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## Healing the Encounter between People and Place in Southern Appalachia

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Healing the Encounter between People and Place in Southern Appalachia:

A Literature Review

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Mental Health Counseling & Expressive Arts Therapy

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## Abstract

In southern Appalachia, we fail to make visible the roots. Existing not as a geographical location but as a socially constructed culture and a concentrated source of exploited energy, the region reflects a necessary element of the postcolonial American imagination. For nationally lucrative resources such as coal, oil, lumber, and natural gas to be extracted without consideration or consciousness for the people and the place of its origin, the otherized Appalachian stereotype must prevail. Further crystalizing this false construction, white Appalachian scholars traditionally address current health disparities via the victimization of poor white Appalachia. The capitalist initiative to concentrate power and privilege may therefore be evidenced by the elimination of white Appalachia's historical role and responsibility in the colonization of indigenous peoples, the dehumanization of enslaved peoples, and the acts of hate and violence against people of color today. In this paper, I explore current literature on Appalachian Studies, historical trauma theory, art-based social action, and anti-oppressive practice to make visible the roots of social suffering and begin unearthing and transforming historical trauma buried within the land.

## Healing the Encounter between People and Place in Southern Appalachia:

### A Literature Review

I immerse within this topic in response to a need for the historically rooted trauma of southern Appalachia, my childhood home, to be unearthed and transformed through arts-based anti-oppressive practice. Current research suggests that present day social suffering for individuals, families, and communities can be traced to collective trauma experienced by past generations (Bezo & Maggi, 2015). In southern Appalachia, the collective trauma of past generations flows thickly in the bodies of the oppressed, in the hands of the oppressors, and in the depths of its land and water. Yet, white Appalachian scholars continuously construct a narrative of the region which amplifies the exploitation of poor white rural America and expunges the underlying cultural landscape. Through the highly malleable tool of historical trauma theory, contemporary social relations, subjectivities, and processes of healing may be understood through deepened exploration of indigenous and colonial histories (Maxwell, 2014).

Using historical trauma theory as a tool, as opposed to a diagnosis, space expands for the truth of indigenous peoples, enslaved peoples, and their systematically invisibilized descendants to emerge from the soil. As expressed by Black Appalachian author Frank X Walker in the namesake poem of his book *Affrolachia* (2000), "...being 'colored,' and all is generally lost somewhere between the dukes of hazard and the beverly hillbillies" (p. 92).

The trauma imposed upon indigenous peoples and enslaved peoples by European settlers continues to violently cycle through new generations. Simultaneously, the Appalachian stereotype, that so effectively otherizes a poor white people, further enables the racial caste system of white supremacy. Constructing the term *Affrilachian*, Walker noted "a responsibility to

say as loudly and often as possible that people and artists of color are part of the past and present of the multi-state Appalachian region extending from northern Mississippi to southern New York” (Douglas, 2019, p. 1). By challenging the notion of a homogeneous all-white landscape in southern Appalachia, Walker disrupts the current schema and makes space for deconstruction of the American imagination.

Further disrupting this schema is author, feminist, teacher, and scholar bell hooks (2016) who expresses how the restoration of exploited land supports healing the wounds of colonization, slavery, and white supremacy. In a book of essays engaging home place, agriculture, land, and racism, hooks explains how purchasing an expanse of land from her childhood roots symbolized the reclamation of her African American Appalachian past. In this process of reclamation, hooks (2016) specifies that she does not wish to work the land but rather “move the land beyond violation” (p. 1).

The realities of Appalachia’s diverse cultural landscape remain compounded by the larger narrative that dictates white supremacy. Exemplifying this narrative is white Appalachian author Kevin D. Williamson (2019), who coins the term “Big White Ghetto” as he notes,

Thinking about the future here and its bleak prospects is not much fun at all, so instead of too much black-minded introspection you have the pills and the dope, the morning beers, the endless scratch-off lotto cards, healing meetings up on the hill, the federally funded ritual of trading cases of food-stamp Pepsi for packs of Kentucky’s Best cigarettes and good old hard currency, tall piles of gas-station nachos, the occasional blast of meth, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, petty crime, the draw, the recreational making and

surgical unmaking of teenaged mothers, and death...if the people here weren't 98.5 percent white, we'd call it a reservation. (p.1)

