through exploration of EXA. Barad's theorizing about time and matter is consistent with theorizing around Story Family and its particular spacetime-mattering throughout the sojourns. In addition, I propose that a renewed sense of time through spacetime-mattering can assist in looking back into time in order to envision a new future.

Arts. The arts are used in personal expression, education, and activism related to SEJ. I chose arts as a member of the Story Family Sojourn, especially expressive arts. The art materials and practices used in Story Family Sojourn are informed by expressive arts pedagogy, including materials and practices used in graduate programs and community groups. I will explore EXA and its key concepts in the next section, as I employed EXA in this inquiry. EXA materials and practices were one of the other-than-human parts of the entanglement, a matter member of the Story Family. Although EXA as a profession began as a therapeutic intervention, this inquiry does not discuss therapeutic implications of EXA. Instead my focus is on EXA in the realm of education and theorizing. Prior to the Story Family Sojourn, I wondered: If EXA was operating as the apparatus of the study, how would the materials and practices intra-act with the other members of the Story Family and each other? In addition, how might EXA practices, specifically of creating with/in storyplace, be intra-acting with the place of the Appalachian Mountains? One of the values of the arts is to be able to participate in thinking-making-doing (Springgay, 2018) in ways that are not possible through only verbal communication (McNiff, 2009).

Intermodality. The philosophical and pedagogical underpinning of EXA therapy, education, consultation, and research combines art, ritual, and/or play in each class or gathering. Intermodal arts used in EXA can encompass writing, visual arts, performance, movement, music, storytelling, meditation, ritual, gardening, and play (Atkins & Williams, 2007). Materials in EXA can be traditional arts materials such as paint, clay, and oil pastels, but materials can also be items from what is traditionally thought of as nature—woods, streams, wildflowers, feathers—found objects, and materials used in creative play, ritual, or theater. EXA uses each of the modalities as a component of a palette of possibilities. The use of EXA materials and practices involves an epistemology that asserts art as a way of knowing (Allen, 1995). In this Story Family Sojourn, each gathering implemented intermodal artistic creating, including writing, visual arts, performance, movement, music, nature-based practices, and ritual.

Process Oriented. Within the context of my project, there is no expectation of a final product displaying mastered techniques of a particular medium. Practitioners and theorists in expressive arts therapy value the creative process that also includes attention to affect and materiality of the art supplies (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). One of the basic tenets of expressive arts is a process orientation, a belief in the system of objects and people not as fixed but fluid systems (Atkins & Snyder, 2017). I recognize the interrelatedness of all systems, consistent with postmodern views of science and inquiry. Thus, within expressive arts the participants, time, environment, art materials, and practices are all intra-acting together. The “product” that appears carries all these elements and more, the focus being not only on the “thing” but also its affective creation. As one of the theorists under FNM and FPH, Jane Bennett (2010) writes about “thing power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to

produce effects dramatic and subtle” (p. 60). I entered this inquiry with a curiosity about looking at expressive arts tenets with FNM and FPH. What might they have to learn from each other?

I posit that the focus on process-oriented practices is consistent with theorizing under FPH, in which ontology, ethics, and epistemology are considered entangled with each other (Barad, 2007). In these times, and in order to tell this research story, my inquiry had to move from a fixed ontology of “what is” to a more relational ontology of becoming or becoming-with. In EXA, participants and practitioners pay attention to the process of creating through writing, acting, playing, moving, and sounding, as well as the product. While participants do create a product, the participants are guided to focus more on the effects of the process and product that elicit attunement to self and community. In the process of expressive arts materials and practices, a rich entanglement exists.

EXA Practices. In the Story Family Sojourn, participants explored EXA practices. Practices in EXA include creating a ritual structure (openings and closings), participating in art making, spending time in nature, outside in whatever environment is nearby, offering an aesthetic/artistic response, crafting a performance, choreographing a dance, or offering vocal or instrumental sound. Aesthetic or artistic responses sometimes involve responding in a creative way to someone’s expressive art process or the resulting creative product. This differs from critique in that the goal is to respond with movement, sound, writing, or visual art as a reflection on the viewer's relationship to beauty and the particular creative act that has affected the viewer (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). Often, EXA practices occur in a studio-type environment where multiple materials and modalities/practices are offered (McKniff, 2004, 2011). In this inquiry, however, the “studio” is the place of these mountains. While the

Sojourn occurred in the specific place of the mountains, the concept of the undercommons (Manning, 2016) is also used to think-, make-, and do-with, in order to recognize the emergent nature of the Story Family Sojourn.

For the purposes of my inquiry, I used the EXA practice of creating an intentional opening and closing, a way of marking the time and setting the stage for a different sense of time for each gathering or sojourn. EXA practices offer a creative, liminal, and intentionally sacred space, with attention to affect, embodiment of the senses, and synchronicity in the learning environment (Bickel & Hugill, 2011; Fisher & Bickel, 2015; Walsh et al., 2015).

Appalachian Mountains/Storyplace. I chose the Appalachian Mountains, where the women and I live, for its rich geological history and the cycles and seasons that both inspire me and inform the particular EXA program located here. As I learned about the migration of the Appalachian Mountains and their imperceptibly slow movement from Pangaea to the present, I began to wonder about humans' incredibly brief time on Earth as a species and as individuals. I became interested in how the slow movement through time of the mountains, along with the perception of liminal time spent outside, specifically in the woods, were working together. I thought of it as a diffractive noting of time through both liminality and geological time. I wondered how our status as infants and visitors on this planet has had such a profound and harmful impact on the Earth. What would it take to disorient humans away from human time and into mountain migration time? In this inquiry, the women participants and I honored the possibility of a different, liminal, perception of time, in order to create conditions for recognition of what may arrive and depart in the place of the mountains, the place where each woman participant resides (Davis & Turpin, 2015).

The place of the Appalachian Mountains enriches the entanglement, due to the journey of the mountains themselves from the large Pangaeon continent to their current position. Part of the Appalachian range continues to exist in both Scotland and the western coast of Africa. Curiously, the early settlers of the Appalachian Mountains in the United States were the Scots Irish (Peters, 2018). In addition, West Africans were forced to immigrate to the United States, including this region, through slavery. The movement of the mountains and the peoples, in addition to the movement of the height of the mountains, once taller than the Himalayan Mountain range but now smaller in stature due to their age, continues to move, albeit imperceptibly slowly, around us. Contained in what appears to be a still, fixed moment, movement continues to unfold, a migration of time, people, mountains, affects, and theories. All the while, the New River, one of the oldest rivers in the world, runs through these ancient mountains. River carving rock, rock holding river.

In thinking about the binary opposition between nature and culture, I employ the word “natureculture” as coined by Donna Haraway (1988). While I write about the women participants doing-making-thinking in nature, I also embrace that humans *are* nature. Additionally, I recognize, as I have previously stated, that there is a history of associating marginalized people with nature and employing a power over narrative and politics. Consequently, this serves to reify the othering actions that have contributed to the possibility of the sixth mass extinction. Consistent with my inquiry, I recognize that Indigenous cosmologies refute the binary between nature and culture (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Indigenous cosmologies are more consistent with Haraway (1988) and Barad (2007), along with other theorists’ uses of the term “natureculture” that I employ in the Story Family entanglement.

Storyplace is the place I reside and theorize in, the Southern Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina. Although not a native to the area, I have grown to love this ancient range. It is here that I came to see how entanglements of humans and other-than-humans can benefit from thinking and creating together. The agency and vitality of the entanglement includes the site where the making together, sympoiesis, and theorizing together, symtheoria, occurred. There is an urgency to tell, dance, paint, and sing other stories in these complicated times, and geo or Gaia stories, stories about the Earth, need to be included (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Haraway, 2016).

I was curious about what writing and creating in the place of the Appalachian Mountains, with its history, rich biodiversity, and unique arts and culture, might contribute to the Story Family Sojourn. As my inquiry is place-based in the Appalachian Mountains, throughout the process, I was cognizant of a history of studying people of the mountains that has, at times, furthered “othering” and perpetuated antiquated modes of inquiry (Donehower & Webb-Sunderhaus, 2015; Schumann, 2016). My feminism necessitates a recognition of marginalized people and their absence in the full story. Thus, I recognize the ethics and the complicated history of research and, ultimately, colonization of a group of people who have been othered in a particular place. As a feminist scholar-in-the-making, I am committed to examining how knowledge is privileged and produced and how the scholarship of Indigenous and other marginalized groups can be discredited or made invisible by dominant philosophies. In addition, people often are fascinated with other cultures and may travel to visit them. Travelers run the risk of continuing a type of colonization by “consuming” arts, culture and nature. The souvenirs collected may actually further the sense of “knowing” a

place and a culture without the time, love, and labor a place and culture need in order to begin to be known. I conducted my inquiry with that history in mind.

EXA and Storyplace. Dr. Sally Atkins (2018), one of the founders of the EXA program at ASU, along with Dr. Melia Snyder cites nature as a model for creative process and points to community as a central value of her philosophy. I recognize cycles and seasons in the place of the Appalachian Mountains, an area rich in the arts and a recognition of land that is sacred. In her reverence of nature, Atkins also claims the cycles of birth and death as a model for our own personal and community work. Imagination is valued, as are other EXA modalities, through emergence, not analysis or interpretation (Atkins & Williams, 2007). The Expressive Arts program at Appalachian State University, which is located in the Appalachian Mountains, has a particular focus on ecotherapy, rituals, and ceremonies. While educators and practitioners are cautious about cultural appropriation, there is congruence with Earth-based sacred practices that honor season and cycles (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). In this Sojourn, the concept of community is expanded to include material members of the Story Family as well, such as storyplace. Community and ritual, shared concepts between EXA and Indigenous wisdom traditions and philosophies, are interwoven in the inquiry. This is consistent with one of my research questions: What gets co-created in the entanglement with humans and other-than-human participants, including the already entangled materiality of the art supplies, and discourses about SEJ in the Story Family?

Epigraph

She wants you to know that this story is too round and full and woven together, that the paper seems too flat. The black words on white paper, her hands typing. She wants you to know that what is embedded in the telling is the doing, the art, the wind, the colors. She wants you to know she will tell the story maybe not in order, maybe with more questions than answers. She will combine her becoming-scholar self with her becoming-creative writer/expressive artist/educational leader self. This is a story of a commitment to seeing things with more dimensions than traditional research can. It is a story of how it happened when she invited women, time, arts and nature to a Story Family entanglement. It matters what stories she uses to tell other stories (Haraway, 2016). It matters what stories she uses to theorize. It matters what theories she uses to theorize. She will use expressive arts-based research methodology and methods to create a disequilibrium so she can look at the entangled elements in a new and different way. She will use the theory story of arts-based research to show and tell about a radical re-imagination of education.

Becoming Kin

In this inquiry, “Becoming Kin” refers not only to the women participants but also to their storyplace: the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The Story Family participants explored how humans were becoming kin with each other, time, EXA materials and practices, and nature. Becoming kin deepens making kin and builds on focusing on the other members of the entanglement. I ponder, how does attuning to affect and nature with a social and environmental justice lens, while participating in intermodal EXA practices, assist humans and our specific storyplaces in becoming kin? In the following section, I will expound upon FPH, FNM informed by feminism, and ABR informed by EXA pedagogy and practices. Finally, I will describe research-creation and data creation, as opposed to data collection, including who participated in the inquiry and how I structured the inquiry, before giving an overview of what occurred over the yearlong study.

Posthumanism and New Materialism Informed by Feminism

Posthuman philosophy and research has necessitated a rethinking of ethics, epistemology, and ontology into an entanglement Barad (2017) calls ethico-onto epistemology. In addition, posthuman philosophy is “profoundly unsettling how to do research” (Murriss, 2021, p. 2). The rich compost of new theories, philosophies, and standards of research provide the soil necessary to explore the “edge of theorypractice” (Murriss, 2021, p. 3) Elizabeth St. Pierre (2021a) challenges qualitative researchers in using predetermined methodology and methods, echoing Erin Manning’s (2016) concept of the “emerging collectivity” (p. 8). St Pierre (2021a) recommends that students and becoming-scholars read

deeply in many areas. For the purpose of this inquiry, while there are initial research questions, I also attended to the questions that arose from me and the other participants throughout the Sojourn/Inquiry and the sojourns/gatherings. I find that the previous work of deconstructing traditional categories informs how I conducted my research. Traditional concepts such as “voice, data, validity, authenticity, reflexivity, the interview, the research process, the human” (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p. 27) have been challenged by researchers writing with and through FPH, FNM, and the combined PHEM. My goal is not to replicate studies, find voice, discern themes, or quantify the unquantifiable (Lather, 2013; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Mazzei & Jackson, 2015; St. Pierre, 2008).

Feminist new materialism, feminist posthumanism and phEmaterialism invite imagination and creativity in inquiry through critique of traditional positivist science, including methodology and methods (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018; Lather, 2013; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Mazzei, 2013a; Mazzei, 2013b; Mazzei & Jackson, 2015; St. Pierre, 1997; St. Pierre, 2008; St. Pierre et al., 2016). Part of the challenge in employing FPH, FNM, and PHEM lies in the continued need to translate experiences and affects into words that communicate concepts in a dissertation.

Traditional methods and methodology, even in qualitative research, are not broad enough to describe the Story Family Sojourn that has structure and also spaciousness for unfolding curiosities, affect, and artistic exploration. Researchers under PHEM have found the need for more emergent arts-based affective methods. Murriss (2021) states that researchers under FPH, FNM, and PHEM may not do away with data collection or creation but may instead do something different with the data. I no longer see data as separate from the researcher and the inquiry, to be collected, counted, and labeled “truth.”

Feminist Informed Inquiry

Feminist theory is an organizing theory within my own personal and political philosophy; thus, following this thread is a choice that has been and continues to be embedded in my life and now my research. Within the tangle of creativity, affect, and SEJ discussed earlier, feminism is included in the SEJ thread. Bridget Somekh and Cathy Lewin (2011) define methodology in the broadest sense “to mean the whole system of principles, theories and values that underpin a particular approach to research” (p. 326). Faye Harrison, as quoted in Dana-Ain Davis and Christa Craven’s (2016) book *Feminist Ethnography*, asserts that although there are no specific feminist methods, there are feminist methodological components, which provide a rationale for links between various elements informed by feminist theory. Other theorists have indicated that commonalities for feminist research include shifting to a focus on women’s perspectives; intentionality about exploring power and difference; and research that pertains to women, furthers knowledge about gendered lives, and contributes to social action/activism (Burns & Chantler, 2011; Hess-Biber, 2014; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Despite the fact that even the definition of feminism is contested, feminist researchers must make decisions and be able to articulate how and why they have included particular elements in their research.

My feminism was already entangled in this inquiry even before it began. The unfolding of my feminism has been located in the particular spacetime matter of my life, which includes being a White, middle-class, lesbian who came out in the 1980s. My feminist practices invite me to acknowledge that I must continue to look at my own implications in scholarly practices based on my own privilege, which includes a genealogy of settler-colonizers (Jones & Hoskins, 2015). My White ancestors moved from Europe to the United

States and settled already inhabited land. In my career as a social worker, I have had ample time to develop a feminist critique of processes used to educate workers about marginalized people and the consequences of relationships and policies that appear to favor straight, White, male culture. Throughout my life, I have worked in agencies that offered diversity trainings to their employees with titles like Cultural Competence, Multicultural Awareness, and Skill Building, and the current rendition, Inclusive Excellence. Such courses imply that there is an endpoint to arrive at or an identity of cultural competence to achieve. In contrast, cultural humility asserts that there is no end and that those seeking to move toward multicultural knowledge must first examine their own cultures so as not to impose their own biases on others, echoing the concept of “becoming” discussed in this inquiry (Hadley, 2013; Hahna, 2013; Matthes, 2016). As I continued learning about feminism and the impact of power between various groups, I realized what is not taught in formal education related to marginalized populations. I became politicized and attuned to examine my own actions through a feminist lens. I entered expressive arts education with an awareness and caution of cultural appropriation. Ritual structures, which include openings and closings used in EXA in this inquiry, are present in many cultures, and some rituals are indigenous to particular communities. In applying cultural humility, I posit that there are commonalities in rituals across various cultures. I also assert that if each person goes far enough back in their own familial history, they will arrive at a time that recognizes pre-Christian, nature-based spiritual traditions.

My feminism encourages me to be cautious about essentializing the women participants in my inquiry while recognizing through FPH that women live their lives in gendered bodies. My feminism also informs me about my choice to study the Southern

Appalachian Mountains and not the people indigenous to this area. It is common in this region for a person to be considered “not from around here” unless their family has been here for many generations. However, I also recognize the entanglement of the mountains and all the people living here now and in the past. In reviewing the discourses that have contributed to my own intersecting identities, the ones I embrace and the ones I deconstruct, I hope to use my awareness in order to reveal, as much as possible, what may have been invisible to me without this practice. Feminist-informed inquiry involves awareness of power and difference between the researcher and the participants. In reflecting on these issues, I have made decisions about research and data creation based on how I conceptualize power and difference (Hesse-Biber, 2014). The issue of power will be crucial, as I will be one of the participants in the inquiry. As a feminist, my leadership style in the past has been a shared leadership model (Kark et al., 2016; Lou, 2017). In *Story Family Sojourn*, I offered shared leadership; however, the participants refused that suggestion. I enacted enough structure to hold the inquiry but also to incorporate participants’ questions and directions of exploration through the arts. In addition, I recognize subjugated knowledge and voices with a caution about not confusing this with “giving” women a voice or empowering women (Mazzei & Jackson, 2015).

I examined how issues related to power impacts how, as a feminist researcher, I recognize my insider and outsider positionality. With great responsibility, I hold the knowledge that not all power differences will be able to be erased. However, with each choice in my research process, I examine my power, or lack thereof, related to how I may be an insider, an outsider, or both within each sojourn (Hesse-Biber, 2014). As an insider in my research related to women in EXA, I am a member of the local community, a member of the

EXA community as an alumna, a part-time adjunct in the EXA program, and a member and founder of a long-term writing group. These involvements may have allowed me access that I might not have had as an outsider. However, being an insider in a community that is part of the entanglement I am interested in researching also carries expectations about what might emerge and, if I am critical, how this may impact my relationship to a community I am part of. Because of my awareness of my privilege as a researcher and the power it entails, I made choices that sought to allow more of a collaborative stance. Thus, participants had access to co-creation of questions and engagement with the data in a way that allowed them to offer feedback along the way, including during analysis.

Incorporated into my feminist research practices is the commitment to seek work from Indigenous scholars. While this inquiry will not be looking at Indigenous people or trying to use a specific Indigenous methodology, as a feminist and an ethical researcher I recognize that the idea of a relational and material ontology has roots in Indigenous philosophy and methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). One recognition of Indigenous philosophy-informed inquiry is the concept of vital materiality. Consistent with theorizing in FNM and the decentering of self in FPH, Indigenous philosophy asserts that matter is not inanimate but relational (Jones & Hoskins, 2015). The concept of entanglement is congruent with Indigenous philosophy, particularly in this inquiry, as matter that includes objects once seen as inert is now seen as part of the entanglement that co-created agency (Barad, 2007). Another concept shared by Indigenous and posthuman philosophies is the recognition of a need for a relational ontology. Jones & Hoskins (2015) writing in Indigenous philosophy, assert that “the identity of ‘things’ in the world is not understood as discrete or independent but emerges through, and as, relations with everything else” (p. 80). Although

FPH and FMN are considered new theories, I recognize that concepts embedded within, such as relationships between people and objects, are echoed in Indigenous philosophies, which informs how I view research-creation in this inquiry. I recognize my own need for cultural humility and ongoing critique of cultural appropriation.

