

***VOICES at OHIO UNIVERSITY
SPEAK about APPALACHIA***

***Report Two:
Perspectives about Stereotypes***

**Survey Conducted by the Appalachian Faculty
Learning Community, Spring 2004**

Prepared by Sharon A. Denham, DSN
CHHS, School of Nursing
Learning Community Facilitator

April 2005

Perspectives about Stereotypes

Survey respondents provided much information about themselves that offers insight into those who consider themselves Appalachian and the reasons why they do so. A primary reason participants identified as Appalachian is that they were born or raised in the region. Others saw themselves as Appalachian because they reside in a geographic region identified as Appalachia. Still others viewed themselves as Appalachian because of family history, links to ancestors from the region, or to a culture passed through the generations. Many tried to explain what it means to them to be Appalachian. Others described the value of living in the region, but explained why they did not fit stereotypes often held by outsiders.

REASONS PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED AS APPALACHIANS

Participants shared a variety of reasons why they identified as Appalachian. Grounds for identifying with the region were largely based upon (a) ties to family and place, (b) heritage and tradition, and (c) personal values.

Ties to Family and Place

Many respondents indicated they were closely tied to the place where they had ancestral roots and family heritage. For example, one person said, "My father's family came to Mason County W.Va. in the early 1800s on a land grant payment from the federal government in return for my great, great, great, great grandfather's service as North Carolina/Virginia Militia in the Revolutionary War. There are five generations of this family buried in Mason County." Another said, "My family has lived in the area for over 100 years." Another said, "I was born and raised in eastern Tennessee in the foothills of the Smokies. My grandfather and his family are from western North Carolina and he has never let me forget where I have come from and who I am." Still another said, "I have ancestors from southeast Ohio going back four generations." Several indicated that "my family has lived in Appalachia since we first arrived in the United States in the early 1800s."

The importance of ties to family was a recurring theme as respondents shared why they viewed themselves as an Appalachian. One participant shared this information:

I was born in WV and grew up in Columbus. Most of my heritage is Appalachian. My great grandmother lived in a farm house many miles from the nearest paved road and several from the nearest neighbor. My great grandfather was part of the coal miners' strikes in the early part of the century, and my grandfather and father worked in the coal mines after him. My father has since changed career paths, thank goodness, but has scars from the mines. My grandfather died of lung cancer; the mines are thought to be the cause. My best friend's father died in a coal mining accident, when we were very young. My grandmother still feeds us moonshine cake; I still hear it called a "crick" not a creek. And my mother says "you ins" instead of ya'll, and I myself find that I have an accent. For these reasons and many more I am very much tied to this region and the traditions there of.

Obviously, this long family history tied to the region has left an indelible impression as it has for another respondent:

I was born and raised in the foothills of the Appalachians in rural Georgia, and by some definitions that counts. My parents and grandparents (who spent their entire lives in northern Georgia) often spoke proudly of the generations before them (mountain people from North Carolina). I actually regard myself more as a southerner, but some of my experiences while growing up in a poor but fiercely independent household in the rural south seem similar to those of many families in this region.

Still another study participant wrote:

My family has resided in Athens and Vinton County for the past 150+ years. Like many of the families around here, we were Irish immigrants who settled in the region and became coal miners. We still possess many of the traditional Appalachian values--most notably a commitment to hard work and a clannish commitment to family (which means that members of my family RARELY leave the region to pursue better job opportunities, etc.). Like many Appalachians I tend to value family and tradition over social or economic progress.

Family and its associated values were important cultural traits held by those viewing themselves as Appalachian.

A strong sense of place is often cited in the literature as a key cultural characteristic identified in Appalachian persons. Many survey participants provided comments to support this idea. Despite having fewer social advantages than those living in other parts of the nation, Appalachians value their families and homes and tend to stay in Appalachian areas. For example, a student said:

I have always lived in Middleport, Ohio. While my community is not really considered impoverished, we are what I would consider, at an economical disadvantage compared to the rest of the state of Ohio. Coal mines and power plants have dominated our landscape for years. Although the coal mines are gone, the effects are still felt in my community. To me, being Appalachian is not just about where you live. It also entails culture, lifestyle, and life-outlook. Although there are few jobs, our schools seem to be behind (again compared to the rest of the state of Ohio), and environmental issues seem to be swept under the rug and ignored. I am glad I grew up here and continue to live here. In fact, I would not have wanted to live in any other place.