Jill M. Fraley, Appalachian History scholar, also details the American imaginative in the Appalachian construction. In "Appalachian Stereotypes and Mountaintop Removal," Fraley (2007) specifies,

In the American imagination, Appalachia exists as a wholly formed entity, one created by generations of stereotypes and condescension. In the American imagination, Appalachia is no place to go on vacation. Appalachia is a place to avoid, perhaps even a place to fear. Appalachia is dirty, ugly, unkempt, and decidedly different from the rest of the country. Those are the hallmark ideas of Appalachia that Americans remember from the so-called war on poverty in the 1960s. Dirty children. Moonshine bottles on the porch. Collapsing shacks. Appalachia is a place to escape from, not a place to live." (p. 365)

With this highly stigmatized understanding of a people and place, the caste system triumphantly prevails. By examining the current literature on historical trauma theory, arts-based social action, and anti-oppressive practice, I strive to make visible the roots of social suffering and begin unearthing and transforming historical trauma buried within the land.

### **Literature Review**

White Appalachian scholars historically focus upon capitalist exploitation and health disparities among poor white "Appalachian culture." It is in this way that the community of America's poor remains divided by race. It is in this way that models of Appalachian revitalization continue to ignore the original sins buried deep within the soil. Yet even in the

midst of monolithic othering, significant threads of Appalachian research strive to liberate the stories from the land. Most notably in the academic chasm is Appalachian Studies scholar Barbara Ellen Smith.

In 2004, Smith's "The De-Gradations of Race" challenged academia's collective consciousness by examining the making of Appalachia as a profoundly racial process. By analyzing the relative inattention to race in Appalachian Studies, Smith (2004) reveals the reluctance to examine the contemporary social positions and actions of whites in racial terms and then reviews the following three common tendencies within Appalachian Studies that contribute to the evasion of whiteness:

1. A pervasive "race relations" perspective, whereby race is viewed as operative only in settings where people of color are present. When they are absent, as is the case in many areas of contemporary Appalachia, race and racism are deemed irrelevant and the "racial innocence" of white Appalachians is preserved.
2. A persistent "class over caste" perspective, whereby race and class are defined as separable and class is superordinate.
3. A failure to situate pejorative stereotypes of white, working-class Appalachians within a larger critique of racism and white supremacy, which is bypassed in favor of the inaccurate and highly misleading position that "hillbillies" are, in effect, a racial minority.

By critically examining the history and contemporary experiences of all Appalachians through the lens of race, Smith (2004) argues that we can claim a race-conscious perspective that

explores the ways that race intersects with depictions of white working class Appalachians and aids in preserving the social positions and experiences of all social classes. Smith (2004) suggests that this elevated consciousness will reveal new alliances and comparative research for the field of Appalachian Studies. Rather than perpetuating a monolithic sense of regional distinction, a race-conscious perspective on Appalachia would deconstruct a foundational archetype for the system of White Supremacy (Smith, 2004).

Further expanding the conversation, Smith partnered with Syracuse professor Jamie Sanders in 2010 for the publication “New Pasts: Historicizing Immigration, Race, and Place in the South.” Seeking a disruption of America’s “Old South” ideology, Smith and Sanders (2010) examine how recent immigrants, especially those from Latin America, have transformed key aspects of the US South. As recent Latino immigrants seek to make sense of their experiences in the South, they question “how southern histories are mobilized to define and interpret the present, how southern pasts are rendered accessible and meaningful, and how new groups gain or lose legitimacy as “southern” (Smith and Sanders, 2010, p. 1). By interlacing southern studies and studies of immigration, the black-white racial binary that serves to stabilize the South as a coherent and distinctive place is disrupted in the American imagination (Smith and Sanders, 2010).

Connecting Appalachia to arts-based healing, Barbara Ellen Smith and Stephen Fisher’s *Transforming Places* (2012) enables individual stories of art, film, and other media to fill the historical absence of accurate representation through a collection of seventeen personal essays. In a roundtable discussion by McCarroll, Anglin, Osborne, Vanlandingham, Burriss, Scott, Swanson, and Berry (2014), stereotypes of marginalized groups are found to often be catalysts for reactionary, monolithic counter-images created in self-defense by the groups themselves.

Through the celebration of multiple and contradictory stories, the region's diverse population receives space to express, expand, and further develop their perception and experience of self (McCarroll et al., 2014).

