

OUT IN APPALACHIA
LEAVING THE CLOSET IN THE MOUNTAINS

A Thesis

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Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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Navigating the process of coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) is challenging, especially in rural areas such as Central Appalachia, where religious identity reigns supreme. Using semi-structured interviews with Appalachian LGBT persons, I find that Appalachian LGBT persons come out later as a direct result of messaging by religious family, friends, and community members. These findings are supported by the theoretical concepts of Bernadette Barton, Michel Foucault, and Patricia Hill Collins. Further, Appalachian LGBT persons report that Christianity is directly implicated in the challenges and delays associated with their own coming out experience. These implications include either fears of or actual encounters with: isolation or abandonment; labels of sinful or an abomination; punishment or worthy of Hell; homelessness; violence; and feeling dirty or unclean. I also find that various forms of media are implicated in the process of coming out, acting as a motivator for those who have few role models and even fewer positive examples to present to religious family or friends when

coming out. National trends indicate (Russell et al, 2016) that the average age at which LGBT persons publicly identify with their sexual minority identity in 2010 was only 14, yet Appalachian respondents interviewed provided averages much later in life. This study seeks to explain why this phenomenon exists throughout the region.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Mamaw Jean and Andrew. Your love and support forever changed the trajectory of my life and your voices remain with me always. It is also dedicated to Ryan, my loving husband, whose great spirit has truly touched so many lives and whom has made life better for Appalachian LGBT people. Finally, it is dedicated to my mother, Deborah. Our experience was not unique and I am so glad to call you my very best friend and my most amazing supporter.

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Finally, this thesis is presented to support the lives of LGBT Appalachians whom have endured exponential struggle merely by being who you are, where you are. Do not believe, even for a moment, that you are alone. The struggles will ease and life will be better.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1-6
Background Information – Appalachia.....	1-4
Background Information – LGBT Identity in Appalachia.....	4-6
Thesis Statement.....	6
Chapter 2: Supporting Literature.....	7-12
Chapter 3: Theoretical Orientation.....	13-18
Michel Foucault.....	13-14
Patricia Hill Collins.....	15-17
Queer Studies.....	17-18
Chapter 4: Research Methodology.....	19-27
General Concepts.....	19-21
Respondent Identification and Recruitment.....	21-24
Data Collection.....	24-27
Chapter 5: Findings.....	28-52
Condition of Inarticulation.....	28-29
Panopticon.....	29-31
Feminism and Critical Theories of Race and Racism.....	31-32
Age of Coming Out.....	32-35
Method of Coming Out.....	35-38
Abandonment or Isolation.....	38-41
Sin and Abomination.....	41-45
Punishment – Hell.....	45-47
Homelessness.....	47-48
Media.....	49-50
“Dirty” – Unclean.....	50-52
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	53-55

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background Information - Appalachia

The Central Appalachian Subregion encompasses an area of eastern Kentucky and East Tennessee, West Virginia, western Virginia and western North Carolina, and draws forth a static image that has modified only slightly over time (Eller, 1982). The region's dominant industrial mechanisms, historically, have included the extraction of natural elements, namely coal and timber. The historical static image of Appalachia, as painted by Ronald Eller, is inclusive of a picturesque log cabin nestled against robust mountains covered in pine trees; the nuclear family tucked inside the cabin under the helm of the father, whom works outside the home, and a mother, whom works inside the home, and a gaggle of children (Eller, 1982). The region's residents were resilient; there was a sense of pride in possessing the ability to function in remote homesteads tucked in the valley floors adjacent to the astonishing Smoky and Blue Ridge mountain ranges.

That image, however, has changed substantially over time. Capitalistic interests emerged with absentee owners who purchased land and mineral rights, arming those owners with the opportunity to substantially alter the landscape and relocate the families whose ancestors had lived in the valleys for centuries. The beautiful, majestic and towering mountains have been decimated by the processes of underground mining and, later, mountaintop removal mining practices. The pine trees have been unearthed, leaving mountains bare and unprotected. During the many boom and bust cycles of mineral extraction in Central Appalachia the landscape was forever altered.

The shape of the mountain family is the most significantly modified portion of the image painted by Eller; homes sprinkling the mountain are now rundown shacks, mere reflections of a landscape modified beyond imagination. The indigenous families, victims of predatory capitalism at the hands of outside corporate interests, were stripped of ancestral lands, meaning that when the industrial interests were removed, there was no opportunity for families to thrive and little opportunity to change the trajectory of their lives.

Families began to fall apart; an overwhelming number of Central Appalachian residents migrated north in search of employment in steel mills and other manufacturing industries. Eller (1982) refers to this period as *The Great Appalachian Migration* (53-64). The extreme poverty that remained, one of the many offsets of predatory capitalism and abandonment of the commercial interests, decimated the cultural pride of Central Appalachian people who remained. Thus, the natural progression was religious coping; a concept in which a person or group of people turn to spiritual beliefs and guidance to deal with stresses and strains. In the case of Appalachian deprivation at the hands of capitalist interests; Appalachian people turned toward Christianity to cope with the dominance and abandonment of the mineral extraction industry and the outflow of wealth and people that emerged as a result. Governmental responses included Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, a strategic response to provide aid to Central Appalachian residents. Later, the Appalachian Regional Commission was formed in an effort to continue to provide social support opportunities and data collection to support the provisions.

That static image has, however, remained intact in terms of isolation, diversity and inclusion. Data from the most recent census evaluation shows little racial diversity; 88% of residents Kentucky identified as white only (U.S. Census Bureau). Ties to kinship networks inclusive of extended remain overwhelmingly important as dependence for support stretching

from housing to childcare is vital to survival in the region. Male dominance has remained paramount; while many women have begun working outside the home it is generally expected that a male figure will be a household bread winner. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons tend to remain closeted or leave the region in search of the anonymous nature of the city. Education levels remain low; in Appalachian Kentucky high school graduation rates raised from 40.3% in 1980 to 76.6% in 2011-2015 while college graduation rates moved from only 7.3% to 14.0% (Appalachian Regional Commission).

What remains today are a people who are without an identity, forgotten by time. Households overwhelmingly depend on social support assistance programs such as food stamps merely for daily survival. Basic needs are barely met; health outcomes are poor, life expectancy is reduced (Kaplan, 2016), education is significantly lacking, and access to clean water and electricity are dependent on the ability to pay outrageous fees to the local electric cooperative. The remote nature of mountain communities means that there is little infrastructure to support life, thus there are practically no opportunities for the birth or growth of businesses; thus, many residents are without stable employment, further compounding the situation. The images, now practically exclusively that of the *welfare queen* or *lazy and jobless* are not choices; they are the results of extraneous forces that left a robust and resilient people devoid of opportunity, desire, and identity.

These same people, isolated geographically and culturally from much of the outside world, are guided by principles established by the dominant ideology throughout the region; religious coping. Christianity, inclusive of multiple denominations and beliefs, is the most widespread and dominant religious ideology present in the region. Many of these bodies of faith have supernatural beliefs and practices; they believe that the Holy Spirit can inhabit their bodies

and allow them to participate in momentary supernatural activities such as speaking the language only offered up by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the emerging social beliefs are cautiously conservative and guided by Biblical references written by those guided by God.

The introduction of *Beyond Isolation and Homogeneity: Diversity and the History of Appalachia*, a chapter within *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes* (1999) is written by celebrated Appalachian historian Ronald L. Lewis and discusses the many facets by which central Appalachia is isolated both geographically and, subsequently, culturally. Lewis recalls “the publication in 1899 of Berea College president William Goodell Frost’s famous article, “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains,” [which] signified the maturity of the concept of Appalachia as a spatially and culturally remote remnant of a bygone day,” (Billings et al, 1999). Of mountain residents, Frost said: “They were our ‘contemporary ancestors,’ our ‘eighteenth century neighbors’ who had just awakened from a long ‘Rip Van Winkle sleep,’ one of ‘God’s grand divisions,’” (Billings et al, 1999). It was noted in 1899 that Appalachian culture was lagging that of even Berea, Kentucky, a community and college long noted for serving Appalachian populations and a city just out of the actual boundaries of Central Appalachia. Though there has certainly been some cultural change, Appalachian cultural still greatly lags that the other regions of the United States.

Background Information – LGBT Identity in Appalachia

Identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) provides its own unique set of challenges. Historically, LGBT identity throughout Appalachia has been widely disapproved by family, friends and community members. Much of this appears, at least externally, to be motivated by a homophobic religious ideology and is supported by the religious affiliations held by political figures. Members of the LGBT community have been beaten and killed merely for

their identity. While both the anonymity and cultural diversity presented in urban centers tend to favor more positive views of LGBT life, rural LGBT life requires a delicate balance that often favors remaining in the closet, or not publicly identifying with one's sexual minority identity. Take, for example, the national exposure of Kim Davis, the Rowan County, Kentucky, Clerk who gained national attention when she cited her religious beliefs as grounds for her refusal to issue marriage certificates to same-sex couples in Rowan County despite the 2015 ruling on marriage equality. Davis was eventually jailed for continuing to refuse to issue marriage certificates even when directed to do so by a federal judge (New York Times). Subsequently, the Commonwealth of Kentucky removed a requirement for the signature of County Clerk on marriage licenses rather than issuing any further punishment for Davis' actions. Davis, a Pentecostal, now faces opposition for her role as clerk from one of the citizens that she refused to issue a marriage certificate to.

It is likely that many Appalachian LGBT persons flee the region for fear of assault or other forms of violence. Much like *The Great Appalachian Migration* (Eller, 1982), Appalachian LGBT persons have been leaving the region at an alarming rate, migrating toward the acceptance of metropolitan areas (Barton, 2012). This may be explained by observations made half a century ago. Appalachian "mountain youth...are not ready and eager for new ideas and new experiences, but cling closely to the forms and clichés that are the bulwarks of the older generation, (Weller, 1965). Weller continues that such an "existence orientation makes the whole society very conservative in every aspect of its life, almost passive in accepting the status quo, for things are all right as they are and change seems always for the worse," (1965:36). It is likely that the conservative nature associated with rural populations, which is true of Appalachian

cultural identity, have remained just as Weller explained and though national trends toward LGBT equality appear to be moving swiftly, the same is not true of Appalachia.