Another student reported:

I live in Zanesville permanently and after visiting and interviewing in big cities such as Cincy or Dayton, I do very much enjoy coming home to "the country" where your pets can run rampant and much of your nourishment comes from the garden in your back yard. I am proud of this tradition and I strongly believe I have a stronger sense of self and appreciation of the simple things in life because of where I grew up. These could be

anything from a beautiful sunset in the evening to the fresh smell of cut grass in the morning.

Still another student wrote:

I know that geographically I am an Appalachian. I don't really feel like I am all the time though. I've lived all my life right here in this same town, and haven't seen much outside of Ohio. Still I consider myself more fortunate than some of the people in the communities around me. I don't really understand all that the Appalachian title entails, but I do understand that this region is not equal to the rest of the United States.

Though many Appalachian residents see the contrasts between the areas where they reside and other parts of the nation, many seem intent on remaining in a region that might offer less social and economic opportunity than other parts of the country.

Heritage and Tradition

Some participants told stories that tied them to their Appalachian cultural heritage. One student said, "My father used to say that, if there were another Great Depression, the people here would not know the difference." A number of contributors wrote such things as "[I am] very proud to be a hillbilly." A student reported:

I live in Gallipolis, Ohio, so I'm right there in the Appalachian beltline. I've grown up; I've done all the old fashioned things learned through generations. For one, every summer, my family makes jelly. That's the only jelly we have also. There is no store bought kind. My grandma also does chair caning, which she taught me how to do a long time ago. I don't really remember now, but I'm thinking it's not too hard. When I spend the night with my grandparents, (they don't have air conditioner) we all go out on the back porch, and tell stories and whatnot. I'd say that we incorporate all of the old fashioned things in with the new activities in ever day life, and that makes us Appalachian. Also, my grandparents live in Meigs County.

Another said: "Although I would characterize myself as a 'non-traditional' Appalachian, that is still my heritage and always will be. No matter how far someone strays from their culture, there are always constants. I feel that Appalachian symbolizes hard work, long-standing traditions, close-knit unity, and the celebration of life." Still another wrote:

I describe myself as an Appalachian because I have lived my life in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in southeast Ohio. I speak the dialect and share the drawl. Though I am not of the deep Appalachian culture I feel a connection with the people with whom I have grown up with and the culture that has surrounded me since birth. Those who know me best refer to me as an 'educated hillbilly' a title with which I have no qualms.

Many participants expressed pride in their Appalachian culture and made strong links to the culture of the region through their family ancestry.

Personal Values

The personal values of Appalachia were noted in many of the shared stories. For example, one student wrote:

I was raised in southern Ohio (Ross County) with values I attribute to Appalachia (i.e. family very important; distrust of outsiders/strangers; what happens in family stays in family - anything other is completely disloyal); bluegrass, country and gospel music was big in my household; we fry every kind of food imaginable; maternal side was 'holy-roller' religious; language (i.e. 'boot' for the part of the car others call the trunk).

A faculty member wrote:

I am a displaced Appalachian American. My mother was born and raised in Eastern Kentucky and my father is from southwestern Virginia. I have lived in southern Ohio since birth. The culture practiced in my home was Appalachian in form and content. I teach Appalachian literature in my classroom whenever I have the opportunity. I play the fiddle and banjo.

Another student wrote: “My entire family grew up in the Mid-Ohio Valley. My values are very rural and family-oriented. I appreciate the little things and don't feel jaded, as many of my urban friends claim to feel.”