In a chapter by Maureen Mullinax, stories uplift through the Partnerships Affirming Community Transformation (PACT) Project (McCarroll et al., 2014). In PACT, residents, artists, and students of Harlan County and Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College collect stories from the community and produce plays by and for the region (McCarroll et al., 2014). Mullinax writes of the projects as fluid "rather than static 'things'... guided both by where the community has been and where it is possible to go" (McCarroll et al., 2014, p. 27). To move beyond Appalachian stereotypes, PACT addresses contributing issues such as the correlation of poverty and drug addiction (McCarroll et al., 2014). The plot of the PACT plays comes directly from interviews with Harlan Countians to create works that both reveal and challenge the problems and contradictions of a place (McCarroll et al., 2014). As the communities begin to recognize their own story in theatrical representation, the community begins to creatively reimagine their future. The impact of PACT exemplifies how activists and directors alike are learning to allow Appalachia's own narrators to dictate the strengths and needs of a community (McCarroll et al., 2014, p. 28). As the collective consciousness of and for a community evolves, the term "solastalgia" then emerges to describe this place-based distress caused by drastic environmental change.

### **Solastalgia**

In 2012, Paige Cordial, Ruth Riding-Malon, and Hilary Lips of Radford University published an article entitled "The Effects of Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining on Mental

Health, Well-Being, and Community Health in Central Appalachia.” Through the lens of ecopsychology, the effects of mountaintop removal coal mining (MTR), a form of surface mining in which mountaintops are removed to expose coal seams for cheap extraction, are examined across intersections of health (Cordial et al., 2012). Emerging research on mental health implications of MTR suggests that MTR may have significant negative psychological effects upon those living in its shadow. The Appalachian Regional Commission found higher rates of substance abuse and mental health problems in coal mining regions in general than in the rest of Appalachia and reports from those living near MTR suggest that mental health problems such as traumatic stress symptoms, anxiety, insomnia, drug abuse, and depression are significantly elevated (Cordial et al., 2012). By linking reports of people living close to MTR sites with research on similar environmental problems, Cordial et al. (2012) support the need for evidence-based research to examine the earth-related mental health problem of solastalgia. In solastalgia, the sense of place for a community distorts as both the landscape and the expectations of the land become unfamiliar (Cordial et al., 2012).

In 2018, Hedda Haugen Askland and Matthew Bunn critically engaged with the concept of solastalgia to cultivate a greater understanding of, and direction for, the experience of place-based distress. Observing a small village of New South Wales with three large open-cut coal mines expanding through the landscape, Askland and Bunn (2018) suggest a sense of dissonance that place-based distress constructs between past experiences, present realities and future ideas of sociality sense of self in place. As noted by the environmental philosopher Albrecht,

It is the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifest in an attack

on one's sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychology desolation) about its transformation.

In the context of Appalachian healing, solastalgia helps to illuminate the complex roots of mental, physical, and community health. Historical trauma theory thus rises as a necessary tool for connecting the roots of the past to the suffering of the present.

### **Historical Trauma Theory**

In a longitudinal study by Litvak-Hirsch & Bar-On (2006), narrative analysis was used to investigate the influence of the Holocaust on three generations of women across twenty families. The researchers, aiming to trace processes of development and change in the perception of self and relationships with others, returned to the question, “Tell me your life story, starting from anywhere you prefer,” with one family, twelve years later (p. 465). The researchers’ analysis, meant to identify themes of development, integrated Lieblich et al.’s (1998) approach to holistic content analysis; Gergen’s (1992) structural methodology, which examines life stories according to the models of advancement, regression, or stability in the structure of the story and its development; and Rosenthal’s (1993) analytical approach emphasizing the components of content and form (Litvak-Hirsch & Bar-On, 2006). Then placing the analyzed data within the context of Erik Erikson’s psychosocial developmental stages, the study evolved into unexpected themes of intergenerational trauma. Findings were comprised of possible psychological consequences of a trauma transference that occurs when a survivor entrusts a story to their child; the impact of a strong “theme” or “motto” for resilience; and the socialization across generations.