Another aspect of my feminist politics is how I enact my citational choices and citational politics. Throughout my dissertation, I have made choices to focus on women scholars when possible. Like Ringrose, Warfield, and Zarabadi (2019), I aspire to move beyond citations of “masculinist, humanist, western, white, masters” (p. 3). Sara Ahmed (2017), in her book *Living a Feminist Life*, also asserts that the choices we make about who to cite acknowledges who cleared a path before individual feminist scholars arrived. Women scholars writing in FPH, FNM, and PHEM have revisited science and social science theories written often by White, male theorists. I am more interested in looking at and citing women in the theoretical genealogy of men. For example, while I honor and respect women such as Karan Barad and their renewed look at Neils Bohr’s important work in physics to inform their science/social science contributions to FNM and FPH, I want to primarily honor what women are thinking-writing-doing.

The choices I make in feminist citational politics are consistent with the Story Family and the entanglements of women, time, storyplace, and EXA materials and practices. In this inquiry, I desire to contribute to the human/nature binary while recognizing that within the categories of women and nature, neither are monolithic, homogeneous categories. This work is complicated, decentering humans while focusing on the materiality of some women and other marginalized groups. The other complicated, yet generative, place in which my inquiry resides is within the recognition that humans are part of nature yet continue to wield power

over nature. Humans have been both contributors and victims of multiple destructive forces hugely impacting the Earth. While this may seem disconnected from feminist citational political choices, I assert that the old adage is true: “the personal is political.” Claire Colebrook (2017) moves beyond “the personal is political” to assert that the personal is geological. However, I posit that “the personal is geopolitical” is a more accurately descriptive phrase.

ABR Informed by EXA

In the following section, I will describe ABR and EXA that I employed in this Sojourn as methods for me to think through my research questions. Although much ground has been covered challenging opinions and judgments about moving past traditional methods and methodologies, particularly of quantitative inquiry through FPH, FNM, and PHEM, a need still exists to stretch, in order to create new ways of inquiry that are messy, playful, creative, and justice oriented. ABR provides me the space to explore this generative process of unknowing and following existing and new curiosities in knowing. ABR is woven throughout my inquiry in my choice of topic, theorizing, data creation, and the final product of the dissertation. I viewed each step through the lens of the arts. Community-based theorizing and learning invite the use of ABR as inquiry. Using ABR as a methodology provides a way for researchers to view complicated and complex ideas in a different and more accessible way. Carol Taylor (2016) asserts that “because of the profound questions posthumanism raises about what research is and how it may get done differently that posthumanist researchers lean towards arts-based, visual, sensory, movement, sonic and creative writing practices” (p. 19). The philosophy of research-creation is consistent with my

theoretical musings in this inquiry. I will explore data creation in the third section, *Becoming Kin(d)*. In the following section, I will describe some threads of arts-based research history.

History of ABR

Arts-based research has a rich history within education and other disciplines as well. Coined in the 1990s by Elliot Eisner, an influential educator and scholar in the field of arts-based educational research (ABER), researchers and practitioner-researchers have utilized ABR for decades under the category of qualitative research (Leavy 2018). Researchers moving from post-positivist research into ABR mirrored the changing times of the 1960s and 1970s. Leavy (2018) asserts that this was a time of social justice activism that had a profound impact not only on culture but also on academia. Feminist scholars challenged science practices that continued to oppress or make invisible marginalized people (Leavy, 2015). Ringrose (2018) asserts that “new thinking-doing possibilities and practices are visible, for instance, in a huge push toward arts-based and participatory research that challenges old claims of evidence, measurement, and positivist claims to knowledge” (p. 7). Creativity in research including, but not limited to, the arts, was necessary in order to engage new ways of knowing and doing research. Early researchers engaged in ABR understood that knowledge is partial and situated, sought marginalized voices, and examined power-laden binaries (Leavy, 2015). By the 1990s, ABR and its practices were firmly established in qualitative research, although not uniformly accepted (Leavy, 2015). As researchers embraced postmodern theories, artistic research practices emerged, including blurred genres (between the arts and sciences), a/r/tography (recognizing identities of artist, researcher, and teacher), arts-based inquiry, and scholartistry (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; 2018).

Implementations

In this section, I describe how ABR was used in the Story Family Sojourn. Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor and Richard Siegesmund (2008; 2018) report two strands of ABR in education: hybrid forms of artistic and scientific scholarship and those that produce art for scholarship's sake. Hybrid forms include blurred genres, which incorporate multiple genres and make connections between the sciences and art. Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2018) assert that in ABR, "new insights and questions take precedence over a desire for absolute answers" (p. 9). Their conclusions are consistent with my inquiry, as I have no expectation of getting to a final answer but, rather, am on a quest to follow curiosities. The Story Family Sojourn adopts Haraway's (1988) definition of absolutes or truth in inquiry as not singular nor complete but related to the specific situation. ABR is defined as an approach that crosses many disciplines using the arts for research (Leavy, 2018). Shaun McNiff (2018), an art therapist and one of the founders of EXA, asserts that ABR uses the arts to address research questions in a variety of areas of research, including social sciences, education, and environment. Unlike conventional qualitative research methodology, ABR views convolutions and inconsistencies as invitations for further dialogue, creativity, and scholarship (Malchiodi, 2018).

ABR is used within formal education and outside of the academy. While arts-based research and practices are used in formal education, there is also a role for arts-based research to inform activism, health, mental health, and community building. Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2018) refer to practices as ABR but also recognize that, as educators, the use of the arts-based research and practices are not just related to formal education but also to "medical practice and other non-school fields" (p. 2). ABER includes

educators using the arts in their teaching, in their research related to education with participants, and also in their own creative pursuits (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008). Additionally, Barone (2008) asserts that scientific inquiry, as well as art, is related to justice issues.

I think of using ABR as a spacious methodology, or a methodology that is open enough to include the connections of EXA in storyplace with a focus on social and environmental questions raised throughout the Sojourn. During my research, I investigated making with participants with/in storyplace in order to explore the intra-actions of the members of the Story Family, which included, but was not limited to, the human members. I also assert the importance of imagination in both the emotional realm of living in these current times and in the process of how the arts are embodied practices. ABR methodologies also serve to support a mind/body integration, in which researcher and artist, musician, dancer, creative writer, or EXA therapist do not have to choose between multiple identities or modalities (Atkins & Williams, 2007; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2018; Leavy, 2015; Leavy, 2018). Thus, as I conducted my research, I not only embraced mine and others' multiple identities but also recognized how affect is entangled in the study through the senses. The multimodality of artistic supplies and practices welcomed in ABR is also present in EXA.

Arts-based research was also a fit for this inquiry as I explored how the Story Family experienced a different sense of time. Leavy (2015) asserts that qualitative research itself requires intellectual chaos, which often involves a sense of liminality, although this phase is rarely commented on. Leavy (2015) discusses an article by Hunt and colleagues (2013), in which Hunt asserts that while qualitative research has a meaning-making phase that develops

from intellectual chaos, this phase is made transparent in ABR. Through structuring space, time, and experience in a way that increases the possibility of liminality, disintegration will not only be recognized but also encouraged by imagination. Artists' engagement with creativity and imagination can additionally be generative in learning to take a different position in times that necessitate ownership of privileged power in their relationships with nature and matter. Imagination gives humans the potential to think and dream of ways to decenter humans in the human/nonhuman binary in order to contribute to theorizing with nature and with materials (Braidotti, 2013).

In addition to the element of liminality that I explore in my inquiry, I focus on the intersection of ABR and feminist theory. ABR often aspires to see its participants as co-researchers challenging old, worn ways that reinforce binaries of researcher/participant and academy/community. ABR is often community-based, allowing for a greater accessibility of both the process and the representation of the inquiry. Arts-based researchers often create their inquiries in forms that can be shared with audiences who are familiar with scholarly work and who are part of the community (Leavy, 2015). This may have the effect of “mitigating some of the educational and social class biases that have traditionally dictated the beneficiaries of academic scholarship” (Leavy, 2015, p. 292). Accessibility of knowledge is key to my feminist tenets, and I assert that ways of knowing should not be limited to the academy.

Scholarly inquiry necessitates attention to ethics and values; moreover, ABR calls for increased scrutiny in this area. Not only does ABR entail the shared participation of the co-researchers in the inquiry and the outcomes (Leavy, 2018), it often includes depths of emotions that the arts can access. I assert that the accessibility of outcomes outside of the

academy must be examined more closely to ensure clear ethics and confidentiality. ABR is consistent with the aims of this inquiry because of its heightened ethics that result from the entanglement of humans and other-than-humans in the Story Family Sojourn. Consistent with ABR, ethics under FPH and FNM consider both the human and the other-than-human in the ethics of care (Taylor, 2016). Questions viewed through a renewed material and relational ontology call for scholars to examine the tenets of research itself and, in this case, the ethics of inquiry under this re/newed philosophy.

Evaluation under ABR may also include different components, such as “thoroughness, coherence, congruence or internal consistency” (Leavy, 2018, page number). Exploring the idea of “truth” in ABR, Leavy (2015) echoes Haraway’s (1988) conception of truth as being “multiple, partial and situated.” Leavy (2015) offers truthfulness, trustworthiness, and resonance as more accurate descriptions of a rubric (p. 273). Resonance in the Story Family Sojourn is seen as attuning to affect through experiences with multimodality of artistic practices and the affect elicited by a storyplace. My hope is that my dissertation invites the reader to notice their own senses and how the writing and visual images may invoke a connection with the reader's own experiences through embodied memory and a shiver of possibility. This inquiry beckons readers to play in the arts through “emergent collectivity” (Manning, 2016, p. 8), which also now includes the reader of this document and the listener of the stories.

As a researcher and a Story Family member in this inquiry, I moved beyond capturing data to creating data (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008), all the while recognizing that the data is also creating us. Data creating us refers to how the data is not inert; instead, we impact it as it impacts us, through memory, affect, and intentions. The data works on and

through us using the experience of conducting the research. The data and the Story Family members intra-act. Data created in this inquiry includes conversations with individual participants, photos of the journals each participant created, story strands, Story Orbs, and stories I created as an aesthetic response to each sojourn. In addition, during the sojourns I recognized data as fleeting, on the move, so the result of not capturing some data and the creation of other data recognized the impermanence of the “product” (St. Pierre, 2021a). The meaning we assigned to experiences and creative processes were not fixed but mitigated by memory, affect, time, and new information. Entanglements of matter and meaning were already present before the Sojourn began and will be present after it “ends” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). Even the binary concepts of beginnings and endings were troubled/deconstructed, as each sojourn was considered just a pause, a temporary stepping out of one time and place and into another.

EXA

The individual art modalities are represented in well-recognized texts on ABR; however, EXA is infrequently identified, which suggests a lack of ABR that uses EXA (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018; Knowles & Cole, 2008; McNiff, 1998). Even in creative arts therapy “there is still a relatively small number of actual published ABR reports among major professional creative arts fields of art therapy, music therapy, and dance/movement therapy” (Malchiodi, 2018, p. 76). Leavy (2015) also acknowledges that research related to intermodal artistic practices is lacking. In ABR there is little theorizing about EXA education, inquiry, and leadership. Therefore, I feel like I and other researchers are being invited to engage in an exciting and daunting task: exploring

pedagogy, philosophy, and applications of EXA with implications to inform inquiry across disciplines.

EXA methodology based on process-oriented, arts-based pedagogy (Sally Atkins, Personal Communication) found in the Appalachian State University EXA Therapy Program undergirds the Story Family Sojourn. Educators use process-oriented, arts-based pedagogy as the predominant pedagogical tool in EXA courses, which include intermodal EXA, ritual, community, and storyplace, particularly in the Southern Appalachian Mountains (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Atkins & Williams, 2007). I used the arts as inquiry, asserting an epistemological grounding that includes poiesis, or the arts as a way of knowing (Allen, 1995; Knill et al., 2005; Levine, 2011). EXA advocates for the importance of the process, not the product, or an “honest product versus the best possible product” (Atkins & Williams, 2007, p. 21). During the artistic inquiry in the EXA class, educators use intermodality, which refers to the use of multiple art mediums and processes. Process-oriented EXA includes the embodied sense of affect that arises as synchronicity, glow, or shimmer (Bird Rose, 2017; MacClure, 2013). Maggie MacLure’s (2013) concept of glow “speaks to the intensities and forces that cannot be interpreted or understood through conventional meaning making practices” (p. 205). Kelly Clark/Keefe and Jessica Gilway (2016) describe process-oriented EXA as embodied epistemology. In the Story Family inquiry, respect and attention were given to what arrived in the embodied experience of participants; between participants; between participants, organic, and inorganic materials; and between processes.

While much has been written about creativity and imagination and their importance in education and in problem solving, there is often a sense that someone else owns the “arts.” Traditionally, skilled and educated artisans play distinct roles in contributing to a rich

culture. However, many people claim that they cannot “do” art or are not creative. On numerous occasions in which I have led EXA classes and experiences, at the conclusion, participants commented on how much they enjoyed and needed to be creative. I assert that each person is innately creative and imaginative (Dissanayake, 2000). As I discovered EXA, I felt embraced by the assertions that we are all artists, musicians, dancers, writers, and dreamers. Thus, the methods I employed in my inquiry were informed by this belief and enacted in the EXA classroom and in groups outside of formal curriculum.

In creating the setting for a class or an EXA gathering outside of academia, crafting the experience includes many interrelated elements. EXA practitioners and teachers value the need to create an aesthetically interesting, sacred, and beautiful environment that invites people to be present to what may arrive during the class/group or session. Practitioners and educators recognize the marking of time as different from outside of the classroom or gathering, thereby necessitating the creation of a flexible structure that encourages liminality or other spacetime-mattering (Barad, 2007). In recognition of a possible different sense of time and the embodied nature of the arts, educators create a clear structure around the time of meeting. Teachers speak of inviting students to arrive and let go of what happened before and what will happen afterwards. Students are welcomed into an EXA classroom and allowed a pause in the time and space prior to the class or gathering. The process of specifically noting the beginning and the endings of an EXA class or gathering echoes the knowledge of human existence on the Earth as being fleeting. I argue that while the cycles of birth and death are present in nature, humans often have difficulty discussing death as part of life. Stephen Levine (1997), one of the founders of EXA, has called creativity an act of mourning, as it entails letting go of outdated thoughts, feelings, and ways of being in the world. His words

echo those of Haraway (2016) and Braidotti (2013), who write about the personal and cultural need to examine loss, transition, and even death in order to be involved in new stories of life.

One way to honor and mark transitions and loss is through the use of ritual or ceremony. For my inquiry, I considered ritual as an intentional action, within a defined space and time, to attend to transition and loss as well as celebration. As scientists examine the current times of the Anthropocene, I assert that recognition that humans' impact on the world may be causing our own departure is needed. There is an increased need to examine our own individual arrivings and departings (Davis & Turpin, 2015, p.). Through discussions of the impact of climate change on humans and the Earth and the reality of mortality, the participants felt SEJ into the Story Family Sojourn. Throughout the Story Family Sojourn, participants paid careful attention to arrivings and departings as they related to openings and closings by journaling at the beginning and end of each sojourn.

Cultural and spiritual traditions that recognize and honor births, transitions, and death also use the arts as part of the practice (Atkins & Snyder, 2018, Starhawk, 1989). In addition, like Indigenous philosophies (Jones & Hoskins, 2015; Rosiek, 2018), EXA recognizes vitality of matter and the importance of community. These philosophies were used to inform the EXA-based methods that I chose to use in my inquiry. However, feminist caution is warranted, as EXA practitioners must reject cultural appropriation of Indigenous wisdom, practices, and philosophy (Matthes, 2016). Thus, I considered each woman's own background while also acknowledging where information and practices from other cultures and traditions are used to enhance the inquiry. While expressive arts practice often includes

rituals and Earth-based practices, the Story Family Sojourn participants were cautious to not engage in cultural appropriation.

Research-Creation

Beginning in Canada, the concept of research-creation was initially a designation for funding grants to support academics involved in creative research (Springgay & Rotas, 2015). Chapman & Sawchuck (2012) state that research-creation projects usually include a creative or experimental part. Researchers use concepts in research-creation when there is a belief that what they are researching could not be examined without arts-based methodology informing the process and the product. Later, the research-creation was expanded by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi to not just fold art into a research designation. The definition of research-creation on the website of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada was written by Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman, who said that “creation can be described as the complex intersection of art practice, theoretical concepts, and research” (Springgay & Truman, 2016). Research-creation is consistent with the EXA tenet of the importance of process as well as product. Research-creation is also consistent with inquiry of the theories of FNM, FPH and PHEM, in that methods and methodology are conceived of as emergent in the inquiry—not predetermined but enacted and in this theoretical work with/in the Story Family Sojourn. Research-creation is also transdisciplinary, meaning it is used in the arts, sciences, and education, for example. Springgay and Truman (2016) posit that one of the propositions of research-creation is that “in speculative practices relational processes are enacted” (p. 207).

Consistent with the research-creation proposal of research being relational, I co-created and facilitated experiences that were relational between humans, other-than-humans,

and the materiality of arts supplies and storyplace. Another proposition of research-creation is that of creating problems. Research-creation embraces problems and is, therefore, a practice that does not seek to describe, explain, or solve problems. Consistent with FPH, FNM, and PHEM, which refute research that seeks answers, Story Family Sojourn seeks questions and plays with those questions to discover what emerges. While research-creation propositions assert that “concepts are not pre-given or known in advance” (Springgay & Truman, 2016, n.p.), Story Family initially proposed concepts like symtheoria and symposis without knowing how they would operate within the study.

Data Creation

For the purpose of my inquiry, I determined data creation would be a more accurate tool than data collection, in that data creation refutes the notion that data is inert and waiting for researchers to find it, name it, and make it real (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018; Murriss, 2021). Therefore, during the Story Family Sojourn, data was not collected by me alone but created by all the participants. In the following section, I will reveal what the Story Family produced throughout the study in terms of data creation. Data creation in Story Family Sojourn involved beginning with ideas of structure and EXA-based processes; however, my intra-action with the study itself involved more of a sense of unfolding and shifting as the sojourns occurred. I will also describe multiple ways of data creation. I begin by telling the story of the initial gathering, during which we created journals. I then recount data creation through the subsequent sojourns that include making art together, making art in storyplace, using our journals within the sojourn and in between sojourns, movement through a labyrinth walk, sharing hospitality by meeting in each other’s homes, responding to writing prompts, documenting through photography, and creating stories through a material process of

creating Story Orbs. I then move into the journey of the journal, recognizing how the materiality of the journal has its own story. Finally, I conclude this section by describing the conversations I had with individual participants at the conclusion of the study. Like individual fibers in felt, individual questions are threaded throughout this section, never to be fully extracted from the whole.

Initial Gathering. The following section will describe the initial meeting of the participants and what occurred that weekend, as we began to weave the Story Family Sojourn together. Using posthuman and new materialist theories, feminism, and my felted concepts of creativity, affect, and SEJ, I began what I would later call the balancing of structure and spaciousness, which an emergent study such as this requires. Prior to the gathering, I had decided to be immersed with the participants in an art-making activity I had grown to love, journal making. Since time was not only one of the concepts I was interested in exploring but was also a member of the Story Family, I drew from my experience in other creative community groups and chose an activity that would create a different sense of time and take all of us away from our regular routines. Therefore, I began my inquiry with curiosity about all types of time: our perception of time during artistic practices; geological time, especially through the changes in the mountains; and how time and story are experienced through memory.

Traces³ of other stories echo as they create. She experienced memory pictures in her mind, memories of her son taking classes in this very room when he was a child. And memories of when she facilitated a

³ Please note that in the following section, and throughout the rest of the dissertation, some parts will be italicized. The italicized sections indicate stories within stories, memories and curiosities that arose as the study unfolded.

workshop called Express Yourself with differently abled teens and adults as she began her own EXA journey. And deeper back in time, musings of this Baptist church turned gallery. And farther back than that the hilly farmland before the town was even built. And farther back still to when the Cherokee were the keepers of the land.

