

Historiography of Queer Scholarship In Appalachia

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HIS 5208

December 2021

Introduction

Queering Appalachian historiography represents the vanguard of twenty-first-century scholarship. For decades, the erasure of non-heterosexual accounts demonstrated significant intolerance within cataloging. The reluctance to investigate, explain, or understand these identities within Appalachian history limited the scope of objective erudition. Twentieth-century homophobia, both academic and popular, constituted the “old way” of historical interpretation. Scholarship across generations fell short in defining and discussing the existence of “Queer” subcultures within highland communities. The erasure of these identities constituted a methodology-derived misunderstanding—the conscious and unconscious removal of Queer narratives from Appalachian scholarship formulated a monolithic form of study. Earlier scholars refused to elaborate on the rich, often contradictory, systems of Queerness. These identities, hidden behind layers of intergenerational trauma and personal safety, would have provided historians with significant cultural markers of Appalachian society. The refusal to investigate these communities, however, underscored a blatant rejection to understand the entirety of Appalachian civilization.

By understanding the erasure of these groups within the previous historiography, modern academics can begin to unveil the significance of Queer history in Appalachia. Despite the homogenous interpretations of Appalachia, new-age scholars can start challenging these traditional, singular notions of mountaineer identity. How did Queer individuals navigate their augmenting sociopolitical structures? What types of identities develop for these Queer mountain natives? What kinds of communities, social connections, and relationships developed alongside

these identities? Modern historians utilized the methodologies of Queer historians, like Jeff Mann, to better understand the social structures of Appalachia. By understanding the erasure of these groups within the previous historiography, modern scholars can begin unveiling the significance of Queer history in Appalachia. With the introduction of more diverse structures of historical surveying, coupled with a significant change in social attitudes in the 1970s, Queer identity has slowly entered academic consciousness, providing agency to groups previously silenced.

Invisibility In Early Literature

George Chauncey and his benchmark monograph, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (1995), investigated the character of early homophobia and Queer identity. “The myth of invisibility” proffered scholarship with a keener inquiry into the lives of these little-understood communities; “if the gay world existed, it remained difficult for isolated gay men to find.”¹ However, these notions of isolationism and “invisibility” remained embellished with historical inaccuracies. Chauncey argued that while the sociopolitical system of urban America underscored homophobic, “draconian” dogmas, gay spaces and identities continually integrated into mainstream society, specifically in the years proceeding World War II.² Therefore, homophobia handicapped the discussions of Queer identity. Scholars, contemporaries, and the average citizen interacted with gay culture daily. From bars to social clubs, from linguistics to fashion, the character of Queer identity permeated

¹ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (Basic Books: 1995), 3-5.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

into every facet of American life. While the gay cultures of New York, Chicago, and San Francisco demonstrate subliminal integration into their respective regions, the need to belong remains a universal desire. Whether these Queer individuals, lived in Hinton, West Virginia, or Harlem, the need to define, exist and create a safe space for Queer celebration moved beyond geographical barriers.³

To approximate the importance of Queer identity in Appalachia, scholars must first turn their attention to the previous explanations of the region as a whole. Culturally, the essence of Appalachia remains dominated by misconceptions, stereotypes, and misinformation from academic scholarship. For decades, historians have attempted to redefine these assumptions of isolationism, barbarism, and poverty through an examination of the region's history. Early literature, such as Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913), hoped to provide a comprehensive study of Appalachia through regional generalization. While Kephart's monograph presented academic scholarship with a robust and lively portrayal of mountain communities, his inability to engage with the identity of Queerness demonstrated the pitfalls of his interpretation. In his chapter "Who Are The Mountaineers?" Kephart ventured to provide agency for communities continually shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. Yet, this agency did not extend to Queer individuals. In investigating the heteronormative realm of highland communities, Kephart repeatedly left out crucial narratives that would diversify his case study. For example, the scholar surmised, "The mountaineers are homogeneous so far as speech and manners and experiences and ideas can make them."⁴

³ Jeff Mann, "Stonewall and Matewan: Some Thoughts on Gay Life in Appalachia," *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 207.

⁴ Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Outing Publishing Company, 1913), 335.