Some participants provided life stories that give valuable insight into what it is like being known as an Appalachian. For example, one student reported:

My mother and father have never recognized this term [Appalachia]. This name is an artificial name that implies a funding source because of the special conditions of the "war on poverty" in rural America. I have known that I grew up in Appalachia since the term was introduced in 1965. I was born in 1956 in Athens County. As counties have struggled to survive they have associated with funding sources to bring needed assistance to the poverty belt in Ohio since other resources have not been offered to rural people here. A lack of publicly supplied highway systems and exploitive actions by large corporations has prohibited local people from making economic progress. In my county, 20% of the residents have to leave the county to go to work. I am one of them. I had to leave to find employment and was able to buy land here and settle here but can't find work here. I am an Appalachian because I work in Cleveland and drive back and forth to my home in Hocking County as I have done since 1996 when I could finally afford to purchase land there. I am discriminated against in Cleveland because of my accent and my mannerisms. Yes, they never let me forget, I am an Appalachian.

Another student made an important point about language and Appalachia, an issue that those taking pride in viewing themselves as Appalachian often express: “I know the RIGHT way to pronounce the word Appalachia. Only true Appalachians hold such strong 'opinions' on this. (Although I realize that we can probably never know the true pronunciation!). It is like this: Appa - latch - ia. NOT Appa -laysh - ia or Appa-lash-ia.”

From participant response, it was clear that those associated with Ohio University and living in the region deeply value ties to Appalachia.

APPALACHIAN CONVERTS

It appears that “being Appalachian” has its share of converts. Some move into this region and after time begin to identify with the region and its people. A staff person wrote:

Maybe more like a ‘converted’ Appalachian. Although I grew up in NE Ohio, I have lived in Meigs County since 1980. My interest in life and the type of environment that I wanted to live and raise my kids really meshed with life in Meigs County, I have totally adapted my lifestyle to conform to the local community and environment.

Another person wrote, “I’ve adopted many of the customs and rituals of the Appalachians. I plant a garden, play acoustic music, work hard, etc.” Still another said: “Although not born in this part of the country, I feel I have picked up on some of the customs and language (terms) common to Appalachian folk. My style of communication has been impacted by my exposure to Appalachian culture.”

Comments from some provide insight into diverse perspectives associated with being Appalachian and may help explain why respondents took the time to complete the survey. For example, one participant said: “Although I was not born nor reared in Athens, I live here now. If Athens is on the edge of Appalachia, I consider myself Appalachian because the issues that affect this region affect my life and the lives of my family members.”

Some participants recognized themselves as Appalachian even when they did not reside within an area designated as part of the Appalachian region. For example, a student said: “I do not live in Appalachia nor have I ever. Both of my parents were born and raised for a portion of their childhood in Appalachia. I have many relatives that are also Appalachian. I feel that I was raised and carry with me today many of the Appalachian Peoples Values and Ways of life.”

Another student wrote, “I know what a holler is and understand the dialect as well as being descended from an adopted as well as a biological family who are centralized all along the Appalachian mountains.” A graduate student said, “I am an urban Appalachian, as my parents migrated from the Appalachian region to Cincinnati in the 1950s, during the “great migration” out of the mountains. I use this term as it has been defined by Michael Maloney, Phillip Obermiller, and other Appalachian scholars.” Regardless of the theme discussed, this comment from a respondent seems to summarize the attitude of many that view themselves as Appalachian: “I have strong personal feelings for the region and can not imagine living anywhere else but the Appalachian region.”

APPALACHIAN STEREOTYPES

Living in the region often means that residents have to address the negative and positive impressions that others hold regarding Appalachians. A number of persons wrote comments linked to stereotypes often associated with Appalachians. One person noted, “The Appalachian-American is the last group living in the United States that it is still politically correct to

disparage.” Another said, “Many people outside of Appalachia look down on us and believe we are not equal in knowledge.” Some comments indicated attempts to overcome some of the negative stereotypes associated with the region. For example, one student wrote:

“Demographically: I was born and raised in West Virginia and attend a university in the Appalachian region. However, I am more culturally sophisticated and more educated than many of my peers at this university who are not from the Appalachian area.”