The initial Story Family gathering or sojourn occurred the weekend of Mother's Day, in May 2019. I invited the participants to a weekend of journal making led by an art educator and EXA practitioner. We gathered in the community room at the Turchin Center for Visual Arts, a local art museum on the Appalachian State University campus.

The initial opening included an embodied movement to indicate that we had all come from our individual lives and were now moving into creating a group, a community, part of the Story Family. Each woman moved to the perimeter of the room, and in turn, each woman walked in to form a circle as they introduced themselves and spoke about the reason they wanted to be in the study. I imagined looking at this from an aerial view, the dance of the beginning of becoming-with (Haraway, 2016).

I welcomed the participants and described the study. I explained that I was theorizing alone about time, feminism through FNM and FPH, materiality, social and environmental justice through the writings of Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, and EXA's intra-action with ABR. I expressed my desire for theorizing with/in community. I told the participants I wanted companions on my journey and invited them to think and create with me in the Appalachian Mountains. I explained the concept of Story Family to include the members of the "family" as time and EXA materials and practices in the Appalachian Mountains. I shared the research questions, noting that we might come up with deeper, better questions.

I envisioned the journals as a type of “carrier bag” (Haraway, 2016, p. 39), a concept created by science fiction author Ursula Le Guin, for all we would gather during the inquiry. Le Guin (1996) proposes the Carrier Bag Theory, in which she posits that although history is seen as being built on the use of weapons, the first tool was actually a “carrier bag” or a vessel to gather items to be used in personal, home, or community life. Le Guin wonders how the stories of the worlds we live in might have unfolded differently if we had honored one of the first tools, or carrier bags, that bore stories, seeds, and sacred objects.

With the concept of the carrier bag in mind, we met for three days to create the journals and begin to create our community. Each day of the three-day weekend was also opened with a poem. Reading a poem is a practice adopted by some expressive arts therapists to begin or open a gathering or class.



The above photo is of one of the tall art tables in the Turchin Center where I displayed items I brought to show and represent the journey of my doctoral pursuits. The photo shows books that inform the theories I use in my inquiry and an example of art-based theorizing I had created. Included was a cookie sheet featuring concepts from Donna Haraway’s book *Staying with the Trouble* written on the back of tickets, magnetized, and arranged. These words would later merge with a concept of the theory root ball I had imagined in a doctoral class. In addition, I placed previous journals I had created and written

in throughout the years on the table. Flowers were my final contribution to the arrangement, as it is a common practice in EXA classes to create a centerpiece or an altar. Usually, students in EXA classrooms or gatherings sit in a circle on the floor to represent sharing power and also to honor Earth-based traditions that gather in circles. The altar is created before the start of the class or gathering and includes items from nature, cloth, and other objects to be used in an opening or the beginning of the class. The items in the center of the circle may also be used for art making or other activities later in the class or group. At the end of the gathering or closing, this same space is used for an installation of sorts where “what arrived” is presented to the group, and each person is invited to describe the item or their experience making the item or the activity. In keeping with this practice, this table also served that purpose.



On the first night, the women created paste paper to be used as part of the signatures in the journals. The women were instructed to bring any special papers from home that they would like to



include. By the end of the evening, we had each created multiple sheets of papers and had hung them to dry to be used in the subsequent journal making.

The above photos show the paste paper we crafted to use in creating the journals being hung to dry or placed on a drying rack overnight to be used the next day. The paste paper was subsequently used that weekend in our own journals for dividing sections or collage. Additionally, in the sojourns to come we would exchange paste paper to use individually or collectively for artmaking. I chose this photo to show the edges of the community art room used for the initial gathering and to show the colors of handmade paste paper, to mark a beginning, the unknown beginning of how this sojourn would unfold. The paste paper was produced by the individual participants, and at the time of the photo, the possibility of individual and collective curating was just that—merely a possibility. Yet echoing in that possibility were memories of other journals I had made in other rooms with other people, journals that had become my own cherished pieces of matter.



After arriving back on the second day, we were greeted with our dried paste paper pages. In order to use the paste paper, each page needed to be ironed for later inclusion in the journals. The second day, we each chose or curated the journal sections called signatures, choosing paste paper, colored paper, and blank paper to journal or create visual art on. After curating what we had made, both within each signature and in terms of order of signatures, we created the covers.

The photo above is from one of the meals we shared that weekend, a potluck meal served on a tall art table in the same room where we were creating the journals. Drawing from my many experiences in women's communities, I also chose to invite the participants to a potluck. I made this choice due to my faith in the variety of foods that would be brought, how sharing homemade food assists in creating relationships and community, and in the aesthetic gift to the senses that food can be. I selected this photo to show how community and relationships were being created not through only artmaking but also through sharing a meal for which each person brought something to share.

During the second day, I offered three prompts: What is your relationship to creativity? What is your relationship to spirituality? And what is your relationship to SEJ? Written on blank pages of the unbound journal, these pages were later included in the completed journals. Throughout the weekend, we created with multiple colors of paper, small buckets of water, sponges, oil crayons, pencils, colored wax-covered thread, curved needles, rice paste, acrylic paint, punches, stencils, stamps, combs, and bone folders. We engaged in painting, folding, curating signatures, binding, embellishing, embroidering, and stamping. We spent the weekend doing just as our women ancestors before us had done, gathering in creative community, creating, eating food we had prepared for the potluck, and telling stories of our lives. As we witnessed each other's stories, we also shared pieces of paste paper each of us had created so pieces of each other's creations were woven into the final journals.

On the last day, we chose colored waxed thread to bind the journals. We ended our time together by standing in a circle, organized as a crone circle, or in the order of our ages. The result was that the youngest person was standing next to the oldest person. After stating my original research questions, I invited each woman to speak aloud what other questions

they were pondering. The following are the questions they brought to the study, offered in the closing circle.⁴

They wondered:

- ❖ How can we continue sharing in community?
- ❖ Is it ok to have one member leave the collective? How does it affect the collective?
- ❖ How can someone maintain their identity with different groups, to be true to oneself?
- ❖ What is the third we create together, and how do we carry it with us?
- ❖ What is storyplace teaching us?
- ❖ How do the connections we make with each other echo connections in storyplace?
- ❖ How can we trust our inherent knowledge?
- ❖ How can we bring ceremony to our work?
- ❖ How do we know when to change the story and how to change it?
- ❖ How can we explore birth and death in humans, material objects, and the environment?
- ❖ How would being more comfortable with seasons and cycles, including death, change the story we are living?

Each element in this beginning weekend was chosen with thoughtfulness and theory in mind, incorporating traditions, such as women sharing potlucks and crafting together

⁴ Each woman offered their own questions. They are listed verbatim.

outside of formal learning situations and settings. At this weekend gathering, we honored both process and product and offered generative questions. After a weekend of creating the handmade journals, the participants and I spent a year writing, arting, meeting, and eating with each other. We engaged in thinking, making, and doing—together with each other and the materiality of art supplies/practices and storyplace. Walk with me now, as I show and tell how this inquiry continued to unfold.

Subsequent Sojourns. The following section is an overview of what happened during the subsequent sojourns. At the initial sojourn, the women were invited to collaborate on the structure and direction of the inquiry. We agreed to meet twice per month for a year, one meeting to be on a weekend day for four hours to include the opportunity to be outside, and the second meeting of the month to be for two hours on a weeknight. We decided to meet as much as possible outside, wanting to focus on the place of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, considered a member of the Story Family. I initially offered some of what I have been exploring, including the desire for a creative community of women to participate together in symposiums and symtheoria and to explore the intra-action of time, EXA practices and materials, and the Appalachian Mountains. I wondered how the entanglement of these elements would co-create and inform the study. Building on a core concept in EXA, which values the process as much as the product, the process of the inquiry was as valued as the subsequent product of this dissertation.

After the first weekend-long sojourn of journal making on the university campus, the participants met in local parks in the Appalachian Mountains. The study also occurred at participants' homes and, even then, was often outside on porches or on adjacent land. There were a few times that all the participants were present at a particular sojourn. The majority of

the sojourns were attended by 3-5 women. Each sojourn followed a structure common in EXA classes and gatherings, including opening with a poem, a guided meditation, or an embodied arriving through movement; a check in; and a closing at the end (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Atkins & Williams, 2007). After the opening, we would move into art making, ritual, deep play, journaling, or an experience outside such as hiking and/or art making, enacting sympoiesis (Haraway, 2016) and symtheoria. Early in the study, we began to frame each of the sojourns with a journaling prompt: “What traveled with you from the last time we met?” and then a prompt at the end: “What was created during this time together?” After each prompt, the women would read aloud what they had written. Women also created pages with writing and/or visual art. Some women felt more comfortable in writing, and some felt more comfortable in doing visual arts instead of or in addition to the writing. Thus, a showing and telling occurred at the end of each gathering. The methods of each sojourn included individual and group art making, movement, ritual, and/or sound. The individual and group creating allowed each participant to attune to the entanglement.

Another aspect that became important was that each time we met, we would share a meal together, often a potluck. For the evening gatherings, we would first share the meal before we moved into the structure of the opening, check in, arting/writing/hiking, and then the closing. In the longer meetings, we would often meet for 4 hours with a break for a potluck lunch. During these times of meeting and eating, we shared stories and tidbits about our lives. The tables we gathered around were varied, including a table from India, a bench or picnic table in a park, a hand-painted table, and a wooden table. Each table became one of the pieces of materiality in the study that was imbued with affect, resonating with the present and the intersection of many stories and memories.

On two occasions, we met with women who were not part of the inquiry, chosen for their particular skills and experience to assist us in exploring art and storyplace. The first person was a biologist who had worked as a park ranger at both Grandfather Mountain and at the Moses Cone Manor on the Blue Ridge Parkway. She met us at Bass Lake and recounted many facts about the trees, flowers, moss, fungus, and lichen there at the park. She also told us stories of the Cone Manor and the people who lived there. The second time we met with someone outside of our group was a visit to a pottery studio. The potter was an art educator, trained in EXA therapy. She led us in making clay rattles and in some individual time outside on her land to meditate and attune to the earth. Besides those times, I led the groups in intermodal experiences that included writing, visual arts, movement, sound, ritual, and being outside in the storyplace. One of the sojourns included a meal, ritual, writing, singing, and walking a labyrinth prior to one of the participants leaving to work in India for three months.

Journal Journey. In the following section, I will describe in depth the decision to use journals and how they were subsequently used in the inquiry. Throughout the study and the writing of what happened, I have been reminded to tell the stories of how I got to a certain place or what has contributed to the choices that I have made. In the following section, I describe my relationship and journey with journals and journaling prior to the study, which informed my choice of making handmade journals and using journals throughout the inquiry. In addition, I describe how journals intra-acted with the human and other-than-human members of the Story Family.

When I was 12 years old, I began journaling after one of my five sisters gave me a journal for my birthday. I journaled sporadically until I began more in earnest in my 20s. In my 40s, I moved to the Southern Appalachian Mountains and discovered an EXA certificate

program. Prior to that, I had written in individual journals, a journal for my son in which I recorded his dreams recounted prior to the age of 5 (which I later lost), a new journal when he turned 5 years old, and journals with my partner. In my pursuit of the Graduate Certificate in EXA, I registered to take a class called Therapeutic Writing at Appalachian State University but was unable to complete the course. The other students, however, created a journal and gifted it to me. I later completed the course and created my first journal under the instruction of Katrina, who also was our instructor for journal making in this study. Katrina had received her EdD with a concentration in EXA from ASU and had completed a PhD in EXA from the European Graduate School. After taking the therapeutic writing class and participating in a small writing group as an assignment, I commented that I never wanted this to end.

Over ten years later, the writing group continues. Two women joined the writing group in the past few years and are participants in this inquiry. Two other women in the study were part of an EXA supervision group, which began in 2008. Prior to starting the doctorate, I had created multiple journals for myself and as gifts. Wanting others to experience creating in community, I had gathered, as I had done many times before, a group of women to create these journals. After my committee chair agreed to be my dissertation chair, I suggested that we exchange journals, writing in each and then trading them with each other. Each of the Coptic journals I have created has been accomplished under the instruction of my original teacher. The journal is called a Coptic journal due to the type of stitch used to bind it. When I began my inquiry, I was determined to share this process with the participants and to have my teacher/mentor/friend lead us.

As a creative writer, researcher, and participant, I used the Coptic journals. At the start of the inquiry, I was working in four journals, two of which were the journals that my doctoral committee chair and I had exchanged prior to the inquiry as an arts-based mode of mentoring. I would take notes in whichever journal of the two I had at the time. When we met to discuss the inquiry, we would exchange journals and each write or create art in the journal related to my inquiry before our next meeting. At some point, we no longer exchanged journals. No particular conversation or decision was made; we simply stopped. When my doctoral dissertation's chairperson paused for a sabbatical, I retained both journals. I subsequently used both journals for planning before sojourns and reflection notes afterwards. I had another journal that I created with the participants in the Story Family and one I was working in for the women's writing group. Throughout the study, the women and I used the journals in every meeting for writing and arting. A friend and peer in the doctoral program and EXA concentration and I started meeting biweekly to support each other's process. Individually, we had been using our journals for writing and arting related to our lives and our doctoral musings and now began using them collectively to do an EXA process called decentering (Eberhart & Atkins, 2014; Knill, 2017). We would then discuss or harvest⁵ the creating and its application to our own individual doctoral work. The following collages were created during these meetings as decentering and aesthetic responses to the conversations and/or the space we were meeting in.

⁵ Harvesting is a term in EXA which describes a process of processing a multimodal expressive arts call or session.



coffee shop collage

spacetime mattering



coffee shop mapping

entangled intra-action

When I completed the writing group journal, I began to use only one of the three remaining journals for the combined purposes of writing group, sojourn writing reflections, and planning and analyzing for the inquiry. In the materiality of the journal, the merging of the four into one mirrored what was happening in the study with the women in creating, learning, building community, and “making kin” (Haraway, 2016). In this instance, making kin relates to the agency created through the entanglement of the materiality of the journals and discourses about education, gender, and creativity. My practice was to handwrite my planning and reflection/notes in the journal, then transcribe them into a Word document. From those notes, I created a story for each of the sojourns.

Each woman wrote or created art in her journal about the last sojourn she attended. The writing and creating were in response to a question about what memories, ideas, experiences, and thoughts had stayed with the participants from the last time they had attended a sojourn. At the end of the individual sojourns, I offered a second writing prompt for participants to journal about what they had created during each sojourn.

We began to use the words we had written, our own and each other's, to write on strips of muslin, or story strands. The words were taken from our journals; some were our own words and others had been recorded in journals when words or phrases glowed (MacLure, 2013) or shimmered (Bird Rose, 2017). In this process, our individual writing became entangled in each other's writing as well, felting together. Women's phrases wove themselves together as we tied strips together and rolled them into a ball. Women's words became entwined with each other as we became unsure of who wrote what. This process built upon my theory root ball concept and the theorizing I had done with Donna Haraway's (2016) book *Staying with the Trouble*. We began writing on the strips and tying them together and untying them and using them as prompts for further writing and arting. Within this process, we were creating collectively. Without the journals and the time in the study participating in writing and arting, we would not have had the fodder for the strips, which became stories, which became prompts. All of these processes led to us becoming kin, not just with each other but with time, the materiality of the strips, and the environment. I began to imagine how the words in the women's journals entangled to create the materiality of the art and the discourses surrounding ownership related to creativity and community. The agency created in this entanglement was a collective agency refuting individuality alone. I sought an arts-based way to show this, play with the arts, and demonstrate entanglement.

In addition, I wanted to show how stories/theories could be deconstructed and reconstructed in a myriad of ways so we could experience theory as "on the move" (Gannon, 2016), always becoming. I later conceptualized inviting the reader of my dissertation to become part of the story, to become entangled with the stories, by imagining holding a strip of muslin in their hands, writing their piece of the story on it, and tying it to the others.

Writing, reading, tying, rolling, unrolling, untying, or adding new strips enabled us to think and see how the words, concepts, and human actors are always becoming-storytellers, world makers, together. As described in my previous section on Karen Barad and their description of agential realism, I note that within the concept of agential realism, agency not only resides in humans but also in the entanglement with matter. The agency created by the entanglement of the journals, the dissertation, the art materials, and the stories are not fixed but emergent. The invitation to the reader of the stories to engage with the matter of the inquiry enacts a new “cut,” one that engages the becoming-kin through space, time, and matter.

My original conceptualization of the Story Orb as “precarious methodology” (Manning, 2016) occurred when I received an invitation to present at the International Qualitative Congress on a panel organized by Dr. Candace Kuby. The Story Family participants, having met for over six months, enacted the Story Orb. I envisioned this as an arts-based method, a way to show how intra-action occurs and how it is different with each unrolling and rerolling and tying new strips to others. Embedded in this intra-action is the entanglement of the matter of the strips and the humans and the discourses related to community and gender, an enactment of both symplexis and symtheoria. We used the strips by tying them together and playing the string game commonly called cat’s cradle. One woman even tied a strip across her face as a blindfold. We also created artwork from a random pull of the strips and later wrote stories inspired by the artwork. I imagine this could be an ongoing method, as words and phrases could be pulled from the story, incorporated into a new Story Orb, or tied to an existing one.

Participant Conversations. In the following section, I describe the individual conversations I had with the women participants. After completing the last sojourn, I met

with each participant by Zoom, due to the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, for individual conversations. Lisa Mazzei (2013a) proposes that “interviewing” in an inquiry informed by posthuman theory necessitates attention to not essentializing the human. She posits that

from a posthumanist stance, interview data, the voices of participants, cannot be thought as emanating from an essentialist subject nor can they be separated from the enactment in which they are produced, an enactment among researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis. (Mazzei, 2013a, p. 732)

Thus, I conceptualized the interviews as conversations, not as “true” stories but as another act of sympoiesis and symtheoria. Members of the Story Family enacted sympoiesis, both in the conversation and in telling the story of the inquiry to each other. In addition, the participants and I enacted symtheoria as the intra-action of the conversations, artmaking, and materiality of the Zoom calls, and photos enabled theorizing about becoming kin(d) or becoming each other’s kind. Therefore, matter and discourse are produced in this entanglement. The prompts below acted as a roadmap for our conversations.

Talk with me about what Story Family is.

Talk with me about time in Story Family.

Talk with me about Nature/the place of the Appalachian Mountains in Story Family.

Talk with me about EXA materials and practices in Story Family (including the Journal).

Talk with me about the women in the Story Family.

Talk with me about the sojourns.

Talk with me about the spaces between the sojourns.

Talk with me about what the Story Family has to say about education and leadership in education.

Talk with me about what questions remain for you.

Is there anything else that you want to talk with me about?

I began each conversation with an invitation to close our eyes and breathe together, an opening practice common in EXA gatherings and classrooms (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). Near the end of our conversations, I said to each participant, “Talk with me about what questions remain for you.” After each of the conversations, I invited the participant to spend some time with me, both of us creating an aesthetic response to our conversation through visual art. The conversations concluded with each of us sharing the aesthetic response with the other.

One generative tension is how to deconstruct the binary of human/other-than-human while continuing to challenge the concept of giving participants’ voices. Yet how can becoming-scholars like myself continue to work and advocate for the very real issues that exist with humans, particularly women? How can we decenter humans in the human/nature binary and still invite, inspire, plead with, and coerce humans to dismantle the self as we know it? As the inquiry comes to an ending or a pause, and Coronavirus becomes a worldwide reality, I am left with the knowledge of how this virus has affected people and nations in different ways based on power, privilege, and marginalized categories. How will technology and viruses intra-act with humans to create our futures? How will we manage to find new ways of becoming each other’s kind?