Throughout the entirety of his study, Kephart revealed his attitudes of matrimony, women's roles, and heteronormativity that restricted Queer communities from entering his discourse. According to the scholar, women acted as property to their masculine dominators. By engaging with the misogynistic undertones of *Our Southern Highlanders*, modern historians become astutely aware of Kephart's own internal biases—both towards women and those outside of cis-gendered, heterosexual sensibilities. Statements such as “To all pioneer men—to *their* women and children, too,” demonstrate that while Kephart understood women as an integral proponent of Appalachian society, their existence as feminine entities ousted them to the periphery of academic discussions.⁵ By understanding Kephart's dated, often sexist interpretations of women's roles within Appalachian society, modern historians comprehend the extent to which these generalizations of gender, sexual distinctiveness, and heterosexuality limit the scope of Appalachian scholarship.

Kephart's antiquated understanding of marriage, women, and gender identity left modern scholars unsatisfied. In reducing women to secondary characters of Appalachian society, Kephart reiterated his masculine-dominated worldviews, leaving this account generalized and historically inaccurate. According to the historian, women held one-dimensional desires and feminine behavior was a universal construct. For example, Kephart wrote, “some of the older women display the ferocity of she-wolves.”⁶ By minimizing these women to actions of barbarism inherent in their gender, he announced his misunderstanding with the significance of gender in Appalachian society. Not only does this passage reiterate the pressing stereotypes of

⁵ Ibid., 305.

⁶ Ibid., 344.

Appalachians as uncivilized and violent, but his commentary on how these women behaved during “feuds” also eliminated any space for an honest discussion of gender or sexual identity.⁷

The hidden realm of these queer narratives may have provided a more expansive dialogue within *Our Southern Highlanders*. Yet, the invisibility of Queer mountaineers goes farther than erasure. Throughout American history, Queer communities and individuals risked their safety in existing as “out.”⁸ Love letters, explicit sexual activity, or lodging with someone of the same gender illustrated courageous acts of societal rebellion.⁹ Historians frequently lack, however, the necessary documentation to define these relationships within Appalachian communities. A mixture of unavailable source material and purposeful silencing from established academics reduced these early Queer communities to enigmas. While these accounts may lack primary source identification, the fact remains that Queer people most certainly existed within these realms. Therefore, generalized, often homogenous accounts such as Kephart’s diminish our understanding of the true character of these regions. Published documents, such as Jeff Mann’s “The Mountaineer Queer Ponders His Risk-List” or *Storytelling In Queer Appalachia: Imagining and Writing the Unspeakable Other*, demonstrate that Queer identity has existed in this region since its beginnings. More significantly, new-age discussions of Queerness helps contemporary scholars understand why this silencing, invisibility, and lack of source material as inherently problematic.

⁷ Ibid., 345-355.

⁸ “Coming out of the closet” or “being out” refers to the public announcement by Queer individuals that rids them of their previous identity as heterosexual. With “coming out” a person will, from that point forward, identify as Queer. This is often a private matter, however, changing times also allow twenty-first century Queers to announce it on social media or in public spaces. This designation allows them to assert agency over their identities but can also place them in danger depending on the tolerance level of their social networks.

⁹ Allen Ginsberg, letter to Peter Orlovsky, January 20, 1958.

While his attempt to redefine an analogous Appalachian identity invited historical theory and cultural classification within his discourse, Kephart reduced various communities, social networks, speech patterns, and uniqueness to a simplistic characterization. More erroneously, in his attempt to comprehend these often heterogeneous civilizations, Kephart refused to engage with perspectives outside of the heteronormative realm. While the scholar cited, “The highlander, at last, is to be caught up in the current of human progress,” when discussing contemporary economic development, his inability to provide an accurate panorama of the natural character of identity, community, and belonging reduced his monograph to a survey lacking in diverse perspectives.¹⁰

Understanding how Queer communities developed in twentieth-century America remains a facet of academic study that Kephart could neither fathom nor comprehend. *Our Southern Highlanders* attempted to provide agency to highland communities of “native” mountaineers in Western North Carolina, Eastern Tennessee, and Northern Georgia.¹¹ Nevertheless, despite Kephart’s attention to understanding these communities, no use of statistical data, census information, or landscape portraits could remedy the erasure found throughout his monograph. In leaving out Queer perspectives, modern scholarship lacks an integral proponent of Appalachian identity—the importance of Queerness in highland sociocultural demographics.