Thesis Statement

This qualitative thesis seeks to determine how living in a Christian-dominated Appalachian family or community impacts to the process of publicly identifying one's sexual orientation, or coming out of the closet as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). Though general observation might lead one to believe that the process involves some standard method or series of events, the process of coming out is both as unique and as similar as one may imagine. This research study seeks to determine how religious identity influences the time or way in which Appalachian LGBT people elect to come out to family, friends or their community.

It has been said that publicly identifying as a sexual minority is a never-ended and ever-evolving process. The process of coming out of the closet is lifelong and frequently causes anxiety and psychological trauma (Drescher, 2004). In the following chapters I find that Christianity is implicitly impactful in the time at which Appalachian LGBT persons elect to come out to family and friends, according to the statements provided by Appalachian informants. Findings suggest that traditions and norms that prevent nurturing environments for LGBT Appalachians are perpetuated by the notion of surveillance and the inability to begin the conversation about sexual orientation. These findings are supported by a series of observations and are explained through the application of sociological thought and theory.

First, we turn to existing literature to consider the body of work that supports the necessity for my research.

Chapter 2: Supporting Literature

Though there is widespread knowledge of LGBT life, of Appalachian life and of Christianity, there is little literature that discusses the intersection of all three of these identities. A recent emergence of studies and works discussing the intersections of these three identities, specifically the dissertation of doctoral candidates in Sociology and Psychology, has been significantly important in guiding this research. In fact, an overwhelming majority of available literature and research on the lives of Appalachian LGBT people has emerged only in the current decade. The available literature, however, has little discussion of the implications of coming out in Appalachia. In fact, even the average age at which an Appalachian LGBT person comes out of the closet is not noted throughout any of the available research.

Celebrated Appalachian Sociologists Dwight B. Billings, Ronald Eller and Katherine Ledford are joined by Mr. Gurney Norman, noted Appalachian historian and creative writing genius, in editing “Back Talk: Confronting Stereotypes,” a collection of Appalachian stories about defending Appalachian minority groups. Mary K. Anglin’s “Stories of AIDS in Appalachia” depicts LGBT life as seen from the lens of an Infectious Disease physician who was born in Ethiopia and came to the United States after completing medical school. Supportive of Patricia Hill Collin’s theoretical concept of *othering*, Dr. Verghese suggested that the lives of LGBT Appalachians were “alien” (269), much like his own existence in Appalachia. Verghese, however, suggested that his position in Appalachian culture was superior to that of gay men of the region as he willingly assimilated to Appalachian life, whereas gay male Appalachians “invented their own versions of femininity and became ‘Southern queens’ or were aggressively masculine, adopting the clothes and mannerisms of ‘the Castro clone,’ (269). Further, the views of Verghese, who willfully claims to have successfully assimilated to Appalachian cultural views

and appears equally critical of LGBT persons, perhaps represent the attitudes of Appalachians toward LGBT persons, particularly gay men; through the perpetuation of stereotypes and the application of non-human qualities, LGBT Appalachians can be dominated by their heterosexual family and community members. The life of Verghese in Appalachia further depicts Patricia Hill Collins' theoretical concept *outsider within*. This orientation seeks to view the social experience of a group out-member who has been accepted as part of the group.

Bernadette Barton's "Pray the Gay Away: The Extraordinary Lives of Bible Belt Gays" (2012) provides one of the most exhaustive research studies to connect the intersections of LGBT life, Appalachian life, and religious identity. Though the study incorporates numerous Central Appalachian residents, it also encompasses the entire Bible Belt region and thus exceeds the boundaries of Central Appalachia. Her work focuses on kinship networks and involves "audiotaped interviews with 59 lesbians and gay men ranging in age from 18 to 74," (Barton, 17). "Pray the Gay Away" does lay a great foundation for my work but does not exclusively seek to examine the relationships between LGBT life, Appalachian life and Christian religious orientations. Rather, the information collected provides substantive evidence that those relationships should be examined.

Angela Aaron's 2015 doctoral dissertation, "Transgender Individual's Social Support Experiences in Central Appalachia," evaluates the transgender experiences of Appalachian residents and gives some focus to the process of coming out in Appalachia (53). The study evaluates how the social support systems established in Central Appalachia impact transgender persons residing in the region. One of the central themes of coming out as trans is that of being "passable," (134) or having the ability to be physically identified exclusively by their post-transition gender identity. Aaron's study provides some interesting results; stories of acceptance

were considerably more commonplace than expected and that “twenty-four percent (4 transwomen, 2 transmen) of participants described having supportive experiences with pastors and/or congregation members,” (85). Though this may show a change in the acceptance of trans persons and LGB persons in the region, it is still alarming that three of four respondents reported experiences with religious leaders and members that were not positive experiences. Aaron’s research does lead one to question whether regional acceptance has changed. For this reason, my own research includes respondents age 30 or under so as to determine whether the experience of younger persons have an experience different than what may be expected of region.

In “Queer Appalachia: Toward Geographies of Possibility,” Mathias Detamore focuses particularly on the Central Appalachian subregion. He argues that homophobia in America is embedded in the ideology of Christian beliefs (128) and that regional acceptance of LGBT life is more positive than is believed. Rather, Detamore suggests that, counter to the stereotypes associated with Appalachian beliefs, LGBT life is more broadly accepted in the region thanks to activism (53) and the positive depictions of LGBT individuals throughout the media. The research study provides a great example of the intersections of LGBT life, particularly that of Appalachian LGBT people, and Christian ideology.

In 2015, Amy Jordan presented “Those Who Choose to Stay: Narrating the Rural Appalachian Queer Experience,” a master’s thesis for the Department of Social Work at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Much like the great Appalachian out-migration in search of work during various periods of struggle in the coal industry, Appalachian LGBT people have historically left the region in search of social acceptance and the ability to lead happier lives. Jordan’s qualitative study, which focuses on four LGBT respondents struggling with the consideration of leaving the region or staying, revealed that ‘while being out at a young age

poses a higher risk of victimization for all LGBT youth the risk is exaggerated in rural environments,” (11). Further, she contends that a “religious atmosphere was generally found to be a destructive part of these youths’ environments, making them fear for their safety and worry about coming out to their families and friends,” (vi). Jordan also focused on the concept of coming out as a never-ending process, relating that it is possible to be out of the closet in some places but remain in the closet at other places, even in the same community (6). Joran makes one statement, though, that should be countered: “We are all assumed to be straight until coming out,” (viii). This is completely counter to the trans experience, which hinges on the possibility of being passable. Passable references the unique facet that “unlike most members of other minority groups, for example women and people of color, many gay people can ‘pass’ as members of the dominant group – heterosexuals,” (Barton, 82). In fact, my own experience indicates that mannerisms or speech patterns often lead one to be assumed to be somewhere within the LGBT spectrum and consequently lead to questioning, assumptions and even attention of heterosexual peers in the same space.

Gregory Griffey’s “How Reading and Writing Saved a Gay Preacher in Central Appalachia,” written in 2015 and published in *Reading Appalachia: Literacy, Place and Cultural Resistance*, a compilation of stories of the successes and challenges presented in Appalachian social life. This work is particularly important because Griffey obtained a Master’s in Divinity after accepting that his experience as a gay man in Appalachia, particularly that of Baptist and Pentecostal origin. Griffey recalls that “reading the bible gave [me] a way out of traditional masculine activities,” (108) which saved him from the messages of “so-called clobber passages or texts of terror to assure us that homosexuals were reprobate sinners, on the road to an eternal, fiery hell,” (108). This work discusses punishment for sins, the concept of hell simply for living

as LGBT, and the appearance of observation. It is possible that these messages of eternal punishment are impactful to the time or way in which Appalachian LGBT persons elect to come out of the closet.

Mary Gray's "Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America" examines the isolation faced by Appalachian LGBT youth and provides a wealth of information about the many facets by which youth begin to develop the necessary information as they anticipate coming out to family and friends. Gray says, "Age, obligations to family, and limited economic opportunities left the rural youth I met with little choice in the matter but to stay put and make do," (2009:6). Gray's work examines the mechanisms by which rural LGBT youth are armed with the words, examples, and knowledge to discuss their sexual orientation or gender identity. She concludes that "Cable-produced digitally broadcast documentaries, and Internet-based personals, coming-out stories, and discussions were cited as key resources for identity work more than any other kind of media engagement...[and] I would argue that these representations of reality carry cultural weight not just because of the genre of story they tell, but also because rural youth can put these images of queerness to work for them," (Gray, 2009). Gray's findings suggest that rural LGBT youth are empowered to come out by a range of media is suggestive that youth are able to access this media privately, arming them with the words and anticipatory defenses necessary to begin the dialogue of coming out.

Beyond geographic isolation, Dr. Suzanne Tallichet examines Appalachian cultural isolation in "Daughters of the Mountain: Women Coal Miners in Central Appalachia." Tallichet says, "Mainstream American society sees Appalachia as part of the 'other America...[whose] material poverty and symbolic 'backwardness' are juxtaposed against a more affluent and presumably more progressive culture," before continuing that "central Appalachia has

epitomized these stereotypes and therefore been studied by numerous scholars,” (2006:10). The work of Tallichet examines the patriarchal structure of Appalachian culture by deconstructing the presence of female miners in the male-dominated industry. Later, Tallichet says, “Overall, most women I interviewed demonstrated an awareness of how the issues of region, class, gender, and race intersected to compound the controlling images that subjugated them,” (2006: 153). Sexual orientation and gender identity are widely known as populations marginalized among those noted by Tallichet. “A woman who could be both financially and sexually independent of men threatened the ‘natural order’ by undermining heterosexual men’s power and privilege,” Tallichet summarizes (2006: 46). This subjugation by heterosexuals and males supports the notion that patriarchy is alive and dominant in regional cultural identity.