Epigraph

Tell Me She Said

Tell me, she said
What is the story you are telling?
What wild song is singing itself through you?
Listen:
In the silence between there is music
In the spaces between there is story.
It is the song you are living now,
It is the story of the place where you are now,
It contains the shapes of these old mountains,
The green of the rhododendron leaves.
It is happening right now in your breath
In your heart beat still
Drumming the deeper rhythms
Beneath your cracking words
It matters what you did this morning
And last Saturday night
And last year,
Not because you are important
But because you are in it
And it is still moving,
We are all in this story together,
Listen:
In the silence there is music
In the spaces between there is story
Pay attention:
We are listening each other into being.
—Sally Atkins, Picking Clean the Bones

Becoming Kin(d)

In the Becoming Kind(d) section I will show and tell all that arrived and was created, including the ongoing curiosities offered through the questions offered collectively by the participants and I. This Becoming Kin(d) section contains the data that was created, collected, and curated during the Family Story Sojourn, including photos chosen and stories written as aesthetic responses to each of the times that the participants met. Additionally, this section contains what is traditionally thought of as the findings and analysis, implications, and conclusion, which I am renaming Story Catching and Creating, Ongoing Curiosities, and Ending With a Beginning, respectively. I wonder what strands will ripple out and attach to new strands of the participants and the reader of this dissertation. This story is a living story, and its journey will, in many ways, be unknown to me. Like all stories, this one will grow beyond the time/place of now and grow like mycelium, underground, possibly unseen and unknown but ever present.

Donna Haraway (2016) writes about making kin in these tumultuous times, and she writes about becoming, not just being. She describes making kin as a dynamic way to birth connections that would support sustainable relationships, not only with humans but also with the other-than-human world. Haraway (2016) discusses briefly the etymology of “kin” and “kind.” For Haraway, kind represents caring for each other and the earth, and kind also represents how we are each other’s kind as well. There are many kinds of human and other-than-human entities, and all are kin. One of the definitions of kind has been used divisively,

as in “you are not my kind.” Merriam Webster lists one of the definitions of “kind” as “a doubtful or barely admissible member of a category” (Merriam Webster Online). The challenge of becoming kin(d) continues to lie in examining discrepancies within and between human and other-than-human kin, while not continuing to reinforce human exceptionalism.

In the Becoming Kin(d) portion of this dissertation, I include a section of stories I wrote about individual sojourns, which I invite readers to engage with. Using Barad’s concept of intra-action, and consistent with both EXA and ABR, I situate data creation and analysis as an iterative, ongoing process throughout this dissertation. I frame findings and analysis later in this section as Ongoing Curiosities. For the purposes of my inquiry, findings are more of an invitation to ask continued questions, as even the readers of this dissertation become entangled in the theory/story. I invite readers to immerse themselves in the entanglements of the materiality of the stories, storyplace, and art supplies, which become both kin and kind. I recommend that the elements of the entanglement be viewed as kin in a recognition of the challenge to the nature/culture binary and the human/other-than-human binary. The word “kind” also conjures the idea of being kind as in being caring but also as being each other’s kind or not, referring to political affiliation, religion, race, gender or sexual orientation.

As one reads, I invite them to think about how the stories resonate with them as they consider the concept of kin, both chosen and biological. Finally, I beckon them to move beyond being kin to imagine how humans and storyplace can become each other’s kind, with the intention of learning and living on a less damaged planet. This is inquiry as invitation, to disrupt routines and to make and think through art in storyplace and in community. The first research question I proposed was “What questions arise about creativity, affect, and social

and environmental justice in the Story Family entanglement through symtheoria and sympoesis?” My question echoes my assertion that this is a cut, or a choice, a researcher makes to focus on this, not that; now, not then; here, not there (Barad, 2007). Researchers using either qualitative or quantitative research methods make choices; however, in the research paradigm of EXABR, acknowledgment and transparency are expected and encouraged, a type of show and tell. My choice to involve the participants from the start reinforced the community-based nature of this Story Family Sojourn.

Story Catching and Creating⁶

In this section, I reveal what data was created throughout Story Family Sojourn. During the course of the inquiry, I wrote a story for each sojourn, the twice-monthly time the participants gathered. The stories serve as data creation, refuting the notion that data is simply sitting there waiting to be found (Bhattacharya, 2013). Conveying the events of each sojourn, while maintaining awareness of limiting a particular voice or voices, I base the stories on a combination of my own and participants’ reflections and observations as well as my notes. My journal notes include my impressions of what occurred, comments/questions that were shared by participants during sojourns, and my own experience in each gathering. In creating each story, I reflected on my own journaling, both as the researcher and as a participant. I wrote the following stories as aesthetic/artistic responses to each of the Story Family sojourns in order to enact both data creation and data analysis (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). In order to explore how time operated and is theorized in this inquiry, I do not recount the stories of the sojourns in chronological order. Instead, I recognized the entanglement of

⁶ This heading echoes the practice of song catching, which was a practice of collecting the songs in Appalachia by visiting homes in the “hollars,” a type of oral history through songs (Ostendorf, 2014).

all types of time, including, but not limited to, the concepts of liminality and spacetime mattering.

Invitation to Becoming-Entangled

This section describes how you, the reader of this dissertation, become entangled in the dissertation/theory/story upon making the choice to read or listen to my stories. I am inviting you to enter into the stories in an engaging way, not just through reading or listening about the Story Family sojourns but also through your own memories, feelings, and thoughts. In engaging your own entanglement with the tales, you are creating a new chapter along with the story you are reading or listening to. Imagine individual strands of each story and the story as a whole reaching towards you, entwining with your own words or experiences. Maybe your story strands are more visual. I invite you to become part of this living document and, as you intra-act with the stories, to recognize that you and the stories have created something new (Barad, 2007).

At the beginning of each story is a photo from an individual sojourn, which I chose to represent the materiality of the gathering. In addition, I selected a particular photo as a way to show a visual image from the individual sojourn. Part of my process throughout this dissertation has been to read the stories aloud as in the oral storytelling tradition. I invite you to listen to the stories as I read them aloud.⁷ After each story, you may even decide to create your own artistic or aesthetic response to it using intermodal EXA, writing, dancing, sounding, painting, or walking in the woods. This also allows you to engage in the inquiry in a variety of ways. What questions do these stories invite in your own learning through intra-acting with this dissertation?

⁷ Please click on the photos in order to hyperlink to an audio recording of the story.

Within the written stories, please note the use of italics. The black words on the crisp, flat, white paper do not show the color and multidimensionality of my theorizing. However, I am also theorizing dimensionality to mean how we perceive multiple dimensions of a creation or even a situation, actually multidimensionally. So even viewing a flat, white paper with black letters, I think about the sun on the paper, the memories of letters, and my childhood books. This is theorizing with the senses, telescopically and microscopically, forward and backwards in time. I invite this kind of “reading” as well. Subsequently, I am using the italics within the stories to indicate when I am tying a past tale, a memory, or a daydream to the present time of the stories. Whether you are reading or listening to the stories, imagine *your* stories added there in italics as well. I invite you to intra-act with the stories so they are also entangled in the dissertation. Each person reading or listening to the stories will be tying on their own story strands, which inevitably change the story of my dissertation. Thus, the matter of the document, although apparently still, continues moving through time, inviting more entanglements with each person who reads or listens to it. Writers often refer to something being written through them, but while I am the creatrix of this story dissertation, I recognize that I am only a conduit, a midwife, eager to see this creative entanglement continue to become kin(d).

Under each photo you will find a list of a few words that I am calling incantations, an invocation or invitation to enter the story with a sense of curiosity. As I read the stories myself, I realized each one of them contained words related to affect and matter, calling forth the key elements of that particular Story Family sojourn. Serpil Oppermann (2018) notes that “no matter which form it takes, matter yields terrestrial tales of resilience, creativities, uncertainties, evolution and dissolution in nondeterministic ways” (p. 412). In order to move

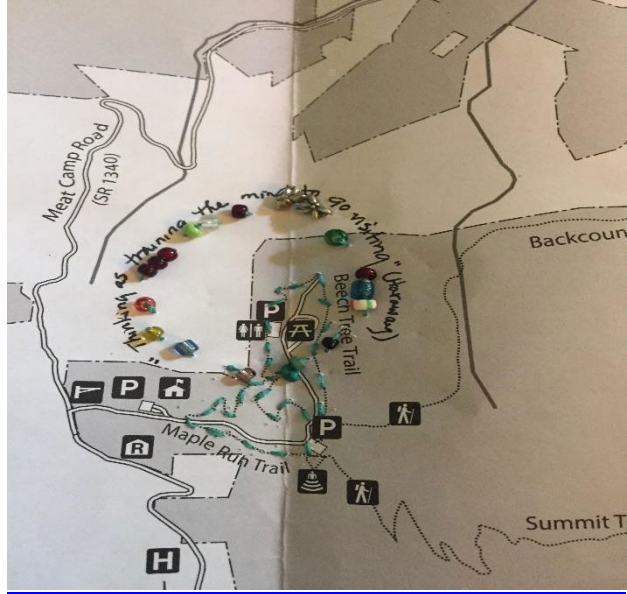
beyond only the human participants in the study, I paid attention to the materiality of the art supplies, the storyplace of the sojourns, the food, the journals, and the many tables we set and at which we sat. The recognition of matter and the human intra-acted to co-create what arrived in this study.

I use “she” in the stories to decenter the human subject and to focus on what is created through the entanglement of human and other-than-human members of the Story Family. Furthermore, decentering the human by using she/they hopefully assists in refocusing on affect, surprise, synchronicity, liminality, embodiment, storied matter, and storyplace.

Threshold

As you read the following stories, my desire is for you to engage with the stories in any way that is meaningful to you. In addition, I encourage you, the reader, to notice how, through the apparatus of expressive arts-based practices and materials, sympoesis (knowing by making together) (Dempser, 1998) and symtheoria (knowing by theorizing together) were present during each of the times the participants met. Making and theorizing together includes the humans and other-than-humans, the mountains in the time of the Anthropocene, the materiality of the arts supplies, and discourses around social and environmental justice community, family, and kin. Karen Barad (2007) states agency “is attributable to a complex network of human and nonhuman agents... an enactment, not something an individual possesses” (p. 23). This entanglement also includes what stories are being told, who gets to tell the stories, how the education system chooses which stories to tell, and how I, as a particular human with my particular privileges and intersectionalities, made cuts to enable the telling of this theory/story. I have simultaneously complicated and simplified the stories.

My hope is that these stories will resonate with the reader or the listener backwards in time, through history/herstory and memory, and forward in time, through speculative fabulations. Please enter now through the threshold, the inbetween, where liminal time is more common.



telescope, microscope, invitation

*Invitation*⁸

Sit for a spell and listen to a story that I am both telling and that is being told through me. I invite you to close your eyes, get comfortable. Imagine you are holding a ball, just the right size to cup your hands around. The ball, or what I call the Story Orb, is where we will start the story. Know, however, as all meaningful stories unfold, we start in the middle.⁹ This orb is made of strips of cotton muslin. On each strip are words written by women in this inquiry, or the Story Family Sojourn. This is the place in the story we must travel back to move forward. I like to think about the mycelium or network of fungus beneath the Earth that interacts with trees. Imagine entering that network as we enter this story. So how does this connect to the Story Orb you are holding, you ask? Well, on each strip are words from those journals tied together. Stop here. It is okay if your mind is wandering. Donna Haraway (2016) says thinking is the mind training to go wandering. As you listen to this story, imagine yourself, no, allow yourself to remember a side story of your own. I invite you, the reader, through listening or reading, to unroll the Story Orb and tie

⁸ Please note that the following stories are published in a different font. This is consistent with ABR and the use of the arts from the initial conception to the “writing up” of the study.

⁹ Stephanie Springgay (2018) writes about how in arts-based research scholars, enter inquiry in “speculative middles”(p. 203) refuting the linearity often found in traditional research. This is consistent with Barad’s (2007) concept of spacetime mattering, in which beginnings and endings are deconstructed as particular binaries. Instead, she uses the concept of the cut, which involves the acknowledgment of where the researcher chooses to focus. The cut necessitates an examination of ethics, why we focus on one part and what and who is being left out.

your strip to the others. You and I are both storytellers and story receivers. You and I roll the strips back into a ball, new words touching each other, intra-acting. You are now part of the story, maybe you already were. We continue like this, moving forward, adding, moving backward, and looking as if through a microscope and then a telescope. Moving back in time in our own lifetimes and in deep time. Imagine that these story strands create Story Orbs that later can be unrolled and inspire new stories. In those new stories, words that glow (Maclure, 2013) may be written on other strands and added to new Story Orbs, a generative process of storytelling and receiving and the creative process in the string game of life.¹⁰

¹⁰ Donna Haraway (2016) writes about string games as an act of becoming-with. In these stories, especially with the Story Orbs, the women pass back and forth the words and strands that are woven together into stories. While doing this in the woods of the Appalachian Mountains, we are also becoming-with the matter of the woods and the materials of the EXA.



response-ability, re-story, re-member, threshold

Beginning in the Middle

She invites them to a place she has been solo theory walking. She has walked this loop before, through the woods in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, at Elk Knob State Park.¹¹ Know that this story starts right now in the reading, that day when she walked alone and billions of years ago when these ancient mountains were formed. She invites you to enter here or there. It is a story that is continuing to tell itself through her, and yet it is a story that shifts and changes and is retold with more or different details. It evades capture.¹² So, enter here with her now as she retells this story. The women participants, members of the Story Family, stand at the threshold, the beginning. They name it beginning, as if there were one, and stand in anticipation. The air feels different, cooler, light-dappled. She notices it feels like the veil is thin between the worlds. They pause to notice tree-lined paths beckoning, and they embark in silence. She revels in the woods-sharing, remembering walking the labyrinth with others, walking together separately. She thinks about walking this path prior to this day, walking toward this study, and now walking with the women at the sojourns. These mountains, apparently still, solid, immovable, have made their own journey from a once-connected continent, Pangaea. In the very moment the women walk, they walk through remnants of deep time, experiencing liminal time. The traces

¹¹ Elk Knob <https://www.ncparks.gov/elk-knob-state-park/home>

¹² Bhattacharya, (2013).

of this mountain migration are deceptively quiet to their moving bodies through this space. The Appalachian Mountains are rich in biodiversity, a glacial gift. As the glaciers moved south, flora and fauna moved farther south along the higher ridges of the mountain range. Parts of the range remain in Scotland and the western coast of Africa. The women walk the loop and return to the threshold place, reflecting on the walk, the questions. She ponders about how to decenter humans in this story she is attempting to tell. She remembers one of the theories she is using to tell the theory story. Posthumanism is not about moving beyond the human but moving beyond human exceptionalism (Barad, 2007). She travels from this moment to deep time, to her own memories, time enfolding on itself through this vessel of her body.

After walking the loop through the woods, they sit on park benches and reflect on the walk. Questions and conversations arise. The conversations include musings and dialogue which includes topics such as the concepts of muscle memory, response-ability or the ability to respond, re-story, re-remembered ontology, and the combination of knowing, being, and doing (ethics). One woman wonders what is present at this very moment. Another ponders how walking on this path is like moving along synapses in the brain and the pathways that her blood travels. Yet another woman wonders about the journey of their bodies in this moment and the journey of the mountain to this moment. They comment on their deep love of

journaling outside. They relish the ability to simultaneously focus on large and small details in this moment and in their lives.

Handmade paste paper journals provide a place/space for journaling. Each woman in turn shares part of what she has written. One woman says she walked with a sense of the transition in her life. Another woman says she has been thinking of "story" for the last year. She says she does not give herself enough time to be in the woods. She comments that she needs to make an appointment with herself. Another woman says she thinks re-member means to put ourselves back together. She also comments that the wind is very important to her. Another woman reads aloud some writing she did that morning about finding a small leather-bound New Testament that was her great-great-grandfather's. She recounts that she also found a picture of her great-grandmother in the book. She remembers and retells an NPR story about the DNA of parchment as it relates to the small Bible. The advances in DNA testing had spilled over into knowing more about plants and animals. Thus, the leather cover of this small Bible would be able to be traced to a particular animal and where it had lived. They talk about Christianity, spirituality.

A woman talks about the privilege of being outdoors and those who cannot interact with it due to physical disability. Becoming teary, she talks about her own issues of physical pain. Another woman talks about the feeling of walking the labyrinth and all that she had experienced in the moment. And yet another woman

talks about roots and shows a drawing of roots reaching into the sky. She talks about amphibolite, a common rock in the Southern Appalachians, and how this mountaintop was once part of the ocean floor. She revels in the thought of walking the ocean floor and the mountaintop at the very same time.

After sharing food, they hike to the top of the mountain. Conversations on the trail ensue. They talk about the Underground Railroad and pathways north to Cleveland. There are stories that the caves in these mountains hid slaves as they traversed the route north. They talk about African Americans' relationships to the outdoors, although none of the women are descendants of people who had made this treacherous journey. Migration of people, migration of mountains.

They wonder:

- ❖ How do we know this is part of the ocean floor?
- ❖ How far back do we need to go to not be colonizers?
- ❖ What did nature-based spiritual practices look like before we were the colonizers?



surprise, mystery, magic, synchronicity

Hidden in Plain Sight

This is a story of women walking alone together in a wooded sanctuary near a university campus, a preserve, hidden in plain sight. They were invited to a solitary walk in the woods, collecting items for an altar. A collage of sound, wind, and water are entangled, indistinguishable from each other. Their conversations are peppered with questions. They wonder how sanctuary, Sabbath, is resistance.¹³ Dappled sun and wind moving leaves frame this conversation. A woman joins in later and notes, "I felt your energy pulling me here." She describes her trip to California and the different stories each mountain had to tell. She "heard it" in her body, the energy of the Appalachians, a nurturing effect, and the California mountains, more of a charged energy. They sit in this circle, open to new and old connections and reconnections. She remembers and recounts that Donna Haraway (2016) writes about how stories need to be told but be left open for new parts of the story, different interpretations, further insights and re-readings that allow stories to be moving and living with each telling and receiving. Haraway (2016) advocates for "stories that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections" (p. 39). They long for surprise, mystery, magic, synchronicity. The story they tell is that this sense of wonder is always there. It is they who turn away.

¹³ Brueggemann, 2014

She wonders what story they are telling each other as they weave this tapestry of belonging. She wonders how deeply listening to the sounds of the woods and to each other is creating a new story. In the string figure of "cat's cradle," she uses her hands to hold threads and pass the string to another. As they pass their creation to the next woman, it changes. They let go so another can add her own movement and aesthetic.

They wonder:

- ❖ Can there be slow activism?
- ❖ What is our responsibility or our ability to respond?
- ❖ How does our need for quiet and aloneness contribute to our activism, to critical thinking and theory?
- ❖ Does activism need anger as a response?
- ❖ How are we enacting making together?
- ❖ How are we theorizing together?
- ❖ How does this passing back and forth decenter human exceptionalism?



light, lake, lace

Spider Lace

They walk counterclockwise around a lake in the Appalachian Mountains invoking questions. They discuss how each of them learn about current environmental and political challenges. With their cameras, they try to capture the light playing with the surrounding trees. What is absent in the photos is the feel of the breeze, the heat that changes as the sun goes in and out of the clouds. They notice a small shaft of sunlight illuminating a spider's web that looks like hand-tatted lace. When they enter the tunnel of rhododendron trees with very few flowers on them, the light, heat, moisture, and sound all shift, reminding them of another walk, in different woods. Photos cannot capture the sight, sound, taste, smell, and feel of this moment. They talk about how experience evades capture (Bhattacharya, 2013) but assists in re-remembering the day.