Informed by patterns of collective trauma found in survivors and their descendants from studies including the Holocaust, Bezo & Maggi (2015) examined whether collective trauma

experienced during the Holodomor continues to exert an intergenerational impact. Researchers used historical trauma theory as a tool for gathering how first, second, and third generation Ukrainians perceived the impact of the Holodomor, a man-made famine in the Soviet Union that killed millions of Ukrainians between 1932 and 1933.

Through a series of 45 semi-structured in-depth interviews with survivors and descendants of the Holodomor, thematic analysis revealed that a constellation of emotions, inner states and trauma-based coping strategies emerged in the survivors during the genocide period. This constellation, summarized by participants as living in survival mode, included horror, fear, mistrust, sadness, shame, anger, stress and anxiety, decreased self-worth, stockpiling of food, reverence for food, overemphasis on food and overeating, inability to discard unneeded items, an indifference toward others, social hostility and risky health behaviors. When thematic analysis then examined interviews of the second and third generations of the genocide, the constellation of emotions and behaviors, intended to cope a period of survival, emerged almost identically.

Giving credence to the notion that a distinction needs to be made between individual and collective traumas, in terms of definition and healing, the results reflect that collective trauma and its intergenerational transmission affects not only the individual, but also the family and community-society. In the present sociopolitical context, trauma afflicted on the individual receives significant clinical and political recognition through the DSM's construction of posttraumatic stress disorder. When the second and third generations of the traumatic stress exhibit the inherited PTSD symptoms, misguided diagnoses then enable misguided treatment. Through continued research using historical trauma theory as a tool, multi-level frameworks that include the individual, the family system, and the greater community can begin to gain the clinical and political recognition that so significantly altered the trajectory for individuals

experiencing PTSD. In contrast to the tendency for historical trauma theory to concentrate on those acute traumas which devastate a whole people within a concentrated period of time, Bolton, Surkan, Gray & Desmousseaux (2012) sought to redirect the conversation of Haitian trauma from acute to chronic and complex.

In 2010, the people of Haiti experienced an earthquake with a catastrophic magnitude of 7.0. Consequentially, the attention on mental health and psychosocial problems in Haiti immediately concentrated to an origin of the January 2010 earthquake (Bolton et. al, 2012). The history of Haiti's chronic organized violence and ongoing civil unrest disappeared from the psychosocial equation. Bolton, Surkan, Gray & Desmousseaux (2012) utilized historical trauma theory to explore the 200 years of complex trauma to make meaning of the present-day suffering. The purpose of the study was to understand how local people affected by the violence view its effects, particularly, the resulting mental health and psychosocial problems. The team of researchers focused on information of programmatic importance such as descriptions of these problems, their severity, their causes, and what victims of violence believe might be effective ways to address these problems. In three key locations, a convenience sample of adults was asked to free list all current problems affecting victims of organized violence.

Through critical thematic analysis, the psychological problems that recurred across key-informant interviews included feeling startled, feeling a loss of self-control, sadness, grief, re-experiencing past events, problems in the head deep suffering in the heart, and "thinking too much" (Bolton et. al, 2012, p. 590). Though the authors systematically related these themes to western constructs of depression, dysthymia, and posttraumatic stress disorder, they resisted corresponding the diagnoses to western interventions and instead identify the next step in

program planning to be an investigation of severity, prevalence, and culturally appropriate interventions.

The studies of the Holodomor and the violence in Northern Haiti offer highly significant strategies for using historical trauma theory as a tool for making meaning of present-day social suffering by reference to the past. In the context of the Holodomor, the researchers concentrated collective trauma to one specific year within a peoples' history. In the context of Northern Haiti, the researchers disrupted the narrative of the earthquake as a root to make visible 200 years of complex trauma. Before southern Appalachia can construct models of research for intergenerational trauma, the collective trauma of cultural displacement and forced enslavement must disrupt the current narrative of poor white Appalachia. Otherwise, we risk falling into the trap of unearthed truth and false healing—a land of milk and honey brutalized and economized by white supremacy; a race war implanted to ensure cooperation. Chief Joseph as cited in Akers (2014) "Decolonizing the master narrative: Treaties and other American myths" notes,

If we ever owned the land we own it still, for we never sold it. In the treaty councils the commissioners have claimed that our country had been sold to the Government. Suppose a white man should come to me and say, "Joseph, I like your horses, and I want to buy them." I say to him, "No, my horses suit me, I will not sell them." Then he goes to my neighbor and says to him, "Joseph has some good horses. I want to buy them, but he refuses to sell." My neighbor answers, "Pay me the money, and I will sell you Joseph's horses." The white man returns to me and "Joseph, I have bought your horses, and you must let me have them." If we sold our lands to the Government, this is the way they were bought." (p. 58)

To move beyond historically misguided patterns and cognitively limiting conceptions, arts-based social action emerges as an act of liberation.