Though an exceptional amount of literature can be used to support my work, it must also be explained by theoretical models. Next, we examine the theoretical models and orientations that are used to support my research and findings.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Orientation

I have elected to focus on feminist theory, post structuralist theory, and thoughts associated with queer studies and social activism as explanatory models for the research that follows. No one theoretical orientation is exhaustive of the LGBT experience. It is important to note that no one theory can fully support the concept of LGBT identity to the fullest extent. Rather, pieces of various theories can be utilized to support general concepts about LGBT life, especially that of coming out.

Michel Foucault, Post-Structural Theory

Philosopher and post-structural social theorist Michel Foucault suggested that simply the appearance of surveillance leads persons to modify their behavior. This concept, which he called the Panopticon, is examined using the prison or jail population. Foucault suggested that the behavior of inmates was shaped by the mere thought that they were being watched. Foucault's concept hinges on the design of the building in which inmates are housed. The central portions of the building are areas in which guards operate and control the facility. The windows are typically believed to be one-way mirrors. Foucault believed that it was the fear of surveillance, and not the physical presence of guards, that caused prisoners to modify the way in which they behaved.

This same concept can be broadly applied to the lives to LGBT individuals, as was discovered in the work of Bernadette Barton (2012) in *Pray the Gay Away*. Though Barton was certainly the first to apply the Panopticon to the lives of LGBT persons, I would contend that the fear of surveillance is a significant modifier in the social performance of LGBT individuals, specifically Appalachian LGBT persons. For example, take the mannerisms often associated with LGBT persons. Generalizations suggest that gay men are often feminine or that lesbians are

often masculine. For this reason, I would find it easy to suggest that LGBT persons are far more aware of their appearance, body language and other identifiers of personality. Given that mere body language or hair styles are common indicators of masculine or feminine qualities, it is considerably important to consider the fear of surveillance that LGBT persons experience.

Also, the element of surveillance extends far beyond physical characteristics. It is not inconceivable that law enforcement or other authorities, parents included, monitor the actions of suspected LGBT individuals. An example of the obvious surveillance of LGBT persons was related in a news story about a gay male who was arrested for watching pornographic material of young men known among the gay community as *twinks*, or ‘gay slang for a feminine looking man over 18,’” who possesses boyish looks (NewNowNext). This person attempted to explain during the police raid on his home that the pornographic materials depicted twinks and not underage actors. Only after his arrest, which was highly publicized, was the individual’s attorney able to convince a judge that the actors depicted in the pornographic material were over the age of 18. The incident outed Mike Whitla, placed into jeopardy his job working with at-risk youth, and cost many friendships (NewNowNext).

Foucault’s concept of The Panopticon is also exceedingly important in understand the experience of transgender persons. Identifying as transgender often results in modifications of the body, clothing and actions of an individual. For example, transwomen who may have previously dressed in clothing associated with the male form often begin wearing clothes that accentuate features of the female form. The very process of transition, no matter how miniscule, is often noticed by others. Further, trans people talk, in depth, about the need to feel passable. That is, they feel as though it is important to blend as homogenously as possible with their post-transition gender identity so as to not upset the social balance.

Patricia Hill Collins - Feminist Theory and CTRR

Feminist theory and the critical theories of race are equally important when examining LGBT life. Feminists challenge the widespread interpretations made of patriarchal society in which women are subjugated as subordinate to their male counterparts. Recent social justice movements seek to examine such concepts as equal pay for men and women as well as sexual assault incidences. Feminist theorists also examine the male/female binary in broad evaluations, such as the masculinization or feminization of clothing. These theories also acknowledge the challenges affixed to the LGBT community. For example, feminist theorists would suggest that, like women, LGBT individuals are dominated into subordination, thus positioning them differently with regard to social position and upward mobility. Take, for example, the work of Philosopher Dr. Cheshire Calhoun, “Feminism, the Family, and the Politics of the Closet: Lesbian and Gay Displacement,” which applies feminist theory toward the subordination of LGBT persons. “Oppression and subordination depend on the cultural articulation of basic social identities that are taken to be: (a) relatively or completely immutable features of a person; (b) determinative of their psychological, moral, and intellectual capacities; and (c) in polar opposition to an Other identity where polarity of evaluation (good-bad, respectable-unrespectable, superior-inferior, natural-unnatural) is central,” says Calhoun (2003: 5).

Patricia Hill Collins – Othering

Feminist and CTRR theorist Patricia Hill Collins exponentially expands on the previously established concept of *othering*. This concept explains that removing the human qualities from a non-dominant person or group of people, painting them as something other than human, adds ease for the stripping of rights and, subsequently, the domination of the non-dominant individual or group. For example, othering can be found in historical justifications for the capitalist interests

from which slavery emerged. By suggesting that African American people are genetically or biologically inferior to Caucasians, an entire race was othered and, thus, enslavement emerged as an accepted phenomenon. Some of the messages from the dominate social group of that time suggested that the brains of African Americans were smaller and less developed than that of Caucasians or other non-African Americans. These same justifications were employed in the capitalist industrialization of Appalachia and the abuses levied against mountain people. The same could be believed of religious persons who suggest that homosexuality is sinful. Likely, these religious individuals tend to remove the ability for LGBT individuals in their homes or churches or community to enjoy a similar social position. By removing the human qualities, suggesting that LGBT life is sinful, the dominant social group silences and punishes the LGBT individual. During the collection of interviews, one respondent, Brian, was required to confess his sins of sexual curiosity by exploring pornography. Brian explained that he was ultimately banned from using the family computer and was no longer allowed to use any kind of computer or mobile device until after they left their home.

Patricia Hill Collins – Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality is explained by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, whose theoretical orientations lie in feminism and CTRR. Our social lives are so unique that there is no singular identity by which we identify. Intersectionality evaluates the dynamics between the multiple social identities any one group may possess. For example, Hill Collins might investigate LGBT life and Christianity, LGBT life and Appalachian culture, Appalachian culture and Christianity, in search of the resulting implications when each of the three social identities are laid atop one another. In fact, this research study hinges specifically on the implications associated with the collision of this very combination of social identities. The resulting analysis

seeks to determine whether the collision of the previously mentioned social identities LGBT, Appalachian, and Christian, results in a modification of the time or method by which LGBT individual elects to leave the closet and publicly identify with their sexual identity.

Now consider the addition of racial or ethnic minority identity atop the aforementioned list of social identities. One respondent, Karen, discusses her unique experience as an Appalachian LGBT person of color from a Christian family. Karen's Korean American identity makes her experience unique as she experiences the same intersectional implications as other respondents but must also navigate the challenges of traditional Korean cultural values practiced by her mother.

Queer Studies

Bernadette Barton (2012) presents, in her sociological work "Pray the Gay Away: The Extraordinary Lives of Bible Belt Gays," one particular theory that repeatedly resonates among the LGBT community; the 'condition of inarticulation,' (Barton, 90-101). This condition is inclusive of two concepts, one attached to the LGBT individual and the other affixed to the family or friends of the LGBT person. The condition of inarticulation affects LGBT persons through the lack of skills to discuss LGBT identity. For example, LGBT Appalachians are not often presented with depictions of positive LGBT role models. On the part of the family or friends of LGBT individuals, the condition of inarticulation is present in the refusal to acknowledge or discuss the LGBT identity of their friend or family member. For example, many parents simply write off the LGBT identity of their child as a phase, suggesting that it will pass and that there is no need for further discussion.

Barton, in fact, might suggest that this very condition of inarticulation may have significant implications pertaining to the closet. First, the LGBT individual is not equipped with the words to say to family or the positive examples by which to reference when coming out. Next, the lack of appropriate response material might lead to an anomaly of family providing feedback that is positive but is interpreted as negative. Finally, this condition extends far beyond the walls of the home and into the circle of friends, into the compound of religious ideology, and well into the community.

Guidance from these theoretical perspectives helps to inform my research as they offer explanatory mechanisms by which to understand, evaluate, and discuss the implications of dominance through both surveillance and systematic oppression. Further, these orientations explain how those very concepts, surveillance and oppression, are delved out by the supernatural religious identity that dominates Central Appalachian social life.

Given the established wealth of information, from background information to existing literature and theoretical models, I will now turn to the research methodology employed to complete my own research.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

General Concepts

The broad concept of LGBT generalizes all sexual minorities into a singular group identity. In fact, the shorthand terminology now includes several additional letters. It should be considered that each of these letters, LGBT, represents an entire subgroup of marginalized people. For example, the social interpretation of bisexuality versus that of homosexuality or transgender life may be very different. In fact, the existing body of literature and research would suggest that this is absolutely the case. Thus, the experience of members of these specific groups must have some clarity in such broad research as has been proposed. This study seeks to understand the general experience of the entire community of sexual minorities by exploring the shared experiences of all types of sexual minorities.

Respondents for this study must have already publicly identified as a sexual minority. Thus, they must have come out of the closet prior to their interview. Here, it should be noted that the process of coming out likely never ends. Heterosexual and cisgender persons are rarely required to explain their sexual orientation or gender identity. Cisgender refers to those whose gender identity is reflective of their biologically-assigned sex characteristics at birth. Rather, it is implied. The identities and orientations of LGBT individuals is often assumed but seemingly appears to require continuous confirmation. This requirement is more a protection to respondents than a required fact for the analysis of data. Though it is recognized that those who are still in the closet may possess a degree of insight that is not as readily recollected by out-of-the-closet respondents, the risk associated with accidentally ‘outing’ a respondent is far too great.

The research study is built on persons representing each letter corresponding to the given sexual minority who lives in or grew up in Appalachia. Initially, two gay male respondents, two lesbian respondents, two bisexual male respondents, two bisexual female respondents, and one transgender male respondent and one transgender female respondent were sought for interview. As the experience for bisexual men and bisexual women is likely vastly different, two interviews from each have been included. Thus, this study was originally proposed for interviews of ten LGBT persons. Potential respondents considered for the study must be between 18 and 30 years of age at the time of their interview. The age limitations were set at this specific interval in order to determine whether the 2015 marriage equality ruling has had an impact on the age or method by which LGBT persons are coming out of the closet in Appalachia.