For many Appalachian scholars, Queering mountain history remains a paramount struggle. Much like Kephart’s monograph, the lack of statistical data, the perspectives of “out” mountaineers, and, perhaps, the inability to accept these lifestyles as consequential to the historical record continually relegated Queer scholarship to the sideline. Take, for example,

¹⁰ Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Outing Publishing Company, 1913), 377.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

Henry Shapiro's *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (1978). Shapiro's monograph investigated the history of the American perception of mountain communities. Unlike Kephart, who proffered a linear, "traditional" history of Appalachian civilizations, Shapiro attempted to articulate how urban Americans understood and defined Appalachia. In his fourth chapter, "Solving the 'Problem' of Appalachian Otherness: The Role of Ethnicity and Culture," Shapiro neglected Queer identity. For the historian, "[Appalachia's historical character] provides precision and focus to generalizations about the otherness of mountain life."¹² "Otherness," according to Shapiro, did not constitute an investigation into Queer Appalachian identities. Instead, this otherness stemmed from Judeo-Christian charters of benevolence and federal aid.¹³

The creation and cementation of a mythologized view of Appalachia further silenced significant contributions to Queer identities within the region. Early scholars provided a critical glimpse into the realm of mountain communities, but their inability to comment on the existence of LGBTQ+ spaces, behaviors, or cultures permeated modern interpretations of Appalachia and those living there. Invisible communities, like Queer spaces within rural havens like Boone where "Boone based lesbian communes," provided safety for Queer women. These notions of security lacked the needed scholarship to validate their existence.¹⁴ The nefarious nature of this erasure combined with the lack of willing participants to discuss their identities contributed to

¹² Henry D Shapiro, "Solving the 'Problem' of Appalachian Otherness: The Role of Ethnicity and Culture," in *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 105.

¹³ Henry D Shapiro, "Protestant Home Missions and the Institutionalization of Appalachian Otherness," in *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 32-45.

¹⁴ Kathryn Staley, *Gay Liberation Comes to Appalachian State University (1969-1979)*, *Appalachian Journal* Vol. 39, No. 1/2 (Fall 2011/Winter 2012), pp. 75.

the lack of Queer source material in historical literature. For Jeff Mann, perhaps one of the most prolific Queer scholars within Appalachian discourse, sentiments of isolation and cognitive dissonance detailed the effects of this erasure. Mann grew up in Hinton, West Virginia, and explained his existence as a homosexual endangered his physical safety. In his memoir, *Loving Mountains, Loving Men*, Mann succinctly expressed the presence of homophobia in his hometown and argued that “it is dangerous to openly queer there.”¹⁵ Invisibility, erasure, and the overwhelming presence of socially-accepted bigotry, all find their traces within earlier scholarship. Moreover, a lack of discussions surrounding Queer identity, and its unique importance to rural townships, underscored why historiography lacks so many perspectives outside of the heteronormative imagination.

Had Shapiro utilized his investigative talents to more fully encapsulate the regional character of Southern Appalachia, perhaps his findings would have redefined scholarly understanding of Queer identity. Objective history must move both the historian and their audiences to understand the historical contexts that an accurate portrait of life, geography, and culture come together to create unique identities. Shapiro, and others of his generation who questioned older traditional narratives, continually missed these vantage points. However, by refusing to engage with these communities, *Appalachia On Our Mind* manufactured the same critical missteps as *Our Southern Highlanders*—Queer erasure. Critics of these early publishings must remain cautious in the breadth of their denunciation. Shapiro’s monograph, published in 1978, entered academic consciousness only nine years after the infamous Stonewall riots. Ironically, Shapiro, who discussed identity and misconceptions of the Appalachian regions,

¹⁵ Jeff Mann, *Loving Mountains, Loving Men* (Greece, Ohio University Press, 2005), 7.

existed during an epoch of great social upheaval. The understanding of Queerness, homosexuality and radical feminism underscored a nation slowly coming to grips with these groups on the periphery of mainstream awareness. More importantly, intersectional methodologies like social history had not entered academic consciousness. Perhaps, if published with a twenty-first-century understanding of inclusion and activism, Shapiro's monograph would have provided agency to the true nature of Appalachian "otherness." Just as Queer communities have existed within American urban centers since the Colonial Era, gay mountaineers also contributed to American character and history.