Some participants growing up in the region tried to separate themselves from stereotypical ideas of Appalachians. A student said, “I live and have grown up in what is called the Appalachian area, but I (like most of us in this region) do not fit the stereotype that always seems associated with the Appalachian culture (AKA, uneducated hillbilly).” Another wrote: “I was born in Athens to parents from northern Ohio, making me a first generation Appalachian. My mother was determined that her children wouldn't be 'hillbillies' and made us say 'how now brown cow' every night to ensure that we spoke without a southeastern Ohio accent.” In contrast, a student who said, “Reared in Appalachia, married in Appalachia, work in Appalachia, but never got too big for my britches” was how she described how she had adhered to traits connected with not ‘rising above one's raising.’

Some tried to separate themselves from stereotypical ideas. For example, one respondent said, “Although I am a resident within the region considered Appalachia, I do not normally share the fatalistic views that seem to appear in most of its communities. I believe that things can change with an open mind, as well as more emphasis on a better education. I refuse to believe that these things can't be changed, if even at a slow pace.” Another wrote, “I do not feel that others would label me as Appalachian, as I do not talk or think like a stereotypical Appalachian.” An undergraduate student said, “I went to school in [Appalachian School]. It doesn't mean that I didn't get a quality education.” While a university staff person said, “My family has lived within a 5 mile or less radius for their entire life. I am the first college graduate with a graduate degree in my family.”

Many residents seem concerned about stereotypical ideologies associated with Appalachia. A student wrote: “There is a stereotype that Appalachian equates to poor, white, dirty, dumb, complacent, backward, unskilled, ignorant, country, simple, homely, etc. Continuing this stereotype only places more guilt on the Appalachians for being ignorant enough to not accept diversity.” Another person wrote, “I was raised in Cincinnati, which isn't totally Appalachian, but I enjoy the music and culture.” Still another said, “I have lived in Adams County all of my life. However, I think Appalachian often also refers to the way a person or community acts (i.e. dialect, customs, apparel, etc). Therefore, I do not believe I am Appalachian in my mindset.” Another person said, “I live in the Appalachian area and I have one of the many accents from the area. However, I have never really considered myself a true Appalachian.” These comments are typical of those who might be defined as Appalachian due to local residence, but desire to separate themselves from stereotypes associated with the region.

Many survey participants comment about the ways Ohio University approaches diversity. For instance, a faculty person wrote, “I recently answered a survey about the climate of diversity at OU and mentioned that stereotypes about Appalachian residents are reinforced by comments by the faculty during class. Maybe more education for the faculty would benefit their

understanding of the region and its people and be a step in the direction of building a bridge between OU and the surrounding areas.” Another person pointed out: “Great disparity is evident between the culture, income, and thinking of the university life and the surrounding Appalachian area. For example, OU will host regional high school basketball tournaments, but cultural presentations of Appalachia are left to local county fairs. So, each entity exists in a separate domain.” One student said, “I’m tired of being referred to as a ‘hill-jack.’” While another student said, “The main problem I see is the stereotype of ‘hillbilly.’ It’s disturbing to see a people-group looked at as second-class citizens, especially when one has descended from that group.” The responses participants made in response to this survey indicate that issues associated with stereotypes of Appalachia are of importance to many who work, attend school, and are affiliated with the University.

REASONS NOT TO IDENTIFY AS APPALACHIAN

Many respondents described themselves as not being Appalachian based on where they were born, grew up, or lived. A key reason why many reported they were not Appalachians pertained to their place of permanent residence or where they had spent much of their life. Those aware of the geographical boundaries of the Appalachian region differentiated themselves on this basis. For many; however, drawing lines of distinction was especially challenging when they had lived a long time in an Appalachian region or had a family heritage tied to the geography of Appalachia. About 43% of those respondents identifying themselves as either administrators or staff said they were not Appalachian. Of the 333 students who participated in the survey, 52% reported that they were not Appalachian. The numbers from the three groups seem to indicate that while a large number of those who took the time to complete this rather lengthy survey did not identify themselves as Appalachian, their interest in the topic of Appalachia was great enough to warrant spending time completing the survey.