They wonder:

- ❖ How does mindfully walking in the woods act as an aesthetic response to political and environmental challenges?
- ❖ How can we continue to decenter humans in the human/nature binary?



bead, bone, stone, purple bean, plum

Lungs

The smell of smoke greets them as they sit together at the top of a mountain in Southern Appalachia. They sit wondering about the fires in the lungs of the world, the Brazilian rainforest. They wonder if they are breathing air or if air is breathing them. They pause and breathe out smoke, weariness, chemicals, busyness. They settle into theory walking, story talking. They breathe in community, beauty, liminality, relaxation. Three women are writing the story of living despite the sixth mass extinction (Davis & Turpin, 2015; Huffer, 2017; & Povelli, 2016; Reed, 2017).

They talk about how what is discarded as trash is later ingested. They notice bird songs, twisted limbs, and different wild flowers since their last walk here. They walk the Lost Province Loop in the traces of other human and other-than-human beings, including people escaping slavery, hiding in caves near where they now walk. She recounts how she had grown up a minister's daughter and how her church was a stop on the Underground Railroad.

They share a potluck meal of a colorful harvest of fruits and vegetables and handmade sweets from a local farmer's market, set on a table covered with a linen tablecloth, a design stitched in cobalt blue. As they eat, sounds surround them, families talking to children, birds singing, cars coming and going, motorcycle engines

running, a kazoo humming, a symphony of sound on this holiday and football game weekend.

She invites them to create with the items she has gathered from her home, fabric from her wedding dress worn 35 years ago, yarn made from recycled silk saris, embroidery floss, and a large bag of beads, costume jewelry, and various baubles. She tells the story of her friend and her friend's mother and the sacred sorting of a lifetime of matter including the beads. The baubles and beads find their way into prayer beads, a small altar, and blessings represented by animal-shaped stone, bone, shell, and wood beads wrapped in felt and secured with multicolored silk yarn.

Journey of the Beads

We travel to a place neither of us calls home

A sacred sorting, artifacts of a mother, a crone

Twenty years of life lived looking out her senior living apartment window at the Appalachian Mountains.

I turn book spines skyward and shuffle winged pages

Pressed flowers, four leaf clovers, lottery tickets, intended bookmarks and assumed bookmarks: candy wrappers, receipts, notes, bills, magazine clippings, photos, postcards,

Kleenex, blank 3x5 notecards, and small slips of paper with notes and lists, shower

down from the pages.

Poetry and prose, romance, mystery, self-help, and daily meditation books are sorted.

Unraveling the life of a maiden, mother, crone as she heads to the last house on the road, as she liked to say.

Her daughter, my dear friend, sorts items into like objects including the dragonfly collection that she and her mother gift to other seniors in the building and the nurses and

therapists at the rehab she currently resides at.

I sleep in a hospital bed in her bedroom.

Her daughter sorts jewelry, linen, scarves, clothes, kitchen items, hospital equipment.

My friend fills the shelves in the free room with items that are quickly adopted by the residents in the senior housing that was once a fancy hotel.

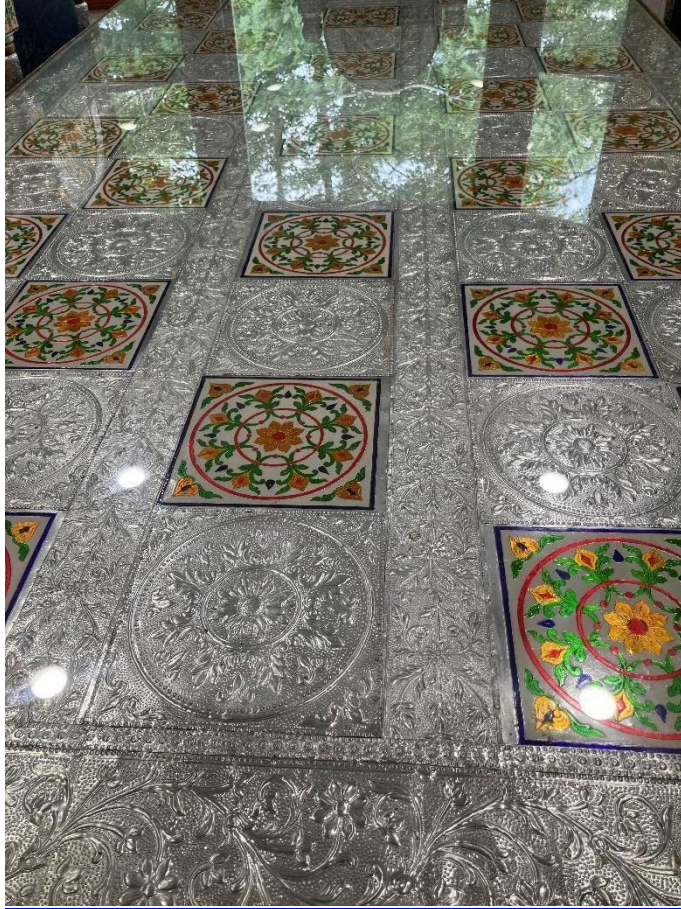
In the senior community garden, the items from the free room gradually appear, a sign, a planter, shells, stones

Matter rippling from one life outward to seek its own journey.

A feast of food, art supplies, and friendship spreads prayers of justice, and they are satiated until they may meet again.

They wonder:

- ❖ What are the disparate consequences of environmental and climate change on marginalized people?
- ❖ How are they connected to the fires in the Amazon, a deceased woman elder, the smoke, and the beads?



movement, migration, mountains, memory

Marigold

A woman recounts a story of a table's journey. She and her husband traveled to India, to his hometown, to choose the materials to craft the table. The table traveled on a yearlong voyage to the United States in pieces on a boat. The women gather at the table, sharing a meal, talking about power, religion, activism, women, and nature. She thinks about the women's bodies sitting at the table now, the body of the table, and all the unwilling bodies in history moved across the ocean, away from home and their own gathering places. She wonders about mapping these movements of bodies, ideas, objects through space and through time. What would that look like visually, artistically? She imagines pieces of glass laid on top of one another, a snapshot of the entanglement of bodies, storyplace, materials. Collective sojourn mapping. She then imagines something softer like tissue paper or dragonfly wings.

After the meal, one of the Story Family members reads a dialogue she had with a marigold. She tells a story of her ancestors, a story of colonization, and a story of bodies moved across the ocean against their will as indentured laborers from India to Trinidad by the British. She describes her own story of being a second-generation immigrant living in India as a teen and young adult. She recounts moving back across the ocean to the United States with her first-generation immigrant

husband. In her adult life, she moves back and forth across the ocean by airplane, this time to do work at a school, which she started and named after her mother, dedicated to educating girls. She envisions the girls creating their own stories, writing their own lives. Another woman recounts a memory from her visits to India of the garlands of flowers, including marigolds, strung together, displayed in a riot of colors in a flower market.

These are stories set in motion by power-over through colonization, racism, sexism, heterosexism. These are stories that echo the impacts of a belief in mankind's perceived divine right of progress to build nations which take advantage of nature and marginalized people. This is a story of the present consequences of those previous stories. This is a time to know the stories from the past, which have set in motion this specific present. This is a time to tell new stories. This is a story of us as becoming-ancestors, telling stories to weave new futures. A story of marigold, table, art, community, blessing, resilience, and witness. A story of movement, migration, mountains, memory. All this is the weaving of our story lives.

They wonder:

- ❖ Where do the storylines connect with other storylines, the trees that are part of the table, the water holding the boat, and the water they drink as they dialogue about power?



heather, blueberry, rhododendron, compost

Doll's Eyes

The biologist-turned-English instructor-turned-park ranger and educator meets them at the place of the original gate of the Moses Cone Manor near Bass Lake. She recounts that Moses Cone was a man who acquired wealth through the production of denim cloth. He owned property that included a manor house, apple trees, and a pond, which was later donated to the Blue Ridge Parkway. She tells us she once was a park ranger there and gathered oral histories of people who worked for the Cones and lived on the property. She passionately talks about her love of flora, trees, lichen, herbs, wildflowers, fungus, and her interest in the Moses Cone Estate and those who called it home. She offers stories of people and flora universes, plant lore. Like an incantation, she offers names of plants, trees, lichen, moss, mushroom, fungus. She describes plants edible and poisonous, including a plant called doll's eyes with red stems and white berries. She speaks of the relationship between trees and mycelium, fungus assisting in decomposing trees. She talks about fungus innovations including cancer treatment and ecological assistance.

Responding to a question about the heather plant, the biologist tells them that heather is in the same family as the rhododendron or the heath family. She says heather, thriving on challenging ecological sites, also grows on Grandfather Mountain and also the North Carolina coast and Scotland. She reminds them that

the Appalachian Mountain range remains in Scotland and along the western coast of Africa.

She explains that when the glaciers covered northern parts of the United States, the Appalachian Mountain Range was higher, so flora and fauna were able to travel down the mountains, creating the current rich biodiversity. She shows them different kinds of lichen, which are actually communities of fungal filaments and algae. She invites them to smell witch hazel and shows them witch's hats and berries. They taste wild ginger leaves and observe gentian blue flowers as bees dip in. They walk through snowball hydrangeas to sit and eat lunch.

They talk about feeling the traces/pathways of the Cones, the multiple people who walked through and around the lake. Since last time, she has been thinking more about the trees and their relationship with the mycelium. Roots and strands that connect them through time, their own history, and the connection to other people that may have inhabited the exact places they walk that day.

The weekend after her beloved died, family and friends walked around Bass Lake on the Moses Cone Estate honoring the/her circle of life. There were two swans that day and a dragonfly birth.

Their guide speaks of her son who died at age 7. She thinks of the web of life and death, both the Earth's and ours. She thinks of her own death, whenever it may come, and her wish to be buried in a shallow grave, consumed by mycelium, compost for plants and fallen trees. The woman Heather planted in a meadow, her forearm inked with a dragonfly, a spiral, and a snippet of a poem, "one wild and precious life" (Oliver, 1990). All transforming into dirt.

The skies become gray, and thunder rumbles in the distance. Slowly, a light rain starts to fall, then a heavier rain follows. The guide shows them a shortcut through the woods. As they quickly follow her and each other through the woods, they come out on a path. The wind picks up, and a shower of yellow leaves flutters down on the members of the Story Family. Time changes, colors darken and brighten.

They wonder:

- ❖ What is written in stone, the consequences of time, human time on Earth?
- ❖ What is written on/in our bodies, our bones, our flesh, our DNA?
- ❖ "What kind of geology does a body live?" (Yusoff, 2016, p.8).¹⁴

¹⁴ When doing an internet search about who built the Moses Cone Manor, Wikipedia states that Moses and Bertha Cone built the house. The income difference between the Cones and the people who actually built the Manor and its rock walls is likely vast. What would history that is not whitewashed reveal about the people who literally moved mountains in the service of progress?

Overlook. At this point on the story/theory path, I encourage you to rest, breath, and think at this overlook. While yet again the materiality and discourses embedded in the stories is entangled, I pull out strands to guide you on this journey. At this overlook, I want to show and tell you about the discourses related to social and environmental justice. Remember that “discourses are not literally what is said but...what enables and constraints what is said” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.115). This cluster of stories glows with discussions or symtheoria about race, disability, colonization, activism, global relationships and environmental impacts, and privilege. This particular story place is one of a lack of racial diversity, political conservatism, and amazing beauty. The participants “aren’t from around here” and yet are deeply committed to the mountains they call home. I wonder about what we learned as girls about social and environmental justice and what the children living here learn in the public schools. What discourses shaped the framing of the narrative of justice? As a group of mostly white, privileged women, I wonder about what shapes our ongoing engagement with activism. In the above sojourns, we enacted sympoesis that continues our adult homeschooling, our mountain home. Now rested, I encourage you to walk/read/listen on. After this walk through the stories, I encourage you to ponder your relationship to education, activism, racial inequities, privilege, and climate crisis.



mountains, movement, memories

Canvas

Mountains, colors, movement, paint, sunset, cool air intra-acting. They revel in the largeness of the canvas and the joy of playing with paint. She feels layers of gray, of blank, leave her as she creates with others, symposium. Joy arrives. Encroachment turns to engagement. They dance together with paint. By the time the sun sets, they note feelings of being grounded and centered.

There is an unfinished stone house near where they paint. She wonders, if the walls could talk, what stories they would tell as the house watches over the women in the woods. She is reminded of wise women, witches even, creating, laughing, making magic as the light fades. They wonder, will this color carry them through the winter of this year of their lives.

After tragedy, loss, or transition, her mother used to tell her daughters, go and make new memories.

They are telling stories, making new memories. They are "listening each other into being" (Atkins, 2005). They are painting each other into the next interlude, the in-between. Their breath returns easy, stress painted away.

They wonder:

- ❖ How is creating with others different from creating alone?
- ❖ How do the Appalachian Mountains or other storyplaces, the artist, and the art product create each other?
- ❖ How are they connected to women's circles throughout time?



round kitchen table, antique coffee table, homemade food

Time Travel

The women meet in the winter, the dark part of the year, in the northern hemisphere in the Southern Appalachians. They talk about noticing the light returning. The story of this sojourn is about the cut (Barad, 2007), or the ending that will also be the beginning of what is next. They express the value of these sojourns and their desire to continue with no ending in sight. They travel back in time, not their own but to women meeting in circles to talk about what is meaningful, sacred even: their grandmothers' crafting, sewing fabric to build community. Creating the Story Orb has invited this. The three women who began the Story Orb creation at the previous sojourn weave a story to the woman who was absent to describe the process. Written words in journals, spoken words, and written words on muslin are read aloud to describe the story. Interspersed in this evening is also weariness, nourishment, round kitchen table, antique coffee table, homemade food, quiet. She notes the quiet she usually is surrounded by when alone in her house and how the quiet envelops all of them on this dark, cold evening.

She has longed for a way to show multidimensional theorizing or theorizing that recognizes the dimensionality of time, arts-based, a precarious methodology. She has moved from poiesis, or knowing by making, to sympoiesis (Haraway, 2016), or knowing by making with others, and also symtheoria, or theorizing together. This

sojourn is a weaving of women in the room and women ancestors throughout time, weaving story and craft and community now, then, and in the future. This sojourn occurs, like all the others in this inquiry, in the Appalachian Mountains that settled themselves here on this Earth billions of years ago, ancient height diminished by time. They sit with each other amidst whispers and traces of other journeys and sojourns, creating memories for what and who is to come next. They close the sojourn by randomly choosing strips of muslin with the words from their journals and reading them aloud: poems, blessings, snippets of ceremony remembrances.

They wonder:

- ❖ How are present time, women ancestors gathering in community, journals, and fiber intra-acting?



seed, mellow, seen, mystery

Cosmos and Mycelium

They gather around a low, round coffee table on the porch. Another table is invitingly full of art supplies, markers, magazine images, paint, and paste paper from journal making. The sound of a stream rippling over rocks behind the porch envelops them. Baby bunnies romp in the yard across the stream. The light fades as a pending storm threatens to appear. Thunder rumbles in the distance, and a torrential summer rain occurs as they create art. They work in their own journals, then pass them to the left in the direction of invoking (Starhawk, 1989), a belief in Earth-based spiritual traditions, until the journals eventually return to their creators. A second passing ensues as they add a word to each other's journals. Using pieces from paste paper making, they weave the past into the present. This is a story of seed, mellow, seen, mystery, yummy, seeking, strength, and power. This is a story of cosmos and mycelium, yellow roses, water, sun, clouds, rain. The woman who had invited us to her house comments on her relationship with the weather in the summer in the mountains. Sunny where they are, a few miles away it may be raining or vice versa. Or it may be raining in the present moment, but in a few minutes the sun may appear. Locally, people advise, "You should keep moving toward where you are going. It may look different from where you are now."

They wonder:

- ❖ How can they incorporate more time in creative community into their lives?
- ❖ What gets co-created in sharing a meal, art supplies, and each other's homes?
- ❖ How does witnessing each other contribute to learning and activism?



bedtime story, antidote, lullaby, medicine

She Shaman

They sit in a circle of love, mapping stories, love stories. Their stories continue to interweave. Lines from their journals about their experiences in the woods, connection, community have appeared in each other's journals. Questions about who was the original author of the sentence arise with no single ownership required. They wonder, as their words entangle, "Who really said what?" Their words and phrases are woven with others. What is the collective story they are writing? She reads them the story that seemed to write itself through her. Her friend called it a medicine story. She thinks about a story strand that led to right here, right now. She chooses a point and names it beginning, knowing there are many beginnings before this beginning, nested beginnings.

They each respond to one of the story strands as a prompt for an aesthetic response to the words on the muslin strip. Before the next sojourn, they were invited to write stories as aesthetic responses to the art. She wonders if the beginning of the process started when they made the journals before that, this very evening. The teller of a tale chooses where to begin.

*Once upon a time, there were two sisters who loved to
read and write. One was Emma and the other was Shana.
They would sit for hours on their porch reading stories,*

writing new stories. Sometimes they even acted them out. Their mother would sing her daughters to sleep in their shared bedroom under quilts their grandmother had made for them. Each scrap of fabric represented a tale itself. Sometimes their mother sang songs about the shaman and sometimes about the whale. Every story song seemed to build upon the previous one, separate yet connected. Since they often drifted off to sleep as their mother cuddled and crooned, bits and pieces of her songs were drawn into their dreams. One night they dreamed of their mother as a whale telling stories in a language known only to whales. Strangely, though, they could understand the words. Mother whale invited them to swim into the dark unknown. They swam into the dark hole in the ocean, or was it a deep hole into space? The dark hole lightened to clear green blue turquoise. As they traveled through the passage, they could feel themselves shapeshifting, water changing to air, fins changing to wings. Exiting the watery tunnel, they flew into the sky, into the lush woods. Side by side, they landed gracefully

on a tree branch. A wind swirled gently around them.

Listening intently, the owl sisters heard a new language.

The wind whispered, "It is I, the she-shaman, here to teach you about the chakras." She explained that the fourth chakra of the seven is the heart chakra, not red at all like the Valentine's Day ones, but deep glowing green.

They realized they were resting in the middle of the deep green leafy woods chakra. The she-shaman reminded them that love is within and also around. She directed them to plant seeds; seeds of love, seeds of nourishment, seeds of what was to come. She began to quietly sing a seeding song, a song that would echo out into the universe throughout time, reaching human and animal, oceans and mountains. Seeding the stories of remembered pasts and imaginative futures. They imagined wrapping the world in a soft cotton quilt of justice, reverence, and creativity. Rocking the Earth to sleep, to dream, to rest. Singing it into sustenance. The girls woke the next morning full of dreamtime adventure.

Throughout their lives, they wrote stories of journey,

*magic, sleeping Earth, and sanctuary. Open hearts
opened wider, reaching towards each other. Seeing the
unseen.*

She realizes she is a story receiver and a storyteller, a story gifter. They ask her to tell it again to another family. A bedtime story for the Anthropocene, an antidote, a lullaby.

They wonder:

- ❖ How can creating stories and telling stories provide medicine
for
social and environmental injustice?



quilting bees, busy bees, queen bees, honey times

Stone House

Ripping strips of muslin from a large swath of cloth and strips from a smaller cloth with leaves and a small child's handprints on them, they talk as they tear. Reminiscent of their women ancestors quilting, sewing, creating with what they had and what had been left over from other projects. Cloth transformed into quilts. Stories transformed into community.

The day of this sojourn is a gloomy, foggy, rainy, windy day with birds determined to sing regardless. The leaves susurrate outside. An unfinished stone house sits on the hill above the house the woman lives in, as if watching over them. Inside is warm as the women gather near a large stone fireplace with a golden, crackling fire as part of their circle. Prior to the gathering, she found the muslin and the strips they had written on previously. She found a small handmade book she created in her first EXA class. She does not believe she left it there in the bag with the strips, yet synchronously, here was the book titled the Gift. The gift she returns is attention, intuition, and intention for the stories embedded in the stories. Women gather in sacred circles spinning yarns, words, and fibers; weaving together and pulling apart story strands. Quilting bees, busy bees, queen bees, honey times, the golden hours spent in a Story Family entanglement.