After the conclusion of interviews and the processing of data, one respondent, a transwoman, contacted me and asked to be removed from the research study. The respondent cited fears of family shame as a motivator, stating flatly that she was out of the closet but worried that her family may become unhappy if they believed she was “airing dirty laundry.” This is true of Appalachian families, as previously mentioned. In Appalachian culture, matters of the household are to be expressed only with members of the family residing within the household. This is both perpetuates and is a product of the condition of inarticulation and, thus, can explain in part the concerns of the transwoman who withdrew from the research study.

The loss of a transgender respondent removes some particularly important perspectives. First, we must consider that transgender individuals must often come out twice; the first coming out commonly includes an identity as lesbian or gay and the second occurs on the acceptance of their transgender identity. This will be further discussed in the following analysis sections. Next, we must consider that transgender rights are by and far lagging to the rights of lesbian, gay and

bisexual individuals. Finally, being transgender typically hinges on being passable, which describes the process as passing for the post-transition gender without concern about pre-transition gender. Each of these observations make the transgender experience unique when compared to the LGB experience, especially in the confines of Appalachia and in communities deeply entrenched in religious roots.

Respondent Identification and Recruitment

The task of identifying and recruiting LGBT Appalachians is challenging. First, one must consider that LGBT life is rather private, especially throughout the Central Appalachian subregion. Given the established concept of the Panopticon, it is easy to understand that LGBT Appalachians are rather hesitant to speak openly with a researcher about their own experiences with coming out, especially if they maintain relationships or residences in the communities from which they hail. The mere mention of a research study might lead an LGBT Appalachian to question whether or not they are under surveillance. In fact, connecting with one trans respondent was rather challenging because the respondent refused to acknowledge my requests to participate until it was noted that a mutual friend had established the connection between myself and the respondent. Next, it must be considered that finding LGBT Appalachians may be more challenging when requiring the element of Christian life. Finally, the age range of respondents, 18-30 years of age, leaves little room by which to recruit respondents meeting this specific age criteria since many LGBT Appalachians elect to leave the region for the more open and accepting environments of metropolitan communities like Lexington.

Respondents were identified through the access of the existing social networks of the myself and the faculty advisor overseeing the research project. Social networks were also solicited from any respondent willing to provide such access. For example, respondents were

provided with my contact cards so that they could share that contact information with their LGBT friends and family who may have fit the criteria and who may be willing to reach out and participate in the research study. It was expected that this method would provide adequate results and that numerous points of contact would emerge. In fact, my own established social network and that of initial respondent led to the collection of all required interviews from appropriately corresponding respondents.

The first step in the identification and recruitment of respondents was to attend a meeting at an LGBT-affirming organization. There are several organizations who provide services, whether they are support groups or medical clinics, to LGBT persons in the region. Through my engagement in the region, I was aware of Eastern Kentucky University's Alphabet Center. The Alphabet Center is an organization that provides support services to LGBT students, faculty and staff at the University. I learned that this group holds regular weekly meetings in a support group setting which entice attendees to share their own stories, whether background information or recent challenges or successes, with the group in a way that is structured like that of Alcoholics Anonymous. Further, given the central focus on University students, the Alphabet Center provided the perfect grounds to reach the age groups specifically targeted for the purposes of this research. Obviously, though, my presence as a researcher in an intimate setting such as this could be frightening or threatening to group members. Thus, in employing Collins' outsider-within concept, it was virtually a requirement that I share my own background with the group. My contact information was provided to any group member who expressed interest.

The first and only contact came from a 27-year-old gay man who attended the event named Eric. Within 24 hours of the conclusion of that meeting, Eric reached out to me to schedule his own interview and advised that he had already shared my contact card with

numerous contacts.

Respondent information including age, gender identity, sexual orientation and identity, and racial background are noted below in Chart 1.

Name	Age	Gender	Identity	Race/Ethnicity
Alex	26	Transman	Heterosexual	White
Heather	26	Female	Lesbian	White
Leslie	27	Female	Lesbian	White
Christopher	20	Male	Bisexual	White
Sean	28	Male	Bisexual	White
Emma	27	Female	Bisexual	White
Karen	29	Female	Bisexual	Korean/NA*
Eric	27	Male	Gay	White
Brian	29	Male	Gay	White

Chart 1: Respondent Age, Sex, Minority Sexual Identity, and Race/Ethnicity

*Denotes Native American

I would be remiss should I fail to mention the unique experiences of persons of color. In fact, the only respondent of color included a 29-year-old bisexual female of Korean and Native American descent. First, the racial composition of Appalachia, as previously noted, is overwhelmingly devoid of people of color. In fact, the 2017 population estimates indicate that 88% of Kentuckians are white alone, though national reflections for the same period of time suggest that only 76.9% of the U.S. population identify as white only (U.S. Census Bureau). Next, it is equally important to mention the unique experience of LGBT persons of color, specifically those in Appalachia. The challenges of navigating multiple cultural identities as well

as an LGBT identity inside a religious Appalachian community presents one of the most unique positions of intersectionality that I have ever encountered.

Data Collection and Processing

Potential respondents were advised to contact me directly to schedule interviews. Interviews were scheduled for periods of 1-90 minutes and were arranged at a mutually agreeable location. These locations were typically private spaces in public places so as to provide a level of protection to the respondents. Though respondents were selected through the established social network of the myself, my faculty advisor or other respondents, those who identify as LGBT may feel a sense of risk by being asked to meet in a non-public place.

Prior to the collection of data, respondents were required to provide written, informed consent. The consent guarantees that the respondent is over the age of 18 and that respondents fully understand that their participation is voluntary. Respondents are then provided with details about the data collection and destruction, as well as the anonymity of respondent identities. Finally, respondents were advised that they may withdraw from any question, any part of any question, or from the entire research study at any time prior to the publication of research materials. The contact information of both the research and Morehead State University's Office of Research and Special Programs was included in the consent. Upon discussion and agreement, respondents were required to sign the consent. A copy of the consent and a copy of the approved research questions were there provided to the respondent for their own files.

Respondents interviews consist of semi-structured oral conversations based on ten research questions. These questions request that the respondent recall information about their own

experiences and describe the actions and emotions of others. The specific set of interview questions included the following:

- Can you describe to me your family background when you were young, including religious ideology that sticks out in your memory?
- Will you talk a bit about the process of discovery that made you aware that you were not heterosexual (or cisgender if trans)?
- And how did the religious statements by family, friends or church members impact the way in which you felt about the discovery that you were not heterosexual (or cisgender if trans)? Also, what did religious family and friends have to say about the 2015 marriage equality ruling?
- Talk some about the process of “coming out.” *When* did you come out to friends versus family? At what age were you when you came out to various people?
- And was there a difference in *how* you came out to friends versus family? Can you tell me about the ways that you came out to friends and family?
- Talk a bit about the differences about *when* you came out to religious family, friends and community members versus *when* you came out to those who are not religious. Can you explain the reasons that you may have delayed coming out to specific people or groups of people?
- Can you talk about the risks of coming out to friends or family that identified as Christian? For example, were there fears about social isolation or physical violence?
- And did you have similar fears when coming out to those who did not identify as Christian or was the experience different?

- Talk about your observations of people coming out. Do you see or hear about younger people coming out in your community or older people more frequently?
- Is there anything else you may wish to discuss regarding your coming out or gay/bi/trans life in either Appalachia or a Christian family?

Respondent interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device. The recording of interviews began immediately on the conclusion of the discussion on informed consent and all interviews opened with the respondent's acknowledgment that they provided written, informed consent for the collection of data through the interview process. Respondents then answered the approved interview questions and were then provided the opportunity to discuss any further concept prior to the conclusion of the interview.

Transcribed interviews were printed for the processes of coding. This coding, prescribed by the grounded theory method, is "inductive, comparative, iterative, and interactive," (Charmaz et al, 2012). The use of the grounded theory method employs a two-step coding process; initial coding and focused coding. Coding included the notation of patterns of similarity and difference through the marking of the transcribed interview documents with pens of various color; each color specifically referencing a pattern. Coding provides a method of evaluation that is particularly important in providing quantified evidence of the existence of patterns or points of influence in a particular evaluation. In this research study, coding was employed to determine general patterns and then to evaluate how those patterns were implicated through the application of theory.

The central focus of initial coding was to determine whether patterns emerged among the age or method by which respondents elected to come out of the closet. Respondents were asked directly about the time and method by which they came out of the closet. The series of additional

research questions urged the respondent to elaborate on each of the aforementioned concepts. This elaboration provided the grounds by which to determine the existence of patterns outside of age and method of coming out. Further, any additional statement or concept that the researcher felt was influential was noted with the mark of the passage with an additional color pen.

A second application of coding, that of focused coding, permitted me to determine how these broad patterns were implicated into the theoretical frameworks being evaluated. For example, respondents who mentioned sin or punishment may have mentioned the feeling that they were being watched by others, thus implicating the Foucault theoretical orientation of surveillance. The coded passage may, in fact, provide some examples of this observation and might explain whether the respondent modified their behavior or altered the time at which they came out or the way in which they did so.

It is important to discuss the handling of these documents. Once coded, interviews were scanned and saved in a specific file for analysis and the physical copies of transcriptions were then destroyed. This methodological approach allowed for the seamless collection, analysis and handling of respondent interviews. The results of those interviews are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Initial coding afforded me the opportunity to mark ages and methods by which Appalachian LGBT persons came out to their family and friends. Additional notations were also utilized to note the emergence of patterns and notations that may be of importance for further discussion. Focused coding led to the discovery of patterns relating to: isolation or abandonment, sin or abomination, punishment and/or hell, homelessness, media, violence, and unclean.

Next, we turn to those findings that emerged throughout the research and coding processes.

Chapter 5: Findings

In the following block of concepts, I find that religious messaging does, in fact, impact the time at which Appalachian LGBT persons come out of the closet. First, I provide respondent interview data as supporting information to confirm the involvement of the theoretical concepts mentioned previously. The Condition of Inarticulation, the Panopticon and Feminist thought are discussed at length. Then, in the next block, I find that seven concepts appear as patterns throughout respondent interviews, each of these concepts supported by theory and explained as aggravators which impact the time at which Appalachian LGBT persons come out to family and friends. Those concepts include: isolation and/or abandonment; sin and/or abomination; punishment and/or Hell, homelessness; media; violence; and *dirty* or unclean.