Awakened Social Consciousness

While one-dimensional accounts like *Our Southern Highlanders* erased Queer narratives from the discourse, modern scholars have attempted to redefine academic understanding of Appalachia. The social upheaval of the 1960s, culminating with the violent revolt at the Stonewall Inn in 1969, held monumental repercussions in understanding Queer identity; homosexuality entered into the national consciousness and redefined active history. The Gay Liberation Movement, a social explosion that continually strengthened during the 1970s, spearheaded new conversations about the meanings of Queerness. Urban centers like New York and San Francisco began disintegrating previous taboos and homophobic legislation. Sodomy, fashion, and "behavior" politics began to fall away with the outburst of national outrage from Queer communities across the country.¹⁶

¹⁶ Kathryn Staley, *Gay Liberation Comes to Appalachian State University (1969-1979)*, *Appalachian Journal* Vol. 39, No. 1/2 (Fall 2011/Winter 2012), pp. 75-77.

For communities in Appalachia, however, the Gay Liberation Movement, and its consequential scholarship, integrated into these rural municipalities gradually, without the swiftness of their urban counterparts. For Appalachian State University, discussions of Queer identity began to take shape in the 1970s. “Gay Liberation Comes to Appalachian State University (1969-1979)” constituted the benchmark of this diversifying scholarship. Researcher Kathryn Staley underscored how this social movement penetrated both the historic campus and the municipality of Watauga County. The investigation into the Gay Liberation Movement’s impact on rural North Carolina illustrated an unprecedented step in the direction of defining and discussing Queer identity.

With the Gay Liberation Movement in North Carolina, various new subcultures moved across the state. Gay bars, feminist bookstores, and even gay-owned businesses entered popular consciousness. For the local populace, however, this direction of tolerance left a sour taste in the mouths of those clinging to conservative attitudes.¹⁷ The 1970s “back-to-land” movements triggered Queer migration into rural areas like Watauga, Mitchell, Chatham, and Orange counties.¹⁸ However, many locals considered these Queer spaces in Watauga county “the worst thing that happened to Boone.”¹⁹ Yet, despite these additions to the character of Watauga County, Staley listed that institutional homophobia still plagued academia. More than this, however, the local attitudes of ingrained marginalization maintained heteronormative structures. Staley charted the transition of both Watauga County and Appalachian from a place that accepted

¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸ Ibid., 75.

¹⁹ Ibid., 75-77.

homophobic tirades from professors like “fag” or “fruits” to one that established the first lesbian/gay support groups.²⁰

The investigation into Queer identity within Boone’s township represented a significant step forward for historiography and modern scholarship. Published in the *Appalachian Journal* in 2012, Staley’s essay proffered a new glimpse at how national movements of inclusion and tolerance continually altered rural communities. Earlier scholarship erased and silenced the importance of these identities. By defining the meanings of being Queer in rural Watauga alongside attitudes of the local populace, Staley proffered historiography unprecedented commentary. One must not underestimate the relevance of describing these communities. While contemporary scholars still refuse to acknowledge the notability of Queer identity in an era ripe with violent homophobia, Staley underscored how agency allowed these newly defined identities to flourish in regions that had historically believed them non-existent and inconsequential.

For all of the benefits “Gay Liberation Comes to Appalachian State University (1969-1979)” provided historiography, Staley’s contribution only demonstrated one form of discipline-wide diversification. While her scholarship highlighted the significance of defining Queer history in Watauga county, other publishings acted as the catalyst for interpreting these Queer communities. “Out in the Mountains: Exploring Lesbian and Gay Lives” proffered newly diversifying scholarship with the first investigation into rural Queerness. Scholars Kate Black and Marc A. Rhorer provided the most prolific, and perhaps the most cited, study of gay identity in highland communities. In 1995, the team interviewed five lesbians and four gay men within Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina communities. The participants detailed their

²⁰ Ibid., 78.

adolescent upbringing, the discovery of their Queer identity, and the struggle to find a safe community.²¹ Within this study, Black and Rhorer redefined academic understanding of Appalachian culture. Most notably, the scholars referenced the feelings of intense isolation and “otherness” that plagued each member of their case study.²² “Trapped life in the mountains” and “feeling like an outsider” demonstrated a universal Queer experience—alienation.²³

While Black and Rhorer’s study may appear inconsequential, their commitment to defining and understanding rural Queerness redefined Appalachian scholarship and its relationship with gay subcultures. Black and Rhorer provided academic cataloging void of queer accounts with the beginnings of Queering historiography. Just as earlier literature painted highland civilizations as “isolated,” “Out in the Mountains: Exploring Lesbian and Gay Lives” reexamined these attitudes. By understanding how rural Queers internalize these feelings of “otherness,” the modern scholarship will benefit by examining how these sentiments compare to the national comprehension of “Appalachian otherness.”²⁴ New models of diverse scholarship allow historians to determine why Queer identity remains a crucial component in Appalachian history. Stanely, Black, and Rhorer used the experiences of mountain Queers to validate and contextualize sociocultural attitudes of Appalachian society. Yet, Appalachian historiography continues to refuse the advances of these accounts.