### **Arts-Based Social Action**

The studies of the Holodomor and the violence in Northern Haiti offer highly significant strategies for researching and analyzing the complexity of intergenerational trauma. Extending from research to action, psychotherapist and theater director Armond Volkas (2009) presents an arts-based method for healing the intergenerational wounds between historically oppressed and historically oppressive parties. Conceptualizing historical trauma as internalized energy with the potential for transmutation, Volkas (2009) developed a six-stage model called healing the wounds of history (HWH) to empower the inheritors of trauma through art-making and play (p. 40). By courageously acknowledging the ancestral history and unearthing the embodied emotions, Volkas suggests that participants may be liberated from the trauma and transmute the energy through acts of creation or acts of service. Volkas assists the participants to find their own paths of alchemy, and thereby expresses his enlightenment of natural transformative principles found during his 1995 pilgrimage to Auschwitz. Volkas (2009) notes, "...the horror of the ashes of the cremated bodies scattered around the burning fields could be transformed into transcendently beautiful wildflowers," (p. 41).

Because deeply rooted ancestral conflicts are highly emotionally charged and motivated, HWH is founded upon the notion that only when the emotional content of these conflicts is addressed will any real progress toward healing and reconciliation be achieved (Kouttab, 2007). The first and second steps of HWH involve disarming the power of stereotyping by telling personal stories of pain. After each personal story is shared, participants are then invited to step

inside the story and take on the roles represented in the story. Through this psychodramatic technique of “role reversal,” participants connect with the emotional and psychological experience of the teller and inevitably come to the question: “How can I empathize with my enemy and hate him or her at the same time?” (Kouttab, 2007, p. 353). This example of arts-based social action exemplifies not only historical trauma theory in motion but also the imaginative realm’s role in liberation. The investigation continues to unfold through various cultures and textures of arts-based social action to discern potential pathways for disrupting the narrative in southern Appalachia.

Contrasting from Volkas’ model of liberation with and for the participants, Faigin (2015) provides a path for arts to be a vehicle of community education and understanding with the purpose of promoting positive change for individuals with developmental disabilities. Faigin considers the complex interaction between person, setting and community, and uses a grounded theory approach to explore social activism and theatrical activities of a community-based drama troupe. The imaginative realm, through integrated arts practices that include and empower marginalized members of society, are used to shift inhibiting identities of “other” to contributing labels such as “artist” or “teacher” or “leader” (p. 1).

Furthering expressing the path of liberation, Litell & Torres (2011) present on the healing and reconciliation of a community that learns to see and reflect and respond through an awakening of the unconscious. Inspired by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who asserted that oppressed communities are capable of questioning their reality and collectively solving their own problems, Litell & Torres (2011) conducted a study in Nicaragua, with Nicaraguan community members, and that functioned as an accessible model for collaborative inquiry. Beginning with the research question, “what knowledge can arise when a community designs and conducts its

own art-based research to effect social and cultural change,” Litell & Torres (2011) stressed the difference between simply creating art together and creating the capacity to implement social change.

Further empowering the client voice, Slayton (2012) addresses the conditions that inhibit health in a community by seeking to link the facilitation of group art making with building health in communities. Gathering a multicultural adolescent group with complex experiences of trauma, the study exposes pathways for building community through a mutual exchange of respectful interactions with art product as the container. Slayton calls for further investigation of small group transference and larger life experience.

Transitioning from models of inquiry to a model of praxis, Marx & Delport (2017) present a case study in South Africa which contemplates self-transformation for larger social change. Through active, bodily involvement, the multicultural group engaged in exploration of individual identity in relation to the other. The group experienced sameness in difference, reflecting South Africa’s motto of “Unity in Diversity.” Marx & Deport concluded that positive social change may be implemented by heightening awareness of the self and how it relates to others and adjusting the approach to interpersonal relations

Helping to ground future therapists of the field, Wittig (2012) presents an education intervention for graduate level groups to relates therapeutic theories to the larger social and environmental context. The study is constructed on two collective principles. First, the way in which small groups, providing safe space for stories to be held and conflicts to be addressed, may act as microcosms for global context. Second, the importance of not only engaging students in group process but also relating that process to larger contexts of social justice and societal

change. Through play experientials of trust walks, flocking, and group art collaboration, Wittig promotes the importance of collective liberation to begin from within.