Condition of Inarticulation

All respondents reported incidences of encounters explained by Barton's Condition of Inarticulation. In fact, many respondents spoke of this phenomenon frequently. This condition is multifaceted; it reflects a family or community that is unwilling to openly discuss LGBT life while also reflecting LGBT persons that are not equipped with the words or supports necessary to begin the conversation about their sexual minority identities. The condition of inarticulation perpetuates remaining in the closet among interview respondents. Also, it should be noted that coming out of the closet to family and friends does not always negate the condition of inarticulation; some people remain entirely visible with their same-sex partners but continue to not discuss their identities with others.

Alex, for example, who is a transgender male, says:

Actually, I have a friend right now, an elderly woman, and I befriended her and stuff like that. But I haven't told her that me and my partner are together. She thinks we're cousins.

Because I'm afraid of losing her as a friend because she is 110% Christian...I just don't know how she'd take it. She's 70 or something like that. There's some people I haven't told. And then there's, like I said, most people know. I don't try to hide it. And I look like a real guy to me.

Thematically, respondents discuss that their decision not to come out to family and friends through a tactic of justification. Many respondents, noted that they felt as though others already knew their sexual orientation, even though there was no confirmation by the respondent. Alex continues, "I really didn't have to. It was just a given." Though many respondents, two thirds in fact, discuss the positive influences of the media in aiding in developing those conversations, LGBT Appalachians have not historically been presented with the positive LGBT role-models by which to begin the conversation of coming out.

Also, there emerged a concept from one respondent that was not widely discussed by others; coming out of the closet and then going back in the closet. In fact, five of the nine respondents discussed their emergence from the closet only to remain closeted to others. Sean, a 28-year-old bisexual male, talked about being out of the closet in the years he lived away from home but not being out of the closet when he returned to the region. He says: "I moved back to this area...and it's something that people don't like to talk about. So, I just kept my mouth shut about it, even though I knew the friends that I had would most likely be very neutral towards it and not have negative opinions about it." Alex also suggests that he has failed to talk about his gender identity with even close friends.

Panopticon

The application of Foucault's Panopticon is of particular importance when evaluating the implications of Christian identity against the time or method by which Appalachian LGBT persons come out of the closet. An overwhelming majority of respondents, six of the nine,

reported that the concept of surveillance modified their behavior. In fact, more than half of the respondents (five) discussed this modification of behavior without even acknowledging that they were doing so out of fear of observation. It was the statements immediately before or after these discussions that identified the fear of surveillance. Emma, a 27-year-old bisexual female respondent, summed up this fear of surveillance well: “I just stopped hiding.” Two thirds of respondents (six of the nine respondents) used the words hide, hid or hiding. These words indicate a high level of understanding when considering the concept of surveillance, even if not directly acknowledged by the respondent.

Sean recalls his direct experience with the Panopticon in his recollection of the series of incidents about watching a television show called *Degrassi*. The show featured LGBT characters. The respondent says: “And I, I just remember watching that and when it got to the episodes where it involved two males or whatever, I would always try to sneak and do it. I felt like I was doing something wrong. Um, I didn’t want my mom to see the tv show. I thought I would be banned from watching it.” When I questioned whether this fear stemmed from things said, the respondent answered in the affirmative.

Another respondent, Brian, recalled that he directly modified his behavior as a result of the fear of being observed. “I kinda built this wall and put on an act. I acted like if I was in sports that no one knew that I was homosexual.” The respondent then later recalls modifying his actions to be worthy of the love of his older brother and guardian. “So, I would put on a show,” he says, “and I would try to act masculine so that way he would want to spend time with me because he was all that I had left.” Likewise, Eric recalls dating a female to avoid the observance that he was, in fact, gay. He says: “Um, and she started falling for me and she had been through a rough life. And I was like ‘crap, I can’t lead this poor girl on.’” Both bisexual male respondents and

both gay male respondents alluded to the notion that the concept of surveillance urged them to participate in activities associated with masculine qualities so that they would not be found out before they had the chance to come out.

Other respondents discussed the concept of surveillance differently. Alex recalled trying to avoid surveillance without success. Emotionally, he stated: “It’s like they made fun of me no matter how hard I tried. If I had makeup on, they made fun of me. If I didn’t I was, like, you know, a big dyke. You know what I’m saying? So, it’s like no matter what I did, it was a lose-lose situation.” One gay female respondent, Heather, recalled trying to avoid her family’s shame. “I think that they felt ashamed or something.” She later continues: “I tried dating men in high school and college but I knew that I was lying to myself. It didn’t feel right. I even slept with a guy.” The statements by these respondents merely further supports a notion that the condition of surveillance directly impacts the actions and intentions of LGBT Appalachians.

Feminism and Critical Theories of Race and Racism

The idea of othering, or being assigned non-human qualities in an effort to be dominated, appeared in all nine of the interviews collected. What’s more alarming is the degree at which statements of othering impacted respondents and those around them. Eight respondents recall messages perpetuated by family, friends or church members that identified LGBT persons as sinful and worthy of punishment up to and including death. Some of those respondents (six of the nine) report that the messages associated with othering came directly from church or from a minister. Two respondents, Eric and Brian, both gay males, directly recall their prayers for the removal of their same-sex desires. Eric’s plea by prayer included the following notion: “God, I’ve just not met the right one. Not the right one to *fix* me, I guess.”

Brian tearfully recalled: “Um, I, I remember sitting alone, praying at the church alter to, to literally pray my gay away.” Later, he recalls the punishment for the confirmation of his sexual orientation: “And, uh, my sister-in-law had actually told *the entire congregation and the pastor and the pastor’s wife that I was gay*. And so they got me up in front of the whole church, in a prayer circle, and had everyone actually lay hands on me and pray the gay away.”

A smaller subset of respondents, four of the nine, provided information that fits soundly into the concepts of CTRR theorists. Concepts of race and racism appeared in interviews with one trans man, one bisexual male and one bisexual female. Alex equates LGBT life in Appalachia to slavery. “It’s like slavery. Like how slaves were treated.” He continues, “They were beaten and treated like scum. It’s like, that’s like how being homosexual or trans feels. It feels like we’re a minority.” He continues that though LGBT Appalachians are not forced into labor, there are “lashings, both physical and verbal.” Another respondent, Karen, a 29-year-old bisexual female, discusses her life as an LGBT Appalachian of Korean and Native American descent. She equates her challenges to the Korean cultural identity that the failures of a child reflect poorly on their family. Of the devotion to cultural heritage she says, “When you’re an Asian kid and raised in the U.S., you’re raised in Little Korea or Little China or Little Whatever Your Nationality Is.” This specifically refers to the familial boundaries of respect through inarticulation.

Age of Coming Out

The average age at which respondents came out appears to be 19.6 years old. For the purpose of discussion, this figure will be referred to as 20 years old. The average age at which gay males came out of the closet was 15 years old, while bisexual males came out, on average, at 23 years old. On average, gay females came out at 19 years old and bisexual females came out at

15 years old. The age at which the trans male respondent came out was 20 years old. This figure fails to account of the never-ending need to come out of the closet. Rather, it indicates merely the time at which respondents came out to family and friends.

When compared to national trends, however, there appears to be some variation. A research study published by University of Texas at Austin researchers in the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences and the Population Research Center at the same University found that the average age at which American youth come out to family and friends has been steadily reducing over the last forty years. Their research found that the average age in the 1970's at which LGBT persons came out to family and friends, as reported by Psychiatrist Dr. RR Troiden, to be 20 years of age. Research in 2000 published by Dr. RC Savin-Williams, a professor in Human Development at Cornell University, shows that the average age at which LGBT persons come out of the closet was then reduced to 16 years of age. Further, a 2010 study by Pennsylvania State University Professor of Human Development and Family Studies, concludes that the average age at which LGBT persons come out to family and friends had then reduced to 14 years of age. It must be noted that the average age at which respondents in this research study greatly resembles the age reported in national trends in the 1970's.

Recent Pew data (2013) suggests that among the LGB community, the average age of coming out is twelve, with gay men averaging at ten years old while lesbian and bisexual persons average around thirteen years old each (Pew Social Trends). This is counter to previous data, which suggested that bisexual persons once came out much later in life. Many respondents, five of the nine, discussed the concept of coming out as bisexual. Of the four bisexual respondents, one was an outlier, coming out at 26 years old. Two others, a lesbian and a transman, came out as bi prior to coming out as lesbian. The average age of coming out of Appalachian bisexual

respondents in my study is nineteen years old, obviously higher than the trends reported by the Pew research and the aforementioned publications regarding the trends of all four sexual minority identities (LGBT). Of her experience, Leslie, who is a lesbian, says: “And when I was telling her I would not even say I was a lesbian. I’m not a lesbian, I’m not bisexual but I do find some women attractive. And that was how I came out.” It would later be explained by Sean, who said: “So, it’s definitely a mentality people have when they hear about bisexual people. *They could be with a female and they could change.* It’s like there’s a light at the end of the tunnel. Bi is relieving for those who don’t agree with gay life.”

Nearly all respondents, eight in fact, report that their observations suggest that the age at which LGBT Appalachians are coming out to family and friends is younger than they previously observed. Some respondents related this to the appearance of positive depictions of LGBT person in media while others discussed the broader acceptance of LGBT life through laws and rulings that brought about greater equality for LGBT persons. Karen reported an observation that both younger and older Appalachian LGBT persons are now coming out of the closet. She says, “They finally feel comfortable with the idea that society feels comfortable enough to love them,” thus empowering them to come out after decades of living in fear.”