They wonder:

- ❖ What stories are they using to tell other stories (Haraway, 2016)?
- ❖ What webs are they weaving?

Overlook. Here we take another rest to digest and ponder, breathe and refresh. The cluster of stories you have been entangled with point to how the arts and creativity can be engaged to think through and explore social and environmental justice. I wonder what is necessary to provide the space and time to explore what matters. The community creating together, or symposium, elicited a sense of being connected through time to women in other circles in other times. I remember people who were not allowed educational access and found their own ways of teaching and learning through what was considered women's ways, such as quilting, cooking, talking, and learning from each other. I wonder who was left out of these circles as well.



snakeskin, roses, bell, fire

She is From...

She is from her(e) right now

She is from foothills, roots, and not knowing

She is from compost and wild roses, snakeskin and starlight

She is from angels walking with her past slave harboring bell tower

She is from choice and chance

She is from Mountain

She is from ball of fire cooling in a dark unknown

She is from continents remembering

Please note that this story recounts a sojourn different in many ways from the others in that one of the women had a health crisis and, subsequently, the emergency squad was called. The following is the story written to capture the unfolding of that gathering.

This is a story of sanctuary, surrounded by trees. Of evening chill, waning light, a feast on a picnic table, creating together separately. This is a story of peaceful writing and arting turned to alarm. A story of shifting energy, space, time, of moving closer and farther from potential danger. Each of the women engages in a specific action as if orchestrated, holding space, calling for help, moving vehicles, offering presence and resources. She puts her hand on the woman's back on her heart chakra, energy sending, heart rate slowing. Then the men come, one, then two, into

the space. They are jovial, responsible, kind, knowledgeable. What strange sanctuary had the men walked into, interrupting a reverent meeting, with purpose, direction, and goals. This is a story of gratitude for all kinds of healing. This is a story of women, men, journals, and woven stories, migrating into one entanglement. This is a story of creating memories to unpack later, of laughter, community, congregating, care.

They wonder:

- ❖ What combination of medicine, including stories, touch, presence, and creating a particular storyplace, can calm a heart?



turquoise, night, table, blue, link

Blue

They gather, as they have done many times before, at someone's house. They share a meal at a round table painted turquoise. They have asked for more time to art, commenting on having trouble finding time to create by themselves. The Story Family has provided a space, a time, and the community to play in the arts. Later, two of the women move back to the turquoise table to create with alcohol inks, reminding each other to be careful not to get the paint on the table. Yet they do. The hostess later comments that she sees the faint blue on turquoise mark as she eats dinner with her family and fondly remembers the night when another family gathered at this table, a chosen family.

They wonder:

- ❖ "What if precarity, indeterminacy, and what we imagine as trivial are the center of the systematicity we seek?" (Tsing, 2015, p. 20)



earth, woman, clay

Rattle

They arrive at the clay artist's studio on a crisp autumn day in the mountains. As they enter the sunlit studio, they are greeted with a space jam-packed with beautiful pottery, functional and decorative. Tables are in front of other tables, every surface covered, even underneath the tables.

The potter tells the story of camping on this land when she was younger and how her parents built a cabin. They later gave her a piece of land, and she and her husband built their home there. When her father died, she bought the cabin and later built her studio onto the side of it. She tells us during the day of being a clay instructor at a local rural high school. She talks about discovering EXA and Sally and changing her high school class so all desks were in a circle. She talks about having students share 10-20 metaphors about their lives related to the work in clay. She talks about buying students' art and then giving it back to them. She gives an example of giving the artwork back to a mother of a student who died.

We are truly story receivers.

Settling into warm comfortable couches and chairs, the potter leads them in a guided meditation. They each hold a small ball of clay in their hands and then to their hearts. She invites them to imagine having roots growing down from their feet

into the Earth. One woman sees red, orange, yellow molten lava. She feels fear that she would burn her roots, but then the roots are transformed into pure energy and light. Then the potter asks them to bring this vision and bodily sensation back through their bodies into their arms, into their hands, and into the ball of clay, which is being held against their hearts throughout the meditation.

The potter has them silently move outside, with the instruction to lie on the ground on their stomachs and then on their backs and then make a pinch pot from the clay. Making a brief pilgrimage to the spot on the property that they would sojourn within this larger sojourn, they each find a spot, near a shed, on some rocks, on the grass. The dog comes to visit each of them in their place.

Sharing food, talking, and laughing, they gather at the already full table to begin creating. She instructs them on how to make rattles. They make clay creations shaped like birds or various sizes of round rattles with prints of spirals, labyrinths, or flowers.

After completing their rattles, they move back into the circle. The potter gifts them with a small pinch pot she had made. In their journals, they write about what arrived that day and what story was created. As a closing to the experience, they write one line about the essence of the day, which they craft into a group poem. They dream of future sojourns at the studio. They talk afterwards of gratitude. Like

other conversations at other sojourns, the issue of structure and spaciousness with time and energy and permission arises.

So much lingers from that day: sunshine, dog visiting, friends, laughter, and how both the whole inquiry and each sojourn is a pause. She wonders if a pause means going back to what was before. Yet maybe this sojourn is co-created by the women, the weather, the clay, the dog, the poetry, and the writing. Echoes of ritual reverberate as she remembers the day, the threshold, liminal space, and the other side, never to be exactly like the before. Structure and spaciousness continue to dance with each other even today.

She re-members that clay day in which she was held by the Earth as she held the clay/earth in her hands. She became the nesting bowl with the Earth. They collect, create, coexist, and craft experience.

They wonder:

- ❖ How does the Earth hold them, and how do they hold the earth?
- ❖ What do they make in this entanglement?
- ❖ What if the original carrier bag (Le Guin, 1996) or tool was a carrier for sound, a rattle to call others to ceremony, for ritual, for healing?



labyrinth, comforter, paste paper stars, light, mountains, sanctuary

Lullaby

She has invited them to an evening of nourishment and mystery. She arrives early to the church to prepare the space. She revels in the sacred subversiveness of this act of preparing the sanctuary. Paste paper luminaries folded into stars with lights placed inside are arranged, encircling a canvas labyrinth. She thinks of the life that these paste paper stars and the labyrinth have had.

The story of the paste paper stars is one of creating them in community, 400 stars, 400 people, to be used on a dark night on the top of a mountain encircling a labyrinth made of stones. The story of this labyrinth is one of a community of women painting the purple paths on the prepared canvas. The journey of the labyrinth has borne silent witness to the questions carried to its center.

They enter the lowly lit sanctuary, just right for the unfolding mystery. Surrounded by dark outside and soft light in the room, she invites them to imagine being in a nest, a seed, a cocoon, using blankets and pillows they had brought from home.

The story of the comforter covering the woman soon to travel to India is that it was crafted by a grandmother and grandfather. The grandmother sewed and the grandfather tied knots with small bits of yarn.

She visits each woman and sings the lullaby her mother sang to her as a child.

The story of the lullaby was one of a mother snuzzling with the three sisters, oldest to youngest, and singing each one to sleep.

As the generative dark of the season is encroaching and approaching, they are invited to walk the labyrinth. They gather in a circle in the center of the labyrinth, clasping hands. As the first to exit the labyrinth, she is gifted an offering of frankincense and a whispered blessing. They receive the gift of synchronicity, walking mystery, comforter, paste paper stars, light, mountains, and sanctuary, fodder for story strands to come.

They wonder:

- ❖ What makes a “just right” level and quality of light for mystery?
- ❖ How does the sound of one’s name being sung in a lullaby elicit tears?



solstice, wind, cloud, shadow

Wind

The summer solstice story is a tale of the sensation of being part of wind. They walk toward the summit of a mountain, tall trees flanking either side of the path. A powerful tree-bending wind roars through the trees. They walk along, as if in the eye of the storm, both part of the wind and inside the wind. She believes she has never been so close to the wind. Fear and excitement courses through them. They question if they should turn back, and yet they move on, recognizing the gift of intimacy with the wind. After completing their walk to the summit, they travel to Sunset Overlook. They watch a moving scene of the wind, clouds, light, trees, shadow, and mountains. No longer in the midst of the wind, they rest in the changing spectacle before them. The elements, earth, air, water, fire, dancing.

They wonder:

- ❖ How do they know when to go back or move forward?
- ❖ How do the elements invite us to engage with them?

Overlook. Here is our last place to stop and rest, take a drink of water, stretch. Jasmine Ulmer (2017) writes about “slow ontology” in her research practices. She asks “how we might write the materiality of our local environments" (p. 201). She further states that slow ontology “refers to a state of being in which scholars choose to live writing and research through locality, materiality, and artisan craft” (p. 202). I posit that attuning to the arriving and departing of affect, sensations embedded and embodied in the moments, allows us to slow down enough to notice what is essential for education, creativity, and activism.



prayer flags, birdsong, alchemy, dirt

Alchemy

They each bring dirt from where they live, which she mixes together and then adds water to. They use the gritty brown dirt paint to create words and symbols on the muslin strips. After each woman creates her strips, she hangs them in the trees, their own installation of sorts. In the morning, she returns to retrieve the strips; the wind, leaves, and light dance together, moving the strips of fabric hanging on their trees. The strips had been hanging in trees, intra-acting with the weather, the light, water through rain, and the earth of the dirt paint. She visits each of the story strands and photographs them. Some of them she videotapes as their movement creates what appears to be solo dance performances. Some of the strands are wound around trees, and some of the fibers from the strands are wrapped around leaves or small branches like the beginning of a spider's web.

After engaging with each of the strand installations, she starts to harvest them and lays them one by one on the ground under a cherry tree. Amazingly, many of the words are still legible, despite the month in the alchemical outdoors. As she lays them down, she realizes that a found poem has been written.

Story Strand Found Poem

Remember the earth
Ancient Story Family
Be mindful
Mountain lessons
Bring us peace
Shadow time
Gather roots
Thank you, Mother Earth
Create love together

Threshold. Step back off the theory story trail. Through reading or listening to the stories, you have added your own memories and thoughts. You are indeed part of this dissertation. So many beginnings and endings and multiple ways to know what are the guiding principles or the felt concepts that act as your guide.

Pandemic Pondering

In this section, I describe the unexpected member that inserted itself into the Story Family Entanglement. In early 2020, everyone began talking about a highly contagious and deadly virus that could spread across the world. Soon after, news in the United States (US) indicated the first case of COVID-19 in Washington State. At the time of this writing in March of 2022, there have been over 900,000 deaths in the US within the last two years. While much occurs within the context and environment of any inquiry, the virus has asserted itself into this study as a member of the Story Family. With the concept of intra-action (Barad, 2007), I see the virus as being entangled in this study, including in discourses around health, human relationships with other-than-humans, and COVID-19's particular impact on marginalized people and the Earth. As I continued my theory walking, now analysis walking, in the woods, I pondered about how the virus influenced, engaged with, and created this

study with the women in the inquiry time, EXA materials and practices, and storyplace. On March 29, 2020, the governor of North Carolina (NC) imposed a quarantine. There was a sense of being catapulted into a parallel universe, as if we were in the same life but everything was also different. This sense of same/different continued, as people no longer met in person or outside of “pods” composed of family or chosen family. Busyness and business stopped for many people as travel, family gatherings, parties, and conferences halted. Some people were able to begin to work from home. People spoke of how their perception of time had changed. There was “before coronavirus” and now. The beginning of the pandemic was a rush of putting cultural events online, watching concerts from performers’ homes, and going on virtual tours of museums. A call to be as busy as we were when we could meet in person occurred, which some called “productivity porn” (Ahmad, 2020). Bread baking, mask making, and Zooming filled many people’s time. University and K-12 classes pivoted quickly into online learning. In terms of the study, we were no longer able to meet in person, so we decided to continue meeting by Zoom. There was a sense of gratitude for technology and its ability to afford us the opportunity to meet at all. Initially, we planned to meet weekly to stay connected after the study ended.

I spent my time working from home, cooking, and walking. At this stage of the pandemic, very few people were meeting in person. Parks and picnic areas closed, including some of the roads to the Blue Ridge Parkway. My college-aged son and I began walking the Mountains to Sea Trail (MST), which spans from the Great Smoky Mountains, across the state of North Carolina, all the way to the Outer Banks on the Atlantic Coast. We walked sections, but like this story, not in order. We walked. We walked back. We started where we ended the day before.

One day we walked on part of the MST that intersects with the Blue Ridge Parkway near the Linn Cove Viaduct. At this time, the Blue Ridge Parkway was closed, due to an attempt by the park to discourage large groups of people from gathering and increasing the chance of spreading the virus. When closed, the Linn Cove Viaduct became a massive pedestrian path. When I visited, I observed bikers, skaters, a bride in a wedding dress, picnics, graduation photos, families with pets, and sunrise viewing. I observed people lying down on the road on the yellow line painted between two lanes. A circus atmosphere bloomed, documented later with multiple photos on Facebook of the adventures on this closed part of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Time was suddenly slowed down and filled with new or renewed activities.

The Story Family participants and I met four times on Zoom, two meetings for sojourns and two meetings for open studio/check-in times. We journaled about how our relationship with each other, time, arts, and storyplace changed. In the broader world, the abrupt halt of much of human activity had caused a decrease in carbon emissions, promoting a return of wildlife to land, sea, and air. There were reports of cleaner air and water. Additionally, I noticed the discrepancies of how marginalized people were affected by institutional racism, sexism, classism, and a lack of resources (Fullagar, 2021). I remembered how I began this study by walking alone in the woods, and I end this study by walking in the woods. As I have posited before, however, beginnings and endings are false concepts. I like to think of endings and beginning in a more rhizomatic fashion or multiple possible entrances and exits (Deleuze & Guatari, 1987). The reader can enter in multiple places through the stories, through the resonance with their own theory stories. Thus, how the reader engages in the story is a choice or a cut (Barad, 2007).

The pandemic has stripped away so much, inviting a focus on the essentials. During the first part of the inquiry, I was caught up in the social, imaginary, and environmental reality of the Anthropocene. As I am living the end of my inquiry, arbitrary as that ending is, I am living in the consequences of human actions on the sociopolitical and environmental issues, particularly of COVID-19. How will this appear in the geological record? Will human exceptionalism shift or even die in this time of worldwide death? Media bombards us with numbers of COVID-19 cases and death counts. Photos from space show that social distancing has severely decreased air pollution. Stories are yet to be written, not just our individual stories but the stories of what we will do with this Earthly reset, our being catapulted into this parallel existence. At one point during the pandemic, I considered stopping my study, and yet this chapter in the Story Family tale is yearning to be told. How did the entanglement of women, time, arts, and storyplace plus virus weather this storm?

My story today is a story of living, creating, and theorizing through a pandemic. The Story Family gatherings concluded by being online—no hugging, no sharing of meals, no gathering around a table together or walking in the woods close enough to touch each other. The participants maintain physical distance and social connection. We live the story strands. We tie them together. We roll them into Story Orbs. We unroll them and add. Your story is ourstory is history and herstory. It is a living, moving entity. This ending is not the end. The conclusion of this inquiry is not really an ending, as participants continue to write and art in their journals and readers of this dissertation connect to and add their own musings. As time progresses, we re-member what happened during the inquiry itself and in the time of Coronavirus.

Pandemic Sympoiesis

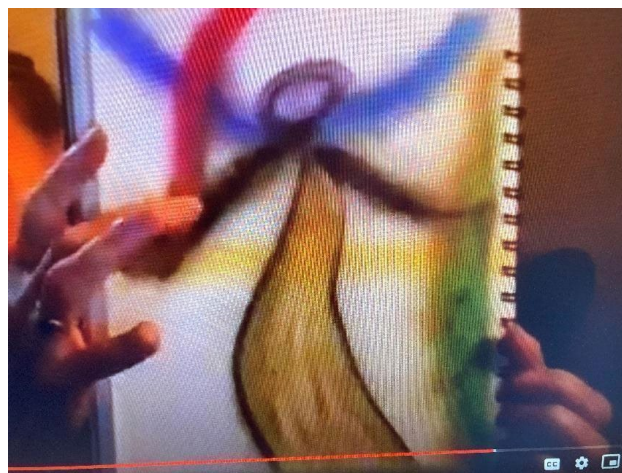
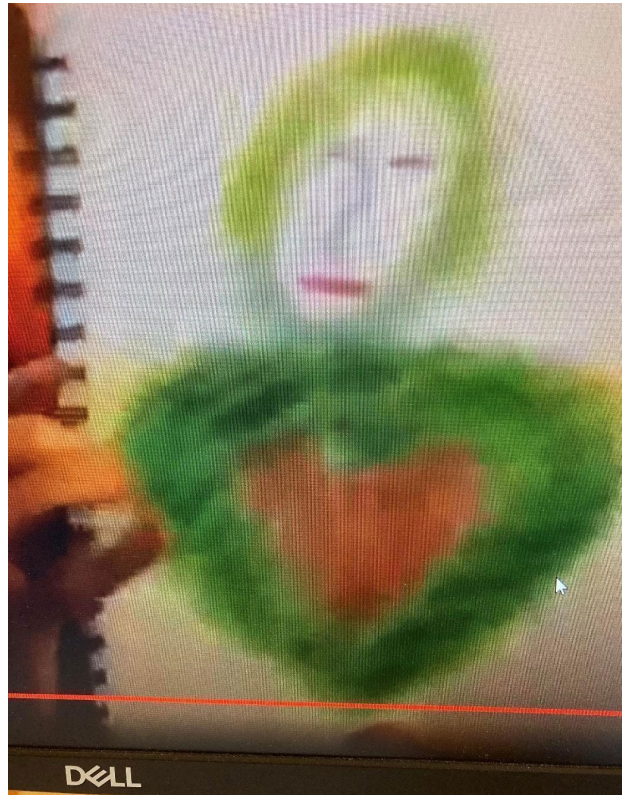
Near the conclusion of our agreed upon time in Story Family Sojourn, I invited each woman to meet with me in order to have a conversation about Story Family Sojourn. The conversation was conducted by Zoom, due to the entanglement of the Coronavirus as an unwelcome, but interesting, member of the Story Family. The full list of the ten conversation prompts is listed in the Becoming Kin section above. Prior to offering the prompts, I reminded the participants about the research questions and the questions they offered to the study on our initial journal making sojourn meeting. After our conversation, each participant and I created a set of visual aesthetic responses. The following section contains the aesthetic responses to the conversations between myself and the women participants that occurred at the end of the Story Family Sojourn. When deciding to include the following photos and participants' questions, I watched the videos of our conversations conducted on Zoom. I took photos of my aesthetic responses from my journals and took a photo of their aesthetic responses on my video screen. The results were that even the aesthetic of the responses indicated the intra-action of women, time, art, Coronavirus and technology. However, I took the photos of the participants' art by photographing the art on the Zoom screen. The photos were embellished with wavy lines of the lens of layers of technology. One lesson I learned during this time was our complicated relationship with technology. While the participants and I longed for in-person meetings and interactions, our gratitude to be able to connect through this mitigated platform swelled. Sometimes the uninvited guest brings surprises and synchronicity as well.

The questions listed before the photos were the participants' responses to my curiosity about what questions remain for them. The following photos were all of the aesthetic

responses to our conversations created by the participants and myself. While I included all of the responses, I have not credited myself or the individual women in the study. Thinking with the concept of intra-action, I assert that these images and questions arose in the intra-action (Barad, 2007) among myself, the women, technology, time, art materials and practices, and Coronavirus. They are also not organized in a chronological manner, so the first interview is not represented by the first photos and questions.