Faculty, administrators, staff, and students come from all over the state, nation, and world to participate in the academic activities that occur at Ohio University’s main campus. Often in contrast to the main campus are the students from the area who attend the university’s regional campuses. Some of the regional campus respondents suggested that although they were not residents, they perceived positive attributes about Appalachia and its people. For instance, one person wrote, “I moved to Athens in 1987 from the East Coast. The history and culture of Appalachian areas is very rich and steeped in traditions, and I would feel like intruding and would be presumptuous to call myself an Appalachian. I feel that there is a certain pride of home-grown people of Appalachia.” Another said, “I have a strong interest in the people of the area and have been one who relates exceedingly well to adults and children of the region.” It was obvious from the detailed comments provided by those respondents that ideas linked with Appalachia had significance for them.

Extended Family Living in the Appalachian Region

Some respondents had extended family members residing in Appalachian regions, but did not identify themselves as Appalachian even though they lived in the area. For example, an administrator responded: “I have been a resident of Appalachian Ohio for over 30 years--more than half my life--but I have chosen “no” because I was not here the first half of my life. I grew

up beyond the fringes--east of the Blue Ridge in Virginia--and I am happy now with my home in the Appalachian region." Another respondent who did not consider himself Appalachian wrote, "Although I have lived in this area for the last 25 years or so, and most of my relatives are from around here....I did not grow up here. I moved here when I was 18." Thus, at least for some people, being Appalachian has more to do with being born in a particular place than residing in it. An interesting response came from one student, "No, I don't think I am. I have been raised in many different areas so therefore I am myself unique and not able to be labeled. Although, my family is of Appalachian heritage and they are in *The Foxfire Book*."

For some participants living in an Appalachian region or having ancestors linked with Appalachia was not enough for them to view themselves as Appalachian. For example, one person wrote, "I moved to Parkersburg, WV, when I was 8 years old but don't consider it my home because my family is from Pennsylvania and New York, so I don't feel that I fit in with the Appalachian culture." Parts of these states have Appalachian regions also. Another student wrote, "I would consider the rest of my family (aunts, uncles, cousins) to be Appalachian. They were born and grew up in Kentucky as did my mother. But I grew up in Columbus, which I find somewhat far from Appalachia. I am related to Appalachians but don't consider myself one." Yet another student wrote, "A few generations ago my mother's family lived in WV, so I have some Appalachian cultural connections, but not enough for me to consider myself to be Appalachian." One other person wrote, "My grandparents and father were born in Appalachia, but I grew up in urban Columbus, Ohio, with no Appalachian cultural influences in my childhood." Being Appalachian, then, has different meanings to the survey participants and is often closely associated with residence, especially where one resides as a child.

Appalachian Sojourners

Many respondents saw themselves as sojourners, visitors for a time with an intention to move on to other areas. Many appear to find themselves here only because of the university. A student said, "I was born and raised in Northeastern Ohio; though I do love the area in which I live, I don't consider myself a permanent resident as I am only here to attend the university." Another student wrote,

I was born in Columbus, Ohio, although I attend school at Ohio University. Columbus is much different than Athens. Where I was raised, I did not have to worry about the school systems or health care. These are just some of the problems that many Appalachian people face. Now that I am a student here, these problems are affecting me in some ways, but I know that I have other options. I consider someone who is Appalachian to be born and raised in the Appalachian region. I am only a resident here for a short time."

Still another student said:

I grew up in Cincinnati ... although I have some family that would consider themselves Appalachian and I currently live in Athens, my suburban childhood isn't what being Appalachian is all about. My time here in Athens (three years) hasn't made me Appalachian. Athens is pluralistic. I experience Appalachia without it completely transforming me. I suppose I am saying that I am many things and if I was going to call

myself Appalachian I would have to call my self many other things that contribute to my overall identity.

Some expressed uncertainty about their relationship to Appalachia. One questioning respondent wrote: "I've lived in southeastern Ohio since 1969 and I was born in Southern Illinois about a 45 minute drive from Kentucky (close to the Ozarks and the Appalachians). Because I don't live directly in the mountains and I don't live in Athens, am I considered an Appalachian or not?" Another suggested, "I was not born and raised in this region; however, I am working to understand the unique needs and perspectives particular to the culture. I would like to think that over time, I would be considered Appalachian by those who were born and raised here." A student said: "I was raised in northeastern Ohio, therefore not really classifying me as a true Appalachian. Although I was not raised here, the time I have spent in Athens in my childhood as well as during my college experience has made me well-aware of Appalachian people and the differences that this part of the country possesses." Thus, persons residing in Appalachia for short and some lengthy time periods had different perspectives about what that meant as far as viewing themselves as Appalachian. Nevertheless, awareness seems to exist that the region has some cultural distinctiveness.