Eric observes that younger persons are coming out as LGBT in Appalachia. He uses the platform of media to explain his observation. He suggests that “people in this area have never been, you know, aware of what they would call a lifestyle. So, they didn’t understand it. And to see that on tv shows and to see more gay characters on it and see the struggles of what people go through, it kinda like made them more empathetic and...sympathize.” He continues that such depictions may have changed the trajectory of his own life and then discusses his excitement to

attend his ten-year class reunion in the coming months. The respondent states that “there’s like so many gay people in my class that I didn’t even know were gay.”

Another respondent, Leslie, suggests that the media is influential in reducing the age at which Appalachian LGBT persons are coming out of the closet. “I think you see a lot more real people portrayed instead of...a walking stereotype like some of the ones. You’re seeing more real people with more real issues,” she says. Also, Christopher briefly discusses the fact that younger Appalachian LGBT persons are coming out even in the face of adversity in the operation of their daily lives. “There’s a young man I know who hasn’t told his mother but she’s slowly finding out and she’s already pushing him away. She’s going to throw him away like garbage,” he says, before asking, “Is that what we are?”

Method of Coming Out

The method by which respondents came out to family and friends is an incredibly unique situation case by case. The process, however, always involved a lengthy internal debate by each respondent. Most respondents disclosed that coming out to family was innately emotional while coming out to friends was considerably easier. Two thirds of respondents, or six of the nine, reported that the method of coming out to family and friends was merely through conversation. The conversations, however, were often emotional. Two respondents, or more than one fifth of respondents, recalled that they elected to come out by writing letters to family members. The final respondent reported being outed by her brother after he overheard a private conversation.

As the process of coming out is on a continuous and evolving process, several respondents reported coming out in multiple ways. Brian reported that he was outed by family members who found the very intimate letter that he wrote to his mother as his method of coming

out. Another respondent, Alex, reported being outed as the result of his mother's best friend asking him about his sexual orientation in front of his mother. This was pre-transition, so Alex's first coming out was as a lesbian. In another instance, Heather reported that her decision to come out to her family was based on the notion that she was going to change her public relationship status on social media platforms to identify her girlfriend.

Some respondents report instances of coming out after hearing homophobic statements made by family and friends. Eric details his coming out experience with his family as the result of his sister's harsh words about LGBT persons:

My sister had got talking about, you know, the scripture and all that stuff. And she's like 'oh, I love them,' but then at the same time she's like, 'can't, you can't do that, it's a sin and stuff,' and it, it hurt, it triggered me. And I kinda got into it. And she's like, 'yeah, you're, they go to hell.' And then I was like 'well, I guess I'm going to hell.'"

This interaction was in front of his entire immediate family. It is worth noting that Eric's sister first confirmed understanding that Eric is gay but then walks back that statement. She says: "Yeah, you're, they go to hell," first identifying Eric (you're) as gay and then assigning 'they' as a replacement. This replacement signifies her refusal to accept that her brother is gay.

Another respondent, Brian, reported coming out to friend who were using incendiary statements as a joke. Brian found the joke less humorous than his classmates. He says:

We were at lunch one day in middle school and we were all sitting together. And someone had used the term 'that's so gay' and I remember, you know, I'm insulted because *I'm that*. And so, I looked at everybody and I slammed my tray on the table. And I said, 'You know, I'm really offended by that because I am gay and I don't think it's so gay.'" (Chuckles). And everyone looked at me. And everyone laughed. Then they all hugged me because I had finally come out to them.

The central similarities in the process of coming out, however, are noted in the feelings of despair that respondents reported as risks prior to coming out. All respondents had some fear of isolation or abandonment. One respondent, Eric, however, discussed his fear of coming out to his

brother, whom had assumed guardianship after his loving and accepting mother passed away. Of the nine respondents, seven reported that their religious family or friends made them feel sinful or of being an abomination. An equal amount, though not the same respondents, reported fearing punishment, whether on Earth or through an eternity in Hell, related to their LGBT identity. One third of respondents reported fearing homelessness or actually being homeless because of their LGBT identity. Six of the nine respondents discussed the media as influential to the process of coming out. One third of respondents also suggested that they feared or actually experienced violence related to their LGBT identity. Finally, one additional pattern emerged: One third of respondents mentioned the concept of being dirty. Dirty, as will be explained later, includes several concepts such as a lack of cleanliness, perversion, and unworthy of the love of family, friends or society.

As previously noted, a second, focused coding was completed after the initial coding guided by theoretical concepts had been evaluated. Throughout the analysis several themes emerged that relate directly to the theoretical orientations utilized to test the central thesis, or the belief that Appalachian LGBT people come out at a different time or by a different method that is noted in national trends. It is feasible that these themes explain some of the interplay that is necessary to support the theoretical roots of intersectionality related by CTRR and feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins. For example, it is possible that being isolated or fearing being isolated is the direct result of life as Appalachian, identity as LGBT *and* a foundation of Christian beliefs. This explanation is even more clear when considering the concepts of sin and abomination, which several respondents reported as influential in their own process of coming out. Whether actually experiencing these themes or simply fearing them, the implications of

these intersections appears to have been of grave importance to those beginning the process of coming out to family and friends.

Abandonment or Isolation

Isolation is an interesting concept, here, as it falls into two distinct categories. In the first, isolation is self-driven, meaning that respondents reported isolating themselves because of the fears regarding what might happen if they came out, if they were outed, or if were merely discovered by family and friends that they identified as LGBT. In the other, isolation is a form of distancing by family and friends. Eric suggests that he isolated himself from friends and family intentionally as a method to protect himself against emotional torment and rejection. “I just had a bunch of walls up and wouldn’t let people get close. Um, because I was afraid of coming out and afraid to be myself. Or, afraid of rejection. I was afraid, so I would just be on my own and stuff,” he says.

Conversely, abandonment is discussed by respondents as a form of punishment enacted by family and friends whom are alarmed, disturbed or otherwise unhappy with the official assignment of an LGBT identity. Abandonment, in this context, is evaluated as the actual verbal notion that a family member or friend no longer wishes to have a relationship with the LGBT individual. For example, Christopher reports: “She [my mother] said, ‘I don’t think I could accept that; no son of mine or daughter of mine will ever be gay – I won’t have it.’”. Another respondent, Sean, says: “They would shun you, they would kick you out. You would be banished. You would be forgotten; put in a corner and just left there to rot,” when discussing the statements made to him by church members.

Isolation and abandonment, however, tend to parallel one another. Many respondents actually discuss isolation and abandonment as fluid concepts, as though they anticipate that isolation ultimately leads to abandonment. Alex speaks at length about his experiences with the abandonment of friends. When asked about the risks of coming out to family and friends, after a long sigh he said:

Losing, losing. Losing people. Losing family and friends...I had a friend. We're not friends anymore. Um, she's like 'why didn't you tell me this sooner; you've seen me naked.' And I was thinking *You ain't got nothing to worry about.*

After a burst of laughter, he explained that friends and family began to recede from his life and explained it by suggesting that people believed that he was predatory. He also discussed the abandonment and isolation of the general public, people with whom he had never had contact:

I mean, I've had people move their kids away from me. At the store. I've had a kid look at me, obviously kids say what they think. And they're like 'mommy, is that a boy or a girl?' And they're [parents] like 'shhh, get around here (pretends to tuck a child behind her), you know not to talk to that person. Like they don't want their kids around me or something.'"

Respondents also report that their friends *shunned* them. Heather reports that prior to coming out, she dated a male that one of her Christian friends had a crush on. She says, "In fact, one time they publicly shunned me just for talking to a boy one of them liked. If they only knew. But could you imagine the reaction if I came out, especially knowing that they publicly trash talked me for using a guy that they liked to hide my sexual orientation? They actually used the word shunned. 'YOU HAVE BEEN SHUNNED.' It was a big note that they gave me after they showed everyone." Another respondent, Leslie, recalls the messages from her minister. "I remember the preacher saying he wouldn't want gay men to go to his church because he had sons and, you know, so they're [gay men] all child molesters...Um, pretty much that gay people

want to turn everybody gay,” she recalled. These are the justifications made through othering by which LGBT Appalachians are generalized as possessing predatory personalities, depicting mostly gay and bisexual men as preying on children and heterosexual males, thus making it easier to prohibit Appalachian LGBT persons from maintaining position in the dominant social group.

Only one respondent did not discuss abandonment or isolation. Brian, the one respondent who did not discuss abandonment or isolation directly, did, however, mention that his mother died when he was 16 years of age. He reported that he came out to his mother when he was only 14 and that she was loving and willing to move beyond the cultural beliefs established through her religious upbringing in an effort to provide her son with love. He later says that his oldest brother, who was assigned guardianship, questioned his sexual orientation after finding a letter written to their mother. He said, “Um, and, had I told my brother the truth I would have had no place to live and I would have had nowhere to go.” His response does not indicate that he fears the abandonment of his brother and family. Rather, he indicates that he fears homelessness. Though this topic will be discussed in detail later, it is important to note that one third of respondents reported either being homeless as a result of coming out or fearing that homelessness would result when they came out to their family, thus impacting the time at which they came out. This makes me question whether the respondent had no concern of abandonment because he had already faced the ultimate abandonment from his only supporter.

Two theoretical concepts are very applicable when considering the implications of isolation and abandonment. First, feminist activist Suzanne Pharr’s model of power and privilege suggests that sexual minority identity is one of the six elements that are commonly related to belonging to the non-dominant social group (Pharr 17). Clearly, it is easy to establish that

dominant social groups tend to succeed by distancing themselves, either by isolating or abandoning a person or group, and maintaining dominance over that person or group. The second theoretical application here is that of othering. When persons rest outside the dominant group identity it is easier to justify separating that person from the dominant social group. In this case, heterosexual persons tended to abandon those with sexual minority identity.

Sin and Abomination

More than three quarters of respondents, seven of the nine, were told, either directly or through the messages of church sermons or biblical text, that the very idea of life as a sexual minority is sinful. Sinful, in this context, directly means wrong and punishable. After the conclusion of recording, one respondent reported that his family forced him to confess his sins of homosexual desires to his entire church body. Public confession, this respondent suggested, was the only mechanism by which to remove the damage of sin and, thus, the only way to save his soul from Hell. The concept of sin is a way by which Christian family members, friends or community members suggest that LGBT life in Appalachia is a violation of God's sacred law.