Summing up this collection of current research surrounding arts-based social action, Yass, Spiegel, Lockhart, Fels, Boydell & Marcuse (2016) addresses ethical issues of arts in community across the spectrum of social contexts. Formulating the study around concern for tensions that arise within an interdisciplinary team of artists, counselors, community partners, and researchers, Yass et. al stress potential damaging consequences for a community.

Concluding that each intervention must be formulated through community-led dialogues that cultivate ethically sound approaches, the study exemplifies the need for arts-based social action to begin with community-driven arts-based research. Current arts-based research within Appalachia, including methods of urban development and cultural restoration, provide opportunity for critically analyzing strengths and needs of place-specific efforts.

### **Arts- Based Research and “Urban Appalachian” Development**

Focusing on the narrative of inclusive community building, Thomas, Pate, & Ranson (2014) present the case study of an arts organization using place-making for an urban neighborhood revitalization effort in Memphis, Tennessee. Grounded in a mission to strengthen the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking seeks to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community (Thomas et. al, 2015). Using a collaborative process of arts-based research, the community navigated through the framework of shaping their public realm in order to maximize shared value. The case study thus considers how the notions of social and creative friction are taken up in site-specific strategies

that attend to relational and spatial dimensions of community building including bridging social capital and place attachment (Thomas et. al, 2015).

Using systematic participant observation, interviews with stakeholders, and a review of historical and contemporary media coverage, the authors established prolonged engagement with the setting which allowed for triangulation of multiple sources of evidence and inclusion of local meanings. In the arts-based research process of collecting emerging themes, creative and social friction emerged through overlapping notions of art and community. Of most concern was the feeling that arts-based economic development and growth ultimately promotes gentrification, displacement, and marginalization of a city's low-income residents. As explained by one resident, "all the development projects [in Memphis] are trying to attract the same people. You aren't creating any more wealth; you aren't addressing systemic poverty" (Thomas et. al, 2015, p. 84).

For the quality of arts-based practice to support the true nature of a community, Thomas et. al (2015) emphasizes an essential examination of themes including belonging and ownership, the artist identity, economic benefactors, and community psychology research (p. 86). By utilizing the conclusions of this study, placemaking maintains a potential method for disrupting the narrative of southern Appalachia. Paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution, placemaking facilitates not just urban design but also creative patterns of use (Thomas, et. al, 2015). With this critical perspective of how arts-based community development may inhibit the true nature of a people and place, Dockery (2013) then shares how arts-based community projects can may help to preserve a cultural narrative and construct intergenerational communion. Yet, notwithstanding criticism, the study also continues the false monocultural identity of the poor white Appalachian.

### **Arts-Based Research and “Appalachian Culture” Preservation**

In the Appalachian community of Lumpkin County, Georgia, the endangered tradition of sharing and planting heirloom seeds inspired the construction of the annual demonstration garden, Saving Appalachian Gardens and Stories (SAGAS) (Dockery, 2013). Seeking to preserve cultural history by interviewing seed donors about gardening traditions and foodways of Southern Appalachia, the demonstration then prompted the 2012-2013 Appalachian teaching project, Heirloom Seed and Story Keepers: Growing Community and Sustainability through Arts-Based Research. The project, born as a reciprocal learning opportunity, joins undergraduate students and community members for conceptualizing how heirloom seed gardening literally and metaphorically supports the development of Lumpkin County.

To ground the learning project, seed collecting and interview protocol were structured and examined via formats yielding scientific reproducibility. The compiled data that included interview transcripts, images, maps, seeds, and invitations for more interviews and return visits, transformed the project into a domain of arts-based research (Dockery, 2013). Promoting the generation of an expressive form that enables someone to secure empathic participation in the lives of other people and the situation studied, arts-based research methods inspired interactive listening sessions in which students would read aloud interview transcripts of a seed keeper's story verbatim, listening for visual metaphor and emerging themes. The responses were used as the basis for creating a collaborative artwork called a "communograph" (Dockery, 2016, p.215). The students thus co-created a methodology for both analyzing the data and promoting further communication with community members. The project became a bridge in which the community at large was asked to offer knowledge about problems of food diversity and sustainability through both the initial interviews and the subsequent conversations at the exhibit.