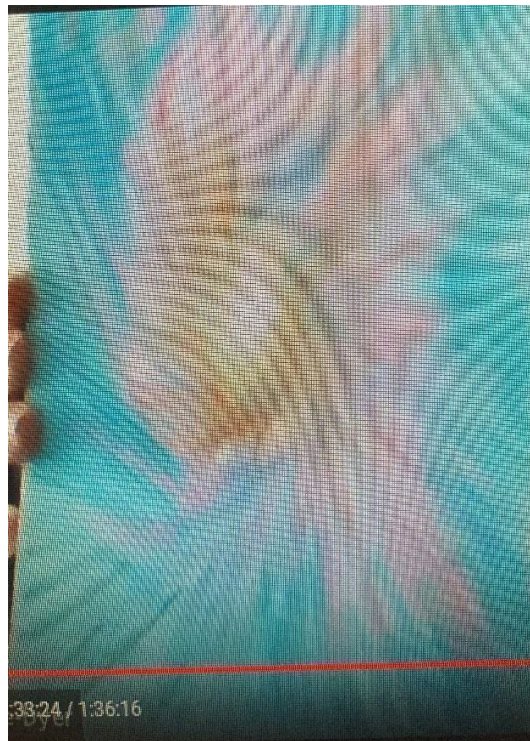
She wonders:

- ❖ How does flow happen?
- ❖ What becomes part of the new story?



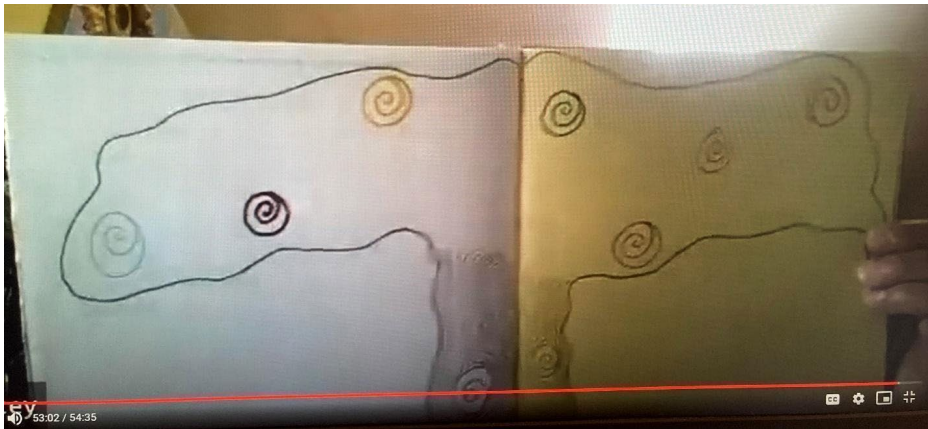
She wonders:

- ❖ What would have happened with our relationship with the sacred if the study hadn't included nature and art?



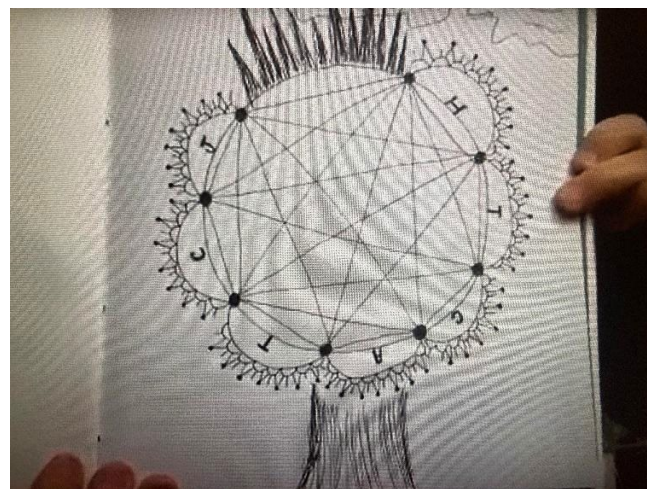
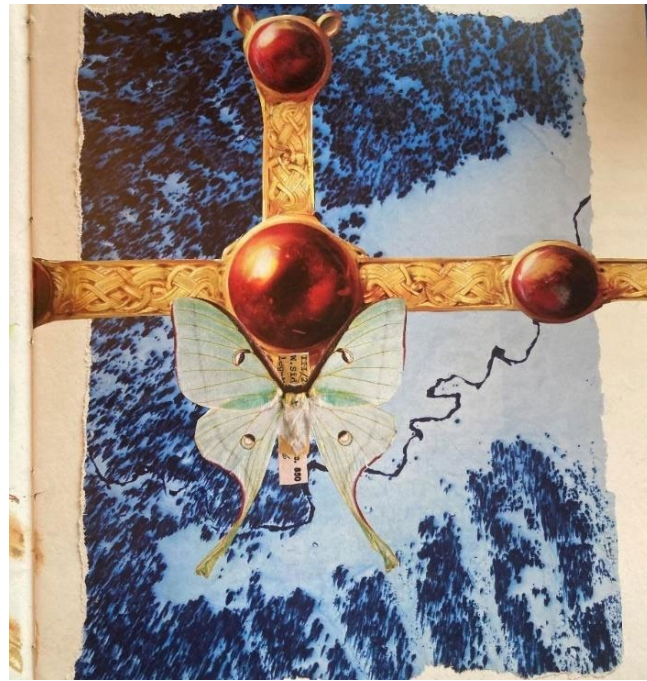
She wonders:

- ❖ How will you pull all these strands together to write about Story Family?
- ❖ Did we address social and environmental justice?



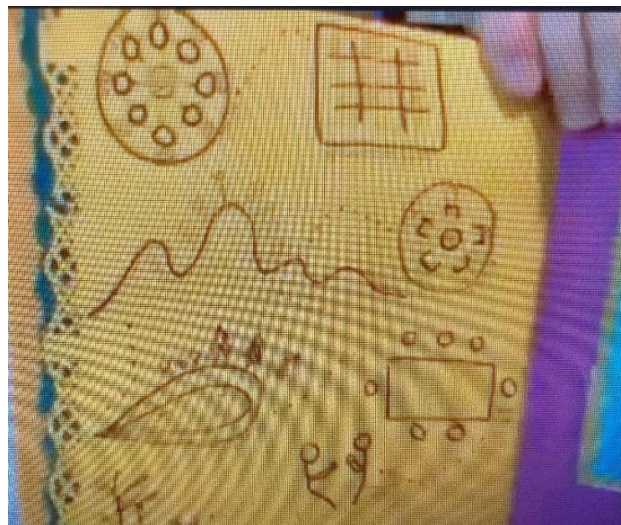
She wonders:

- ❖ Can we learn differently because we are learning next to trees?
- ❖ How do we take studies like these and put them into real world use for teachers and students?



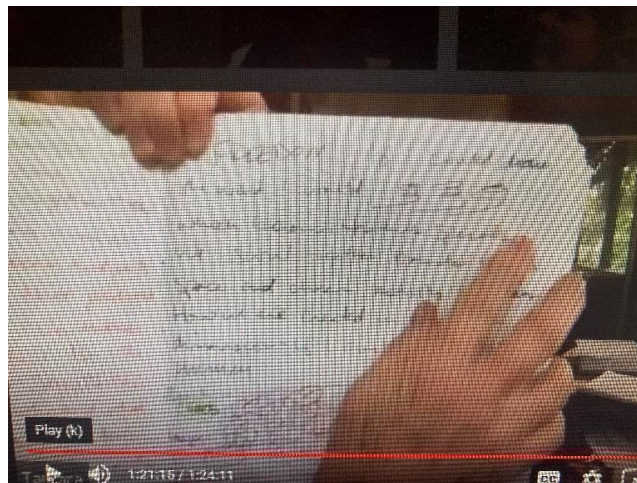
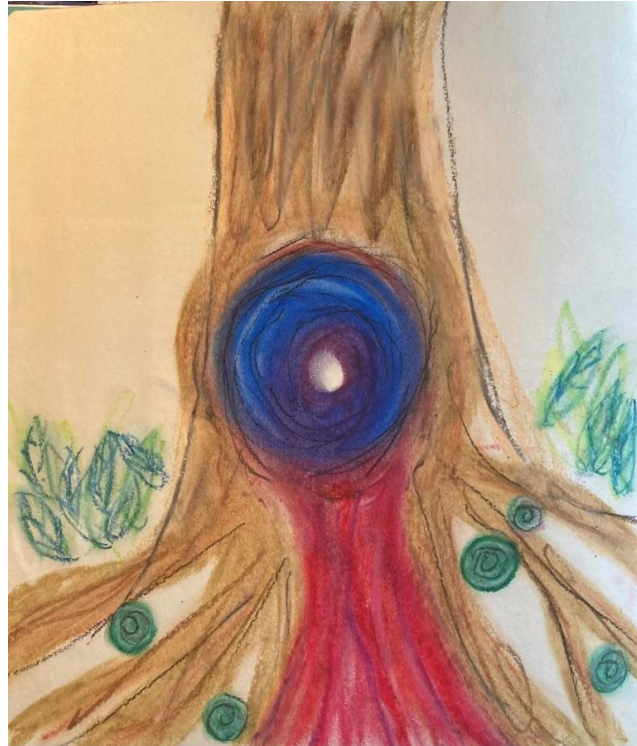
She wonders:

- ❖ How do I know if I am an activist if I am not “doing” activism?
- ❖ How can we embrace slow activism?
- ❖ Do I make a difference if I have an intention to learn by studying what is around me?



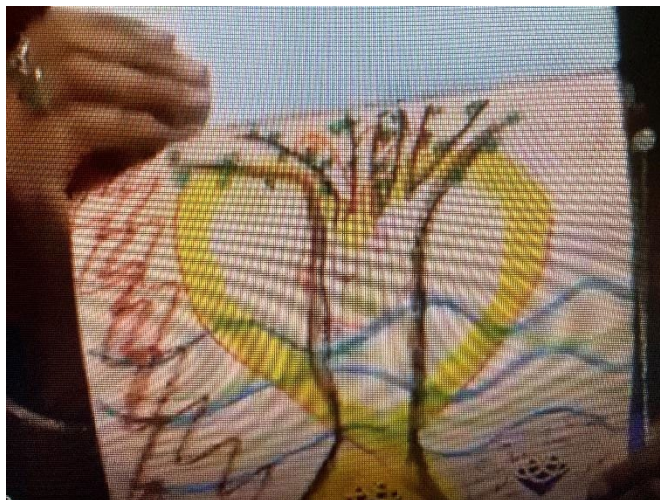
She wonders:

- ❖ What was this all for?
- ❖ What was this all about?
- ❖ Can systemic racism and White privilege be in relationship with beauty?



She wonders:

- ❖ What is the journey of the woman who left the study midway?
- ❖ How can we continue this journey of women and community?



As I completed the conversations, I wondered how I would respond to the conversation prompts, acknowledging that this dissertation is my understanding of the process and product and my ongoing curiosities. In keeping with the theoretical underpinning of this Sojourn and what was created, theorized, questioned, and played with, I imagine that the questions the women offered could be questions for further symposiums and symtheoria. I posit that future gatherings could be created to continue engaging with questions and curiosities around creativity, affect, storyplace, and social and environmental justice. Cognizant of how both the process and the product of this Story Family Sojourn continues to move and become, I may bring these questions to the next dinner party.

She wonders:

- ❖ What path will we take next after this transformative journey?
- ❖ How will we continue to seek being felt into creativity, sacredness, and social and environmental justice?
- ❖ What will we do with this “one wild and precious life?” (Oliver, 1990)

Ongoing Curiosities

In the following section, I explore the journey of the questions that traveled with me and also the questions and ongoing curiosities that arose throughout the Sojourn. I also describe what emerged through the entanglement and what I subsequently chose to write about and show through photos, written and recorded storytelling, and the cut (Barad, 2007). I begin with how curiosity through the progression of questions unfolded. I then discuss further how the Coronavirus intra-acted with the other members of the Story Family and what implications this may have for educational, expressive arts-based inquiry and practice. I conclude with implications of the Story Family Sojourn for education and educational leadership.

Question Progression

At the onset of the inquiry, I asked, “What questions emerge in post-formal education by women knowing by making together and thinking by theorizing together with/in the Appalachian Mountains?” and “What gets co-created in the entanglement of the Story Family?” I also recognized participants may have other questions or curiosities to explore. When we met for the first sojourn, I invited the women participants to join me on this post-formal educational journey. I offered the research questions and asked them to share what they were curious about. In this section, I explore the journey of the multiple curiosities and questions that emerged during the study. I assert that curiosity is a key component of education, especially post-formal, self-directed education. I assert that curiosity can lead to choosing a more formal educational path as well, as evidenced in my desire to seek a doctorate in educational leadership. My question initially was “How could I provide leadership in EXA?” I wondered how I could contribute to the field of expressive arts and

arts-based research with theories that challenge traditional modes of inquiry and are feminist informed. I invited participants to frame initial questions and noted the questions that arose during my study, in my aesthetic response to the individual sojourns, and during the participant conversations. Inviting questions throughout the inquiry is consistent with a study that is enacted in the undercommons, or an “emergent collectivity” (Manning, 2016, p. 8). This dissertation also invites its readers to engage in the matter of the document, the stories, and the participants' questions and to then ask their own questions. Those who seek specific answers may not be satisfied with this process. However, those who are looking for arts-based, emergent, generative research and who love questions as much as answers, may be satisfied with this type of inquiry. I hope I have left the readers of this dissertation with remaining questions as invitations for their own ongoing curiosity to explore an idea, a creative process, the woods, or a vision.

Story Family Entanglement (+ Coronavirus)

In the following section, I muse about what was created in the Story Family entanglement, becoming kin, and becoming kind. I discuss the individual members of the Story Family Entanglement of women, time, EXA materials and practices, and storyplace. Please note that although I will attempt to pull the members of this entanglement apart, they are felt together in this inquiry. As I journeyed from start to finish, as arbitrary as beginnings and endings are, the theories and theorists I chose helped me tell the research story. In addition, my lifelong felt concepts of creativity, sacredness as affect, and social and environmental justice traveled with me as my companions throughout the Sojourn. I begin the following section by describing how the concept of symtheoria was enacted and how thinking/theorizing together occurred within Story Family.

Becoming-Kin(d)

Symtheoria. Symtheoria is a concept I created to think through not only creating together as in sympoiesis (Dempster, 1998) but also how women theorize together beside and with/in time, arts, and storyplace. I enacted symtheoria, or theorizing together, as I theorized with/in the storyplace of my woods walking and theorizing; in my theorizing with/in multiple journals; in theorizing with my cohort mate, chair, and writing center guide; and while theorizing-thinking-making-doing with the participants. The participants and I theorized together, symtheoria, while not only being with/in storyplace but also becoming-with/in storyplace with arts materials and practices. Throughout the Story Family Sojourn, a relational ontology of becoming with -humans, -arts, and -storyplace provided the fodder for theorizing together, a theorizing that emerged throughout the study. Symtheoria through making kin, becoming kin, and becoming kin(d) became a trail through the woods, a road map, not of something specific or somewhere specific, but of a philosophical way to journey through the woods, through research, through education, and through life. I stepped onto this path and attuned myself to all the humans and other-than-humans who have traveled before me and the traces of those who will travel these paths after this Sojourn.

Story Family. In the following section, I examine the felt members of the Story Family and how each one unfolded.

Women. One of the tensions in my inquiry was the presence of the women participants and sympoiesis/symtheoria with the deconstruction of the human/other-than-human binary. The relational ontology of FNM, FPH, and PHEM resonated with my own relational values of attending to both humans and other-than-humans. Despite explaining that the Story Family was not just the human members, my initial impression was that

participants thought that the Story Family was just composed of women. They commented about the importance of the connection with each other. One woman shared that it is difficult to make new friends at her age, and she noted that the participants were women whom she might not have known had she not participated in this study. The study appeared to decrease a sense of relational isolation for the participants and for me. In addition, the participants talked about their relationships with their own creative practices. As the group of women built relationships with each other, they told their own stories in and beyond words and crafted new stories in which storyplace, a sense of community, sacredness and attunement to affect through recognition of synchronicity, and a different sense of time arose.

The questions proposed after the participant conversations could each be their own inquiries. I imagine the generative, iterative process of journaling about the questions and finding glow words (MacLure, 2013) or phrases and continuing the Story Orb process. I continue to ponder the entanglement of art, conversation, virus, and technology that intra-acted in a Zoom space (Bozelek, et al., 2021) as I longed to be in person with the participants to see whole bodies and experience the embodied affect that only occurs when talking to someone in person.

While this inquiry employs concepts from feminist posthumanism and feminist new materialism that do not privilege matter over discourses, language continues to be important. Language shaped the study, as the naming of the Story Family resulted in each woman attaching to the meaning of “story” and “family” from the start of the inquiry. While these words are fraught with cultural, historical, and emotional meanings, they also shaped the journey through the Sojourn. The word “family” conjures ancestry, genealogy, and a biological naming system that includes the word “family” Humans create families chosen

and biological. New ideas of family, both human and other-than-human, are needed in order to address social and environmental disparities in both local and global communities.

Sacred Affect Time. This Story Family Sojourn spanned a year, through all seasons and the subsequent changes in the landscape. The participants commented on the importance of making and spending time away from their regular routines. The time was also filled with attention to all the senses, through smells from the foods, the sounds of women chatting, and the sight of a plethora of colorful art supplies.

Another aspect of time was the curiosity of a combination of time and place. The recognition of Barad's (2007) concept of time includes recognition that there are no dividing lines of before, now, and after. I was struck by the point in time when the participants and I were walking a particular path and how in that moment I was walking in the traces of humans and animals that walked before me and would walk after me. The concept of viewing moments and events through both a telescope and a microscope solidified. All of those moments are embedded in each moment of time. In addition, my relationship with the mountains did not begin in the moment that I first started theory walking.

Throughout the study, the participants expressed—through writing, conversation, and EXA experiences—attunement to the senses and to affect. The participants experienced it as synchronicity and liminality. I continue to feel at a loss to effectively describe sacredness, given its complicated association with religion and the divine. This sense evades capture (Bhattacharya, 20013; Springgay & Truman, 2018). I find MacLure's (2013b) concept of “glow” to be useful in describing a sense of something different, emergent, or otherworldly. Words, art materials, and experiences that glow are woven throughout this inquiry.

I take up the invitation to describe the embodied experience of sacred affect embedded in this inquiry. One day at Elk Knob State Park, the participants and I stood at the entrance to a trail before two medium-sized trees. We paused there and took a breath. There was a sense of here, where we stood, and there, where we would be traveling. As we stepped through the threshold of the two trees, the light was different, a shade darker under the canopy. The air was a slight bit cooler; a sense of anticipation, choice, surprise, and community arose. We walked in silence. Later in the year, we visited this park again, just three of us this time, intending to take the same path. However, the sky darkened, and it started to rain lightly. We had brought flower petals to mark our walk and honor the ancient mountain range. As we left the place we had eaten lunch, each of us scattered mostly marigold petals in our path. We turned to look behind as we reached those same two trees from our previous walk, now a golden orange line behind us. Attuned to the embodiment of this moment, we noticed the color, the light, the moisture in the air, the sense of time slowing down, of crossing a threshold. In pondering what made the experience significant, I posit that what was co-created in this moment between humans, time, arts through ceremony, and storyplace is worth noting and noticing in living and learning with pause, slow attention, and intention necessary to intra-act in the entanglement we call life.

Felting Theories and Practices. My initial vision for this study was that it would explore how EXA relates to and converses with FNM. My theoretical framing of FNM, FPH, and ABR invites EXA to this generative dinner party. EXA's tenet of focusing on process-oriented practices is consistent with ABR and its emergent nature. As noted previously, EXA was started within a therapeutic context and has added education and consultation to its focus. Further research under EXA consultation and education is needed to strengthen the

designation of Registered Expressive Arts Consultant Educator through the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association. In addition, research has been conducted about the use of ABR under FPH and FNM with students in graduate classes and in K-12 education. What is lacking is expressive arts-based practitioner research and research about post-formal educational or community settings applying ABR with the generative critiques offered through FNM and FPH. It is within this space that I hope to make a contribution.