Several respondents, five of the nine or over half, in fact, reported that they were labeled with the word abomination. The very word abomination implies that a person or an act is an affront to God; an act that is so disgusting that it results in God hating the person participating in a particular sin. In Christian Appalachia, participating in an act that results in being hated by God, or being an abomination, is as terrifying as blasphemy as it leads to the ultimate damnation of the soul to Hell for eternity.

One respondent, Christopher, discusses his feelings on the label of abomination and biblical text by saying:

It's very disheartening that Christians will throw someone away for what they love. Yet they accept this person who lies or that person who slanders. And they won't accept me because I love this person. I remember my grandmother one day, she was watching the news. She said it's an abomination [being gay]. That's the exact word she used: abomination. She talked about nothing else that day, no other sin. Not about how lying will send you to hell or being a thief or being a murderer. No, just this one thing. Because, she said, homosexuals are just evil.

It is clear that the assignment of evil, in this context, is a direct form of othering. By creating an image that all LGBT persons are an abomination because they are evil, the respondent's grandmother perpetuates an opportunity to dominate LGBT Appalachians, whether directly or indirectly.

Two respondents, Eric and Sean make references to Leviticus, an Old Testament book of the King James Version of the Bible. Leviticus lists a series of sins worthy of punishment, with verse 22 of chapter 18 being directed at LGBT persons and applied nearly holistically throughout Christian orientations in Appalachia. The passage describes that it is an abomination for a man to lay with, or to have sexual relations with, another man as though he would a woman. Sean says of his family's religious orientation toward the passage in Leviticus: "Um, anybody that's involved with that it's going straight to hell." Eric, has this to say: "But growing up, I was always taught that being gay is, like, the ultimate sin. Or, you know, it's an abomination."

The incredible juxtaposition in the Eric's example, however, is that the he reported earlier that his grandfather was the minister of the family church but sold alcohol illegally, known as bootlegging, immediately after church concluded service. Mountain religion typically adheres to the notion that all sin is equal in God's eye; no one sin is more sinful than the other. Unless it is homosexuality that is under speculation. Homosexuality is seen as a threat because it is seen as fixed; though it is discussed as being a *choice*, most Christians in the region view LGBT life as a condition that cannot be changed. Other sins, like bootlegging, are seen as simple actions and not

some characteristic or condition. Further, LGBT Appalachians challenge the mechanisms of patriarchy that emerged after the abandonment of coal and timber interests as it seeks to undermine the concepts of masculinity and dominance. Pharr (1996) contends that existing outside the rules of dominance directly threatens the mechanisms by which that dominance maintains control. Applied broadly, that suggests that African Americans can gain dominance because they can act white, women can gain dominance because they can serve alongside their male counterparts, but LGBT persons are innately different and cannot change. This further explains the application of the theoretical concept of othering.

The concepts of sin and abomination bring to light Michel Foucault's concept of the Panopticon. As previously noted, the theoretical concept of panopticon suggests that social actors modify their behaviors through even the mere suggestion of surveillance. It is possible that Appalachian LGBT persons delay coming out to family and friends because they fear that the reaction of these persons might result in the LGBT person being identified as sinful and worthy of punishment. LGBT Appalachians are navigating the bounds of surveillance so specifically that they come out only when they can no longer take the pressures of lying and hiding. This is indicative that life as an Appalachian LGBT person is so intensely modified by the pain of the closet that they are willing to assume the labels of sinful and abomination merely to avoid further surveillance.

Several respondents reported feeling as though they were being targeted in church sermons, a form of surveillance which leads to the provisions of messaging to provide warning for the supposed wrongdoings of LGBT life. Alex and Heather report that their minister delivered sermons against homosexuality when they were in attendance. Heather says, "Religious statements absolutely impacted the way I felt about my sexuality. When I would go to

church, the pastor would always preach about how homosexuality was a sin against God. And you know he was looking right at me, even though it wasn't obvious [that I was a lesbian]." Alex shares a similar story:

And the preacher, I felt like when he would preach about it [homosexuality], he would stare right at me. Or, like in Sunday school class that day, it would be about Sodom and Gomorrah and something like that. But only when I was there... Like, people that wasn't all the time about 'man's not supposed to lay with man' or whatever it says there. Right next to that whole eating shellfish thing. 'Whoops, I just had some shrimp. But I'm a Christian and it's okay. But gay or trans isn't.'

Both respondents indicate experiences with the Panopticon. They report that they were singled out by religious leaders and were reminded that their sins were unforgivable, even if they took no action. Alex returns to the comparison between sin that is acceptable because it can be changed and sin that is not acceptable because it is an immutable characteristic. Further, Alex talks about that passage in Leviticus previously discussed. This passage refers to multiple actions as being unclean and, thus, an abomination unto God. Mountain Christians justify participating in the many of the actions mentioned in that passage in Leviticus by suggesting that the verses are found in the Old Testament, which was fulfilled when Jesus came to Earth. Therefore, eating shellfish is no longer sinful. Homosexuality or bisexuality, though mentioned in the very same passage, are not treated with the same critical evaluation; LGBT life remains sinful in the eyes of Mountain Christians and Leviticus 18:22 is always quoted as the justification.

Bisexuality should be mentioned here, too. Many respondents reported coming out as bisexual because they felt as though bisexuality was more socially acceptable than coming out as lesbian, gay, or transgender. Alex, a transman, and Leslie, a lesbian, both reported this. Sean talked about this humorously:

Oh, he's bisexual, there's still time! That's what my family is doing. They're sitting there with popcorn, watching this hilarious, wonderfully entertaining television show of my

life, and thinking it's just a phase. So, it's definitely the mentality people have when they hear about bisexual people. *They could be with a female and they can change.* It's like there's a light at the end of the tunnel. Bi [bisexuality] is relieving for those who don't agree with gay life.

Punishment – Hell

An overwhelming number of respondents reported fearing punishment. While all nine respondents reported fearing punishment in any form, seven specifically mentioned punishment through eternal damnation. The idea that one may be punished simply because of their LGBT identity is overwhelmingly alarming. One third of respondents, in fact, reported fearing physical violence or actually encountering physical violence based on their sexual minority identity.

One respondent discussed, at length, his experience with actual violence in school. Prior to a transgender identity, Alex was assumed to be a butch lesbian and was treated poorly at school. “And I didn't even look the way I look now in school; I had long blonde hair, even if I did dress a bit tomboyish. But it's not like I was going around pinching girls' butts or anything like that. And, uh, I got slammed against the lockers. People, uh, told me not to talk to their girlfriends. I actually sat down at the lunch table one time and everybody got up and moved. So, I was like one person at a seat of thirty. And I was just like, stuck my head down as far as I could into my mashed potatoes and ate until lunch was over,” he says.

Alex continues, “I mean, I went to church and I heard them talk about ‘gays go to hell’ and ‘abomination worthy of death’ but I tried to tune it out.” Conversely, Leslie says of her church's messaging about punishment for LGBT lifestyles: “Um, according to the Bible that, if the law was followed like it's in the bible that it would be, you know, a crime worthy of capital punishment.” “Fire and brimstone” and “eternal hellfire” are phrases used by Karen regarding

her family's religious orientation of punishment for LGBT life. Brian recalls of his family's religious orientation:

I remember being very young and told that I was a sissy and that I was going to hell if I was ever in a relationship with someone of the same sex... [resulting in] always going to the alter and praying that, you know, despite how I feel inside, that I wouldn't go to hell if something bad happened to me.

This punishment, whether on Earth or through the suggestion of an eternity in Hell, incorporates Pharr's framework on power and privilege, Foucault's orientation regarding the Panopticon, and Hill Collins' concept of othering. By threatening through tactics of intimidation and fear, Appalachian LGBT persons are identified as not worthy of the love of God and can more readily be dominated. Further, there is a continuous fear of surveillance as God is all-knowing and all-seeing, according to Christian belief. This means that Appalachian LGBT persons of Christian orientation have worry throughout every moment of every day of their lives that they are unloved by God and worthy of an eternity in Hell merely for being whom they are.

Sin and the label of abomination, however, are juxtaposed to Barton's condition of inarticulation. While Christian Appalachians do not want to talk about LGBT identity, they tend to do so only in this one context. Though they are not willing to talk about LGBT life, it appears that there is a central concept to talk about the wrongness of LGBT life. For example, Kim Davis, the Rowan County, Kentucky, Clerk who refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, both resides and works in Central Appalachia and utilized her religious beliefs as a foundation by which to discriminate.

In Appalachia, those who gain political success require the support of the religious population. Therefore, most candidates tend to foster conservative stances, at least publicly, on most conversations regarding social justice and equality. To support marriage equality, for example, would be political suicide in that voters will remember that at the polls and will vote

for a candidate who aligns more closely with their moral values, regardless of experience, qualifications or capabilities. These are examples of institutional support that perpetuates homophobia throughout the region. Kim Davis is merely the one example who gained national news; many other County Clerks refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples prior to the changes releasing Clerks from the requirements to sign those documents.

Homelessness

Matthew Desmond's "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City" has much to say regarding homelessness. In fact, the epilogue opens by saying "The home is the center of life... We say that at home, we can 'be ourselves'... Everywhere else, we are someone else... At home we remove our masks," (Desmond 293). He furthers that "it is where our identity takes root and blossoms, where as children, we imagine, play, question, and as adolescents, we retreat and try," (Desmond 293). Yet, the concept of homelessness emerged among one third of respondent interviews conducted as part of my research.

Homelessness, in this case, can be related directly to isolation and punishment. Many LGBT persons encounter rejection by family after coming out. In fact, eight of the nine respondents in this study reported fears of isolation or abandonment. For LGBT youth and young adults who live with family, it is not uncommon to be kicked out of the family home if the family does not approve of LGBT identity. In other cases, the mere fear of rejection causes some to voluntarily leave their homes. While places like New York and Los Angeles have programs like the True Colors Fund provides housing to homeless LGBT youth, Appalachian youth lack widespread access to social support systems and programs that fight homelessness, among numerous other issues.