Both examples of art-based Appalachian development promise an origin of community voice; however, the first study provoked fears of cultural displacement while the second study provoked a sense of cultural communion and pride. What differed? Perhaps it is the vulnerable terrain between question and action that either uplifts or snuffs a peoples' voice. For arts-based inquiry, research, and development to be authentic and inclusive, the goal must be simply to make visible the truth. In an effort to move beyond community models suppressed by the standards of white supremacy, arts-based anti-oppressive practice partners with the tool of historical trauma theory to embed future research within ethical and holistic frameworks of investigation and healing.

### **Arts-Based Research and Anti-Oppressive Practice**

Striving towards this ideal of making visible the truth, music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice emerged from Indigenous Theory and Aesthetic Theory and continues to evolve in relation to feminist theories, Post-Colonialism, Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory, and Sexuality Studies. In a study by Baines & Edwards (2018), a Constructivist Grounded Theory method was guided by the question, “what are the experiences of residents and staff in music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice?” (p. 1). Defining anti-oppressive practice as a systematic approach created to disassemble inequality and promote inclusive practices and acknowledging that all knowledge is socially constructed and political, the standard of deep and critical reflection was engaged on each procedure and step in the research. Proposing that music therapy as an anti-oppressive practice may act as a vehicle for amplifying client voice, the researchers found the anti-oppressive practice of using client preferred music experiences energetically correlated with the integration of client preference through all aspects of programming. Through open interviewing and the sequential clustering of codes, themes

emerged to support the residents and staff as experiencing each other as musical beings as opposed to patrons and receptors of health.

Light was shed upon the capacity for expressive arts therapy practitioners to make visible and intervene upon oppressive policy and relational dynamics through increased cultural humility between oppressed and oppressive populations. The anti-oppressive practice approach to documentation, community planning, music therapy initiatives, and recommendations for on-going music-based supports were valued by both staff and resident research participants which supports the sustainability of a method serving to amplify the client's voice and enhanced health.

Acting not just in the microsphere of the settings but also in the macrosphere of the arts and therapy field, the anti-oppressive practice approach challenges current clinicians and researchers of creative art therapies to utilize the arts for making current structures of oppression visible, thoroughly and methodologically analyzing these structures, and creatively reimagining the dynamics of the relationship (Baines & Edwards, 2018).

Deepening the discussion of anti-oppressive practice into the realm of existing traumatic symptoms, Karcher and Caldwell (2014) engage in arts-based research for liberating trauma from both the oppressed and the oppressors. Guided by a bodily framework, researcher Karcher and dance movement therapist Caldwell describe a somatic experience as not just biological but also social, emotional, and psychological. They asked the questions, "what, then, are the somatic effects of oppression," "how can oppression influence how we carry, think about, and care about our bodies," and "how might we research these questions in ways that embody methods that give the body a direct and empowered voice," Caldwell then calls upon the anti-oppressive practice philosophy to conclude, "how might we use the answers to these questions as leverage for social

change?” (Karcher & Caldwell, 2014, p. 479). Using grounded theory, the study compiled semi-structured qualitative interviews with 30 participating co-researchers who identify as disabled, LGBTQ, a person of color, or as occupying other oppressed identities to examine the lived experiences of oppression in a somatic context. One such coresearcher was Owen Karcher, who was transitioning physically and socially from female to male and was using art as a way to understand and explore his identity and somatic experience.

Over the course of eight months, Karcher and Caldwell engaged in three in-depth interviews that captured Karcher’s experience of oppression as a transgender person, his experience of transition, and his feelings and attitudes about his body (Karcher & Caldwell, 2015). This data was then alchemized into a multi-arts production to communicate the emerging themes. The duo stressed that when examining injustice and marginalization, the research method must be an embodied social action. They then observed a sense of healing that occurs when victims of injustice transmute data into personal expression. They found that the transformational effect strengthens when presented through arts-based events where the community can participate directly.