Many of those not identifying themselves as Appalachians suggested that they wanted to learn about the region and its people while they were here. Some reported that there were things they did not understand about the region. For example, one respondent said, "I moved to Athens two years ago from Boston. And although I live in Appalachia, there is much that I don't understand about this area. I'm considered an outsider and I definitely feel like one." A student wrote, "I am not from here and do not plan to stay here past my education time here at OU. While I am here though, it is important to learn about the people who are Appalachian as well as their culture and problems that might be unique to them."

It seems clear from many of the responses that those from other regions observe some cultural uniqueness related to the area even if they can not fully describe it. Some were not really aware of the existence of Appalachia before moving here. For instance, one student wrote, "I did not grow up here and knew barely anything about its existence prior to coming to OU for school. I am interested in its culture and people." It seems that interest about the region and its people was an over-riding theme throughout all of the participant responses. Considerations about being an "insider" versus an "outsider" of the region seem to be a theme that many survey respondents believed important.

Not Appalachian, But.....

Others, not personally viewing themselves as Appalachian, identified things about the people and the culture worth valuing. For example, a student wrote, "While I much appreciate the culture and people of Appalachia, I grew up north of here and am very different than what I'd consider Appalachian, though living here has definitely encouraged me in a more Appalachian direction: i.e. grassroots organizing, self-sustainability, mellowness, community events, and environment-consciousness." Another said, "I guess the best category for me would be an appreciator of Appalachians." Still another participant wrote: "I would like to, but it feels a bit presumptuous to do so. I have some extended family from this area. My mother spent some

summers in Athens as a kid. I attended OU while obtaining my undergraduate degree and returned after three years away, in part, because it feels most like home. But I'm not from here and I will probably leave at some point." A faculty member said: "I grew up in Oxford, Ohio, which I don't believe quite qualifies me to say I'm from Appalachia. My parents' first teaching jobs, though, were in Adams County and many of my mother's family resided there. I came to know many of them growing up. I've taught Appalachian literature throughout my career beginning with Jesse Stuart's *A Thread that Runs so True*. A highlight of my life was when he came to Ohio English and I presented him with the log school house and other projects that my students had produced!" It seems that many students and faculty who spend time at the University develop some strong feelings about Appalachia during their time on campus.

Residence in the Region Not Enough

Many persons suggested that although they have lived in the region for many years, residence was not enough to identify them as Appalachian. A faculty member said, "Although I've taught at OU for 24 years, I don't presume to call myself an Appalachian. This is a cultural and familial concept that I respect but would not claim personally." A student said:

When asked, I say I am from Appalachian Ohio. I have a definite connection with this area, but I wouldn't say I am Appalachian. I moved to Athens when I was 10 and have lived here for 11 years. I definitely feel like I have a connection with this region. I went to public school in this region and I am interested in its history, culture, and arts. However, I wouldn't say that I am Appalachian because I associate that with a particular ethnic group that I was not born into. My parents are not Appalachian and I was not born here.

Another student said, "Although I have lived here for five years, I still don't feel like I know enough about the area to consider myself wholly Appalachian. However, I definitely do feel a kindred-ness or sense of understanding and assimilation with Appalachians." A graduate student said, "I do live in Athens for a majority of the year, but on campus I feel far removed from others who might consider themselves Appalachians." Another responded, "Although my grandfather was an Appalachian, I did not grow up in the region and most of my knowledge of the region has been acquired over the last two years." Many students suggested, "Maybe being in Athens would be considered Appalachian, but I only go to school here - it is not my permanent residence." It appears that many who are not from the region feel some ambivalence about the region; while living within the university environment, they are unclear about the differences encountered in the region itself. Attending school or teaching at the University requires some degree of interaction with others from the region, but many leave uncertain about their place in or relationship with the region.