Two respondents, Brian and Karen, reported that they were homeless as a result of their sexual orientation. Another, Eric, spoke about his fear that his family would retaliate with homelessness if they found out that he was gay. One third of respondents indicated that a fear of homelessness modified their coming out to family and friends. It is not inconceivable to believe that many respondents who feared isolation and abandonment actually worried about homelessness, though they did not identify this directly through interview responses.

Karen reported homelessness as a result of her identity as LGBT:

But I know a lot of people who thought their parents would be super accepting and as soon as the words came out of their mouth, they [parents] kicked them [LGBT child] out. I mean, it's incredibly disheartening. I've seen both sides. And I've definitely seen the side that wants nothing to do with you after it's out there. I was on the street for a while and I've seen plenty of street kids that were gay and kicked out because they were gay.

Another respondent, Brian, discussed with the interviewer, after the conclusion of the interview, that he slept on a park bench periodically after graduating high school as a result of not being welcomed back into his brother's home.

Though homelessness is attributed to both punishment and isolation, I find that Bernadette Barton's theoretical orientation can be applied as an explanatory factor. It is likely that Appalachian families prefer to not speak of LGBT life and the admission of sexual minority identity often leads to shock. It is possible that this shock leads to thoughtless reactions by family members. The immediate reaction to violating the tradition of inarticulation is to remove the perpetrator. This could well lead to homelessness by knee-jerk reaction. Further, it is possible that this condition of inarticulation is perpetuated by a lack of appropriate examples of stable LGBT life, especially in Appalachian communities.

Media

I cannot overstate the importance of media to respondents. The implications of media were discussed frequently among two thirds of respondents. Many report an increase in the presence of positive LGBT characters in mainstream media. In fact, five of the respondents suggested that they believe the media is a central platform that encourages Appalachian LGBT youth and young adults to come out to family and friends. Various forms of media emerged throughout the interview process but television and movies appear to have been the most impactful.

Some respondents discussed the modification of the appearance of LGBT characters in the media over time. Christopher notes that the library of movies positively depicting LGBT characters has emerged with the availability of online streaming platforms, thus making these appearances more widely available. When discussing the implications of LGBT-affirming media, Eric said, “So, it’s just, it’s just been [made] easier for them to come out at a younger age. For me, it would have been, if I was able to come out at that age I probably, my life would probably be different.” Leslie says, “I think you see a lot more real people portrayed...instead of it being like a walking stereotype like some of the ones. You’re seeing more real people with more real issues.”

Media depictions such as this are exceptionally important in the fight for equality for transgender men and women, whom struggle with acceptance and are alarmingly more susceptible to forms of domination and oppression. Alex recalls a television show regarding a female-to-male transition experience for a young transman:

I watched a show about a young girl who is female to male trans and her mom put her on, um, this pill to keep her breasts from developing. And to keep her from going through

puberty, like PMS and stuff like that, until she could be old enough to start testosterone. And I am so jealous. I was like ‘this kid is like six and already has accomplished more transition than I ever will in my life.

Theoretically, I find that media provides relief from Barton’s condition of inarticulation. New media positively depicts LGBT characters leading lives that Appalachian LGBT persons are often taught is impossible; lives filled with success and love, not lives of despair and failure. It is also likely that the depiction of LGBT characters is modifying the way in which heterosexual family and friends view the lives of LGBT persons and could be leading to a greater level of acceptance than previously conceived. Purdue University researchers Jane Campbell and Theresa Carilli evaluate the implications of media in the coming out process in their edit of *Queer Media Images: LGBT Perspectives*. They say, “Coming out in a culture of silence has never been an easy task,” but later summarize that “we [they] believe that the LGBT community is in the formative process of constructing a media identity – one that breaks away from being either a tragic oddity or a predator,” (2013: 2-3). Various media provide the articulation necessary to negate Barton’s condition of inarticulation.

“Dirty”- Unclean

Patricia Hill Collins’ concept of othering suggests that one of the principal mechanisms by which others are dominated is by the assignment of non-human qualities or the depiction of a person with qualities that are not of equal social value. For example, to suggest that someone is evil, especially in a Christian Appalachia, is to assign qualities associated with Satan and Hell. Thus, the person with those non-human qualities are viewed as non-human; they are something other. Reducing their human qualities makes it easier to justify domination. It is rather obvious that LGBT persons, especially in Appalachia, have been dominated throughout time.

Some respondents reported that LGBT life in Appalachia is thought of as abnormal, or as *dirty*. While the general concept of dirty does not seem overwhelmingly alarming, its implications here are. First, the word is used to describe something unclean and not of appropriate quality. Next, the word implies that one is disgusting or perverted. Finally, the HIV positive status has long been referred to as dirty, suggesting that those with the illness are unclean, not of appropriate quality and flawed. Thus, dirty suggests that that LGBT persons are somehow non-human and must be dominated and modified into something clean.

Three respondents, or one third, used this very word to discuss how others viewed them and, thus, how they viewed themselves. Emma had the most significant discussion on the concept of dirty. She says:

I felt dirty and ashamed about any sexual feeling I had, regardless as to if they were heterosexual or bisexual. My bisexual feelings brought me more shame. But that shame was felt for any feeling that I now realize is natural. Sex, in any fashion, was dirty, according to my grandmother. I can remember being about 5. I wrapped myself up in a blanket and pretended to be a baby bird hatching from an egg. And I got in trouble. That was *dirty* and not something we talk about. Anything outside of heterosexuality was wrong and it was treated to be one of the worst sins imaginable, at least to my grandmother and the other religious people in my family. They didn't have open-minded views on sex, period, so anything outside of 'normal' heterosexual activist was, just, sin.

Aside from Hill Collins' interpretation, the refusal to talk about or acknowledge an act that is dirty is quite obviously associated with Barton's condition of inarticulation. Further, it should be considered that *dirty*, when interpreted as meaning unclean, has Biblical implications. Leviticus, previously addressed in the discussion on abomination, frequently refers to the correlation of cleanliness and salvation. For example, Leviticus identifies shellfish as unclean and, thus, references that consuming shellfish is an abomination. Further, the text describes sexual intercourse with women on their menstrual cycle as unclean and, thus, an abomination.

Finally, we will conclude with statements regarding findings of my research as it applies to the existing body of literature and the implications therein.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I find that religious identity negatively impacts the time at which Appalachian LGBT persons elect to come out to family and friends. Though my own sample size is small, and representative of Barton's (2012) sample, should the experiences of respondents be reflective of a similar regional experience, the data suggests that Appalachian LGBT persons delay coming out to their families, friends and community members who identify as religious when compared to coming out to those who do not identify as religious. Theoretical concepts such as the condition of inarticulation, the Panopticon, and othering act as supporting mechanisms perpetuated by religious family, friends and community members to dominate Appalachian LGBT persons to suppress hopes for equality. Respondents report that these theoretical concepts are perpetuated through: fears of isolation or abandonment; labeling as sinful or as an abomination; threats of punishment, including an eternity in Hell; fears of homelessness or actually being homeless; threats or acts of violence; and labeling as dirty or unclean. Conversely, the depiction of LGBT person in television media and the access of private media may be the central positive force by which Appalachian LGBT persons combat each of the aforementioned concepts.

Recent national data suggests that the average age at which LGBT persons come out of the closet has reduced to 14 years of age (Russell et al, 2016). Survey data collected throughout this research study indicates that the average age at which Appalachian LGBT persons between the ages of 18 and 30 came out to their families and friends was twenty years old. Most would see the delay of six years as unimpactful, a mere fraction of time, and not indicative of some larger concern. However, the age of 20 is on par with national coming out trends reported in the

1970's (Russell et al, 2016). This suggests that coming out trends in Appalachia is only now on par with those reported nationally more than four decades ago.

This study evaluated whether the time or method by which Appalachian LGBT persons come out to family and friends is modified by the influence of religious ideologies, identities and statements. Data collected and analyzed throughout this study tend to support the central thesis and indicate that, if this sample is reflective of the experience of all Appalachian LGBT persons, Christian influences modify the time, at minimum, at which Appalachian LGBT persons elect to publicly identify their sexual minority identity. Theoretical applications have been employed to explain these influences, further confirming the likelihood that Appalachian LGBT identity is delayed as a result of religious influence. Theories regarding domination, race, and feminist thought have been utilized as explanatory models to support this claim.

The use of the grounded theory method and focused coding revealed a series of implications that further explain this central thesis. Those implications (isolation and abandonment, sin and abomination, punishment and hell, homelessness, media, violence, and *dirty*) have proven to be effective indicators of the intersections of region, religion and sexual identity. Further, each of these implications illustrate the intersections of region, religion and sexual identity.

Perhaps a new line of inquiry, one specifically vested in the lives of LGBT Appalachians, may be of use in the fight for equality inside our own region. Though it may appear, superficially, that LGBT life has become easier both here and elsewhere, there are recent reminders to suggest that the fight for equality is still raging. The 49 lives lost and countless others altered at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando less than two years ago provides sufficient

evidence to support this claim. While it may be questioned how that incident connects with this study, the world of electronic media has linked our social position to those throughout the nation and around the globe.

Much like the Hillbilly Highway, in which mass outmigration saw the departure of hundreds of thousands of Appalachians in search of better lives, it is my belief that there has been a great outmigration of Appalachian LGBT persons that has gone unnoticed for decades. The cultural constraints and religious implications presented here suggest that this may be so and is worth further examination. This may well be one of the aggravating factors; Appalachian LGBT youth seek positive LGBT role models and have virtually nowhere to turn, thus forcing them to explore freedom in metropolitan destinations around the country.

In conclusion, I find that my central thesis is correct: region and religion impact the time and method by which Appalachian LGBT persons elect to come out of the closet. I do recognize that my sample size is small, though. As such, I propose that additional research is warranted, though I might recommend a larger sample size. Further, it is realistic to believe that the experiences of gay men, lesbians, bisexual men, bisexual women, transgender men and transgender women are unique by sexual minority identity. Thus, each of these identities could reflect a line of inquiry worthy of detailed research.

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