In the conversations at the end of my inquiry, some participants stated they were inspired to create in the journal between our meetings. The journal provided a place to record words or create arts-based reflections. Other participants said they did not write or create art in the journal in between sojourns. As Barad (2003) states, materials and discourses were already entangled. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) assert that “from a humanist perspective, agency is something possessed by humans, and is seen as the ability to act on or act in the world” (p. 113). Thus, agency is better described as a “complex network of human and nonhuman agents.... an enactment, not something that an individual possesses” (p. 114). Expressive arts practices of the use of the journal—through creating or writing, with each other or on their own or letting it sit unopened until the next sojourn—provided the apparatus. As we moved into the later part of the inquiry, when the story strands and Story Orbs appeared, the intra-action was enacted, as our individual words spoken and written in the journals resonated that day and with women’s gatherings throughout time. Embedded in my inquiry, all the Story Family members entangled with concepts, discourses, materialities, and actions of becoming, kin, and kind. The women who had devoted time, attention, and intentions to their own post-formal learning no longer claimed complete individual ownership of the process or the product (Bhattacharya, 2013). The participants re-membered

or put the members of the Story Family together: themselves, each other, arts, and their storyplace.

EXA processes included walking, talking, thinking, relationship building, journal making, collage, painting, drawing, writing, moving, and the Story Orbs' performance of the intra-action of the trees and the muslin strips. Using my initial felted concept of creativity, affect, and SEJ, I recognize EXA practices in the classroom and the community, especially at ASU, include both creativity and sacredness. In addition, due to the EXA program being founded in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, it also focuses on the environment, particularly as it relates to seasons, cycles and how the storyplace of the Appalachian Mountains or other storyplaces can be used therapeutically. I recommend further research about the use of EXA for education and activism related to SEJ. I posit that this inquiry reaches toward that end.

Storyplace. Nature, especially, is a complicated and contested term writing with/in FNM. In choosing to use the word storyplace, my hope is to foster a relationship with nature not because it is separate from humans but in order to recognize that nature has been colonized, commodified, and destroyed by humans. By the time I invited the participants to journey and sojourn with me, I had already been looking at and studying where the Appalachian Mountains geologically originated. The women entered the inquiry with their own relationships to the storyplace of the Story Family Sojourn and other storyplaces previously: home, the mountains, the ocean, the city, where they came from in terms of ancestry, and in their lifetimes. During the inquiry, participants were immersed in the landscape. Immersion, which necessitates time, attention, and intention, acted as a further invitation for the participants to intra-act with the Appalachian Mountains through the arts.

My own and others' immersion in this storyplace shifted due to the pandemic. News at the time recommended spending time outside, where there was less chance of contracting the Coronavirus. The virus was a vivid reminder of the intra-action between human and other-than-human actors in this worldwide crisis. My relationship to storyplace and the place of the Appalachian Mountains invited me to walk and hike more days than not, the EXA process of a "daily practice" (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). In doing so, I have spent time photographing items in these mountains; walking and re-walking; and exploring how the MST, the Appalachian Mountains, and the Blue Ridge Parkway intersect. I continue to seek information about the environment, history, geology, culture, and social and environmental issues here in this particular place, the place I call home.

Throughout the study, the participants and I learned about our own relationship to this storyplace and also specific facts about the area. We learned that even as science evolved through the human genome project, a new view of plant life was also evolving. Plants that appear to share common characteristics may not tell the whole story of their DNA or origin. In decentering the human, renewed focus of the mountains and their intra-action with seasons, the weather, and what is in bloom at the time is possible.

During the course of the study and the subsequent conversations, the participants commented about being outside, particularly in the woods of the Appalachian Mountains, and how, like art, they do not spend as much time in creative activities as they would like. They also talked about not wanting to walk alone, due to safety concerns and a lack of confidence in their own abilities. As the study drew to a close, women asked if they could continue spending time with me hiking in the woods, seeking connection with another human in the mountains, this particular storyplace.

Coronavirus. While the occurrence of the pandemic necessitated changes towards the end of the study, I am mostly left with questions. How will this appear in the geological record? Will this be a new golden spike? Will the human imaginary finally re-member and honor humans who have not been afforded full humanness? Will this truly be a reset, with attention to our intra-action with humans and storyplace and the arts as a way of knowing? I wonder what we as a Story Family and the world's people gain and lose in the increased use of technology.

When I began my inquiry in May of 2019, I could not have known where the study would journey or what would unfold in the intra-action of the Story Family members. I could not have known about one of the Story Family members leaving the study and how an other-than-human member, COVID-19, would insert itself into the entanglement. During the time of the pandemic, people remind each other there is no “going back,” which of course is always true. However, I experienced the pandemic as a time in which I felt catapulted into another existence. Parts of my own life remained the same. The mountains appeared to continue to be ancient and majestic, the seasons kept changing, the moon waxed and waned, and yet everything small and large changed on Earth. We catch ourselves saying “When it goes back to normal....” Normal? Back? We remind each other that there is so much to not go back to, such as routinized learning, disassociation from the outdoors and each other, destruction of the environment, and disconnection from creating and connecting in community.

Frenzied progress in the name of success continues to profit from the disparities burdening marginalized people. It is as though we cannot stop ourselves. I write about education as invitation, but I think the virus has also been an invitation to learn outside of

formal education COVID-19 also acts as a method of learning with/in storyplace, not through consumption but acts of creating with/in community that include structure but also much spaciousness. I posit that a slow unfolding pace is needed to allow for an embodied recognition of a different sense of time: liminal time. I invite others to recognize our mutual ability to respond or our response-ability in becoming kin(d).

Educational Leadership

Throughout my life, I have often found myself in leadership positions, for example, as a clinical supervisor, project director, clinical coordinator, board member, committee chair, program director, and feminist bookstore owner and manager. In assuming some of these positions, I have sought to be the leader, but other times, I have been recognized as a leader and asked to lead. In educational doctorate courses, my peers shared similar experiences of being called to leadership by their peers or their supervisors. I have wondered about the traits that are seen as “leadership potential.” What I have enacted as leadership positionality without being the named leader is informed by feminist theory; my decades long career as a social worker and the National Association of Social Work Code of Ethics; and my lifelong conceptual felted framework of creativity, sacredness, and SEJ. Informed by the above theories and concepts, I have learned to see workplaces, educational settings, and community groups as systems. I maintain a balance of valuing all voices, allowing those voices and opinions to change my thoughts and feelings, and, ultimately, being able to make a decision and take responsibility for making a particular decision. As I ponder about my own leadership journey, I credit my leadership skills to my ability to look at issues and situations through a microscope and a telescope, the “big picture” and the minute details, and how they fit or do not fit together. The “big picture” includes addressing inequities within

systems, posing questions that others either haven't thought of or were reluctant to voice, offering thoughts about breaking down hierarchies, and, when able, implementing policies that offer shared resources. I also possess the ability to balance transparency while maintaining boundaries. I assess people's skills and assign tasks based on skills and stated interests and organize task sharing of tasks no one has expressed interest in. I implement rotating leadership, note-taking and minute-taking to challenge hierarchies. I am curious, outspoken, can tolerate conflict and chaos, and have a lived experience of grief and loss.

The current proposed epoch of the Anthropocene is a time for leadership in education, both in the academy and in the community: leadership that addresses grief and loss without immobilizing overwhelm or naive optimism (Eaton, 2017; Haraway, 2016; Jensen, 2017). Jensen (2017) asserts that "at this moment in history, to teach well—to teach responsibly—requires being able to grieve deeply in the presence of others" (p. 3). To address social and environmental issues, creativity in community, and education, leadership is necessary. I brought my herstory of leadership positions and positionality to the Doctorate in Educational Leadership program. I entered the program to continue to be a leader in the profession of expressive arts education and, particularly, EXA research, pedagogy, and leadership. As I learned about theories and practices of leadership and deepened my feminist theoretical knowledge, I began to imagine my dinner party of theories and theorists. The Story Family Sojourn contributes to creatively advocating for educational leadership through doing research differently, as evidenced in this expressive arts-based dissertation. I assert that the complicated times we live in and the subsequent effects on marginalized people and other than humans is essential.

In the introduction to the book *Apocalyptic Leadership in Education: Facing an Unstable World from Where We Stand*, Vachel Miller (2017) describes leadership needed that, like the pause in the Story Family sojourn, invites a “slow knowing” in order to “hear the more-than-human voices that invite us to walk more gently on the planet together” (p. xv). In the Story Family Sojourn, I sought theory and theorists who write with the entanglement of materiality and discourses focused through the lens of art and science. (Atkins & Snyder, 2018; Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2017) I offered leadership through process-oriented arts-based pedagogy in community learning within the storyplace of the Southern Appalachian Mountains as one way of doing education differently. Leadership, in this case, encourages storytelling while engaging with this particular storyplace, in order to lead with an ethics of care that includes awareness of human impact on other-than-human community members. Redefop & Schleifer (2017) assert a need for “contextual thinking beyond the classroom ‘environment’” (p. 15). They advocate that educational leadership addresses “the larger disconnect between our extractive and consumer-oriented way of life and the natural systems that sustain us” (p. 15). Story Family contributes to leadership in education wherever the “classroom” is.

Throughout the “classroom” of the individual sojourns, I offered leadership through inviting curiosity and providing the space, time, and matter to explore those curiosities individually and collectively. In conducting this inquiry with women in post-formal learning, we explored questions through conversation and arts-based processes, with no requirement to find a solitary answer. Instead the “answers” were becoming, unfolding. The Appalachian Mountains acted as a classroom, undercommons (Manning, 2016), and multimodal arts studio (McKniff, 1998), in which we enacted process-oriented, arts-based teaching, learning,

and leading in post-formal education. This site of adult learning allowed for engaging as much or as little as each person wanted, leading to a radical reimagining of education. In this inquiry, becoming kin(d) and each other's kind, with each other and with storyplace, co-created a rich environment for women's post-formal education.

Leadership can be demonstrated in so many various ways. I initially offered shared leadership; however, a structure developed in which I led or facilitated our sojourns. The women expressed gratitude for my spacious leadership style that allowed and encouraged them to not hold time rigidly and to join when they could. No punctuality was required, as other parts of their life intruded on the Story Family time. As the inquiry progressed, the participants recognized, accepted, and valued the generative tension between structure and spaciousness.

In the following section, I describe ongoing commitment to thinking/theorizing together and creating together. I have no expectation that this inquiry could be replicated. As Barad (2007) reminds us, agency is created in the already-entanglement of materiality and discourses, which was enacted in the structure and spaciousness of Story Family Sojourn. Springgay and Turman (2018) note that "research needs to be understood as speculative eventing" (p. 204) and that research, then, is "an event of becoming, (which) emphasizes doing rather than meaning making" (p. 206). I assert that structure and spaciousness are needed to provide the agentic entanglements that create a different kind of education, learning that could be "Slow" (Ulmer, 2017, p. 201). While we might not all be able to walk and create in the woods, without making kin with the environment, we will continue to contribute to the Earth's ultimate destruction. Marie Easton (2017) encourages educational leaders to "think of a future that does not exist" (p. 40) what Donna Haraway (2016) would

call “speculative fiction” (p.31). Slow, expressive arts-based pedagogy can contribute to becoming-leader, becoming-educator, becoming each other’s kin and kind. In the Story Family Sojourn, I concur with the assertion that this type of “education involves the formation of learners as stewards, rather than consumers, and enables learners to form new relations of mutual care and wondrous regard, rather than exploitation” (Miller, 2017, p. 195). In the following section, I write about symtheoria and sympoiesis, both ways of exploring curiosity through the Story Family Sojourn.

Ongoing Symtheoria/Sympoiesis

Symtheoria is a concept I created to think through not only creating together, as in sympoiesis (Dempster, 1998), but also how women theorize together beside and with/in time, arts, and storyplace. I enacted symtheoria, or theorizing together, as I theorized with/in storyplace in my woods walking and theorizing; in my theorizing with/in multiple journals; in theorizing with my cohort mate, chair, and writing center mentor; and while theorizing-thinking-making-doing with the participants. The participants and I also enacted symtheoria by being with/in storyplace but also becoming-with/in storyplace, EXA materials, and EXA practices. Throughout the Story Family Sojourn, a relational ontology of becoming-with-humans, -arts, and -storyplace provided the fodder for theorizing together, a theorizing that emerged throughout my inquiry. I stepped on this path and attuned myself to all the humans and other-than-humans who have traveled before me and the traces of those who will travel these paths after this Sojourn.

I began my becoming-researcher journey with questions about research, curiosity, and community. As the Sojourn and I intra-acted, I developed and gathered more questions than I began with. The questions invite me to continue on this path of discovery, and I hope that by

showing the process of this inquiry, others are encouraged to ask their own questions. The desire to know something through educating oneself often necessitates unknowing and unlearning. The times we live in, with climate change and its implications for Earth and its inhabitants, implore us to “do” our lives differently so we can learn something new or discover a new way of knowledge seeking. However, we must remain cautious not to reinstate the binary of human/nature and human/other-than-human. The challenge is to decenter human exceptionalism and essentialism. The pandemic has shown us that the category of human is indeed a category that continues to contain consequences related to power, gender, race, and resources. Through sympoiesis and symtheoria, educational leaders in both formal and informal learning situations can provide spaciousness and structure. Easton asserts that “we all are more likely to take action to protect the places and species we know” (p. 48). We can invite learners to pursue curiosities and, through the arts and community, be inspired to become kin(d) with each other, matter, humans, and their own storyplaces.

This Sojourn invites attention to storytelling, storyplace, and being in community with others. In addition, there are strands in this Sojourn that invite curiosity about the mountains, storytelling, and building creative community, which I propose could be used in both education and in activism. Through the Story Family Sojourn, I hope to contribute to the fields and theories of EXA, ABR, FPH, FNM, and PHEM. My broader audience, both within and outside of the academy, is anyone who loves to walk in the woods, study history, speak up and out for social and environmental justice, create art outside in multiple storyplaces, and tell stories. My hope is that the complexity will be inspiring and the simplicity will be

accessible. As we think/theorize together (symtheoria) and make together (sympoiesis), we can hopefully meet urgent times with grace and creativity.

Ending With a Beginning

Echoing Barad's (2007) concept of spacetime mattering, this theory/story began when the continents collided and formed the Appalachian range, when a tree was cut to make the paper that became the journals, when a girl moved from Wisconsin, and another moved to India and back. It began as a seed, a thought, a star, a lullaby reverberating long after the crooning mother died. As I move toward what is traditionally thought of as an ending to this inquiry, dissertation, aesthetic response, I challenge the concept of endings. I pause to take a breath as the "ending" invites a beginning. As I described earlier, I imagine these theories and theorists sitting down at a dinner party. I see roots or fibers strung across the table from theory to theory and from theorist to theorist. I imagine tensions and "(in)tensions," or what Springgay and Truman (2018) refer to as "the immersion, friction, strain, and quivering unease of doing research differently" (p. 1), synchronicity and generative differences. As the dinner party of this dissertation "concludes," like all special occasions, I ponder the conversations, the congruences, and ongoing tensions of the theorists and the theories, guests at this dinner party. I imagine more intimate gatherings for continued specific conversations. And I imagine a larger gathering with the theorists and the participants, this time in the woods of the Appalachian Mountains, where we will talk, share food and make art, dance, or sing together.

The entangled strands of EXA, ABR, FNM, PHEM, and FPH will have more dinner parties, continue to make each other's acquaintances, and tell their stories, including their theory/stories, to each other. The purpose of this ongoing, lively conversation is not to find

answers but to deepen the conversation, to ask more questions, to enliven curiosity in becoming kin and kin(d), because generosity of kindness is so needed at this current ecological and social time/place.

This inquiry is not one of answers but of openings and questions. Donna Haraway (2017) and her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* inspired me to write this dissertation. In the introduction to the book she writes, “The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present” (p. 1). This ending is a beginning, an invitation to be curious and to follow questions about what we are curious about. It is an invitation to learn something deeply, to learn about the places where we live, in a way that engages the lifelong learner, individually or in community, to make kin and kin(d). This study honors relationships not only with humans but also with the materiality of arts and environments.

My entanglement in this study is not ending but shifting past this particular time. I am forever embedded in the Story Orb entanglement of theory, memory, community, arts, time, a pandemic, and mountains. I unroll this story to show and tell and roll it back together after I have added more of my own post-formal education through the completion of this doctorate. I continue with these questions.

What are the stories we will tell ourselves later about this current time?

What stories will we craft that will make specific futures possible?

How might formal and post-formal community education and gatherings be different
with attention to storyplace and the arts?

Will the story be told with a sense of wonder, awe, and reverence?

Will we continue to make kin(d) with humans and other-than-humans?

I close with an invitation to explore this particular entanglement within your own storyplace. I invite you to pay slow attention to who and what your own Story Family members may be. Follow a trace of something that glows (MacLure, 2013) or shimmers (Bird Rose, 2017) for you. Follow the story strands that lead to a deeper understanding of what stories led to this one, right now, right here, and what stories you tell that create what happens next. The editors of the book *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* assert that “to survive, we need to relearn multiple forms of curiosity” (Gan et al, 2017, p. G11). They describe curiosity as attention “to multispecies entanglement, complexity, and the shimmer all around us” (Gan et al., 2017, p. G11). I also offer an invitation to follow curiosity and learn about a place in and throughout history and the sociopolitical and environmental issues that complicate and create that place. Haraway (2017) writes, “our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent responses to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places” (p. 1). It is my hope that in embracing this invitation, readers and researchers will engage deeply in creativity, attention to affect, and a commitment to social and environmental justice. Scholars and citizen scholars will continue to need to seek new ways of creating embodied knowing that does not privilege humans over nature and other-than-humans. In this entanglement, may we truly become kin, kind, and each other’s kind.

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Appendix

Story Files

The following is a directory to the stories in the Becoming Kin Section of the document.

Please cut and paste the link into a browser to listen to an audio of the story, in the oral story telling tradition.

❖ Invitation

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Invitation.mp3>

❖ Beginning in the Middle

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Beginning-in-the-Middle.mp3>

❖ Hidden in Plain Site

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Hidden-in-Plain-Sight.mp3>

❖ Spider lace

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Spider-Lace.mp3>

❖ Lungs

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Lungs.mp3>

❖ Marigold

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Marigold.mp3>

❖ Doll's Eyes

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Dolls-Eyes.mp3>

❖ Canvas

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Canvas.mp3>

❖ Time Travel

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Time-Travel.mp3>

❖ Cosmos and Mycelium

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Cosmos-and-Mycelium.mp3>

❖ She Shaman

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/She-Shaman.mp3>

❖ Stone House

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Stone-House.mp3>

❖ She is From

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/She-is-From.....mp3>

❖ Blue

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Blue.mp3>

❖ Rattle

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Rattle.mp3>

❖ Lullaby

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Lullaby.mp3>

❖ Wind

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Wind.mp3>

❖ Alchemy

<https://www.jrobinwhitley.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Alchemy.mp3>

Vita

Heather Anne Thorp was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to June and Nathan Thorp. She graduated from the Ohio State University with a Bachelor of Science in Social Work, in May 1985. Heather entered the Masters of Science in Social Administration program at Case Western Reserve in 1986 and graduated in May 1988. In 1995 she became a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. In 2010 she became a Registered Expressive Arts Therapist. In 2014, Heather was awarded a post-graduate certificate in Expressive Arts Therapy from Appalachian State University. In May of 2015 Heather commenced work toward her Doctorate in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Expressive Arts Education, Leadership, and Inquiry.

Heather Thorp is a member of the National Association of Social Workers and the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association. She resides in the Southern Appalachian Mountains in Boone, North Carolina, with her life partner, Robin Whitley.