Don't Fit the Stereotype

Many respondents suggested they held ideas about Appalachians that are aligned with stereotypes and class distinctions, ideas with which they did not personally want to associate. Several made comments like "I don't fit the stereotype" and "I don't look Appalachian." One student wrote, "Appalachian is semi-pejorative; I've lived here for two years but really don't want

to identify that way.” Another student said, “I live in a real city with people that are educated. My city is filled with stores and top medical care facilities.” Still another said, “I am not from an Appalachian area. I’m from an upper-middle class suburb of Cincinnati.” Several students wrote things like, “I just go to school here.” It appears that many students from other places outside of southeast Ohio see themselves as different from those who live in the region. Although Ohio University may be viewed as a great place to get an education, it appears that many from other places and perhaps even some from the region do not view Appalachia as a place on par with some other areas. Thus, they choose to view themselves as not connected to the region.

A female student who no longer resides in the Appalachian region said, “I did not live in Appalachia in my formative, growing-up years. I’m glad, after having lived in Appalachia for 10 years. The roles for women are still so limited, it is like going back in time 20 years with some of the stereotypes to contend.” A graduate student wrote, “Although I am a resident within the region considered Appalachia, I do not normally share the fatalistic views that seem to appear in most of its communities.” Still another student responded, “I guess when I think about Appalachia, I think of back-woods, small town kind of places, which doesn’t really describe the environment I grew up in.” Respondents’ descriptions suggest that negative stereotypes about the Appalachian region and its people exist at Ohio University.

One student articulated ideas about cultural differences that were shared by many respondents:

I live in northeast Ohio and I go to school down here at Ohio University. Technically 9 months out of the year or so I do live in Appalachia. I don’t consider myself an Appalachian though. Local residents in this area have a very different sub-culture than the one I was raised. The atmosphere or culture here is not entirely foreign, but at the same time very different from mine. When I am at my home, the residents seem to share all the same experiences, norms, and ideals that I share. In other words, we share the same culture. Down here in Athens; however, local residents don’t seem to share the same culture I am used to.

Finally, one respondent, trying to sort out his being an Appalachian, said: “Yes and no - I believe I still retain some of the positive aspects of the area, such as strong family beliefs and ties, and when we lived outside the area other people would ask me where I was from in the South. But, I also believe that I have tried and overcome a lot of the negative aspects of the stereotypes associated with the area.” Many of those from the region are aware of negative stereotypes held by others about Appalachians and see a need to strive to separate themselves from these viewpoints.

CONCLUSIONS

The questions of who qualifies as an Appalachian and what are the implications of such an association seem to be of concern. It appears that many who associate themselves with being Appalachian due to residence or family ancestry find great value in the culture to which they are intricately connected. At the same time, others who might be described as Appalachian have chosen to disassociate themselves from the label Appalachian. Some who have located in

Appalachia for work or studies have recognized the uniqueness of the culture and deeply appreciate what they have found. Others seem to have a disdain for being labeled Appalachian and choose to separate themselves from what they view as a negative stereotype. Variances in opinions as to who is an insider (i.e., a true Appalachian) or an outsider (i.e., someone from another region with distinct cultural differences) seem to coexist at Ohio University. The majority of survey participants shared an awareness of the Appalachian region and knowledge about the cultural uniqueness found here, even when they interpreted their experiences in very different ways. Many shared common interests and concerns about the region and its people, but most did not want to view themselves as part of a negative stereotype. It seems that ideas surrounding Appalachia and stereotypes are present at Ohio University. While an open dialogue about these issues may not be presently occurring, the implications of these ideas still impact many of those connected with the University.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create opportunities for dialogue and education about Appalachia where scholarship and experience can be shared.
- Provide incentives for infusing positive representation of Appalachians into curriculum, especially for general education requirements.
- Establish links for Athens campus students to learn about culture from southeastern Ohio residents and vice-versa.
- Provide new faculty, administrators, and staff an orientation about Appalachia that describes the diversity of the region.