Similar to the philosophy of Volkas’ “Healing the Wounds of History,” Caldwell & Karcher (2015) propose that emotional responses to the personal narratives of oppression may play an important part in societal transformation. As a result of the yearlong journey with Owen, Caldwell expressed an experience of personal transition from an ally-in-theory to an embodied advocate. Though the personal and societal implications of these studies support the significant effects of relationships guided by artistic process, the weight continues to fall upon the oppressed for grace and education.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Existing not as a geographical location but as a socially constructed culture and a concentrated source of exploited energy, southern Appalachia reflects a necessary element of the postcolonial American imagination. For lucrative resources such as coal, oil, lumber, and natural gas to be extracted without consideration or consciousness for the people and the place of its origin, the otherized Appalachian stereotype must prevail. Further crystalizing this false construction, white Appalachian scholars traditionally address current health disparities through the victimization of poor white Appalachia. The capitalist initiative to concentrate power and privilege may therefore be evidenced by the elimination of white Appalachia's historical role and responsibility in the colonization of indigenous peoples, the dehumanization of enslaved peoples, and the acts of hate and violence against people of color today. In this paper, I explored current literature on Appalachian Studies, historical trauma theory, art-based social action, and anti-oppressive practice to make visible the roots of social suffering and begin unearthing and transforming historical trauma buried within the land.

Upon finding Krista Maxwell's "Historizing Historical Trauma Theory," I centered upon this conception of historical trauma theory not as a diagnosis but as a tool for unearthing the indigenous and colonial histories of a particular place for reference to the social suffering in its present. In the case of southern Appalachia, I experience the unprocessed collective trauma upon, within, and between its people as directly impacting the disconnection, exploitation, and ultimate destruction of land. Likewise, I experience the unprocessed disconnection, exploitation, and ultimate destruction of land as directly impacting the collective trauma upon, within, and between its people. It is my belief that until southern Appalachian research begins to

courageously name its history and address present symptomologies with an intergenerational lens, cycles of oppression will continue.

The qualitative studies involving the Holocaust, the Holodomor, and the violence in Northern Haiti offer strategies for researching and analyzing the complexity of intergenerational trauma. Through analysis of these approaches, interviewing both family and community members across generations consistently presents with correlations for past and present symptomology. Additionally, the tool of narrative analysis extended as opportune for assessing not only correlating themes but also themes of development, regression, and stability. Future research in southern Appalachia could begin with interviews in the smallest realm of the intergenerational family yet expand across the spectrum of white, Black, and indigenous households. From Litvak-Hirsch & Bar-On (2006), “Tell me your life story, starting from anywhere you prefer.”

Extending towards the realm of arts-based research, Thomas et al. (2015) and Dockery (2014) provided formative examples, through both mistakes and best practice, for how to engage the whole of a community in expression and ongoing communication. As expressed in the concluding notes of Thomas et al., arts-based research with and for a community must be grounded in the themes of belonging and ownership, the artist identity, economic benefactors, and community psychology research. With this community ideology upheld, the research method of placemaking assumes particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution. Then through arts-based experientials such as the “communagraph” in Dockery (2015), data gathered with and through a community can be expressed in a way that invites celebration and conversation. As found by Karcher and Caldwell

(2014), the transformational effect strengthens when presented through arts-based events where the community can participate directly.

So where *exactly* do we go from here? In a region experiencing the highest rates of drug abuse, poverty, and disease, how do we include the roots of sin and suffering within our models of intervention? How might the stories of our ancestors influence our economy? What impact could the restoration of land have upon our conception of self? Of community? Of other? Drawing from the spectrum of critical analysis gained from this paper's collected studies, I look towards future research that uses the tool of historical trauma theory for collecting intergenerational and multicultural stories. Qualitative data collection may then be utilized to trace symptoms of trauma across time, locate intergenerational transmissions of solastalgia, and document perceptions of self and other. Through arts-based data analysis techniques, such as those used in Dockery (2015) or Karcher and Caldwell (2014), emerging themes from the community assist in locating and informing anti-oppressive arts-based mediations within each region. To end the cycle of oppression upon a land and a people, we must disrupt not only the imagination of America but also of the defensive narrative we allow in Appalachia. We must contradict assumptions. We must find ways to restore landscape as it burns.

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