When one considers significant blockages to Queer discourse during the mid-twentieth-century, the AIDs epidemic must not go unreferenced. In “Aids in Appalachia:

²¹ Kate Black and Mark A. Rhorer, “Out in the Mountains: Exploring Lesbian and Gay Lives,” *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association*, Vol. 7, APPALACHIA AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE (1995), pp. 18-28

²² *Ibid.*, 18-19.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*,

Medical Pathologies and the Problem of Identity,” Mary Anglin discussed the appearance of the viral disease, its perception among mountaineers, and its impacts within rural communities, both Queer and “straight.”²⁵ When the virus took the lives of rural gay men, local populations began turning their backs on their community members.²⁶ Citing that the funeral homes refused to embalm corpses, Protestant churches refused to provide a funeral service, and citizens remained reluctant to discuss the string of death spreading across the region, Anglin provided scholarship with an unprecedented critique of Appalachian society.²⁷ With the combination of medical scholarship alongside historiographic agency, this article portrayed how the AIDS epidemic uniquely impacted mountain municipalities. Religious groups ostracized gay men, yet, families of the deceased scorned the medical institutions refusing to provide services.

As aforementioned in Shapiro’s monograph, evangelical Christianity constituted a massive cultural power throughout highland communities. The question arises as to why this occurred. In understanding this facet, historiography would do well to expand its horizons and draw comparisons between inherent homophobia, medical malpractice, and religious fervor. These facets of Appalachian society, as outlined by Anglin, demonstrate significant proponents of Queer history not expansively explored. Modern historians must begin investigating the linkages between culture, religion, and intolerance to uncover the true, often tragic, past of Queer identity. Unlike urban accounts of AIDS history, like *A Queer History of the United States* or *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, no prolific accounts of

²⁵ “Straight” is an informal term used to describe cis-gendered, heterosexual members of society. As new terminology develops, this denotation is swiftly losing popularity especially when one considers our modern understandings of being transgender or “sexually curious.”

²⁶ Mary Anglin, “Aids in Appalachia: Medical Pathologies and the Problem of Identity,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Fall 1997), pp. 174-176.

²⁷ *Ibid.*,

AIDs in Appalachia exist. Only by examining the literature of urban accounts will a fuller portrait of Appalachian Queerness arise and provide appropriate commentary on such a torrid history. For scholars, studying the AIDs epidemic and the personal experiences of those who lived through it can help bridge Queer history with Appalachian scholarship.

However, for modern scholars, new avenues of investigation, conversation, and connection with the rise of the Internet demonstrate a reluctance to combine these facets of new-age historiography. The lack of significant monographs, for example, exemplifies where Appalachian scholarship lacks when investigating the lives of Queer peoples. Moreover, the journal articles that engage with these identities pull from samples that do not reflect the accurate demographics of the Appalachian region. The stubbornness to view Queer histories and identities as central to the Appalachian character demonstrates the homophobic paradigms revealed in the early twentieth-century.

While these articles demonstrated the awakenings of new historical theory, the lack of appropriate literature blocks diverse perspectives from being investigated. In “Out in the Mountains: Exploring Lesbian and Gay Lives,” Black and Rhorer chose a sample size that, upon closer inspection, leaves out People of Color.²⁸ The exclusion of Black experiences underscored the limits of how monolithic Appalachian scholarship remains. Queer communities, specifically Queer communities of Color, highlight the combined factors of homophobia and racism limiting the scope of objective surveying. Only with more scholars engaging with these communities,

²⁸ Kate Black and Mark A. Rhorer, “Out in the Mountains: Exploring Lesbian and Gay Lives,” *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association*, Vol. 7, APPALACHIA AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURE (1995), pp. 18-28

understanding their histories, and ushering impartial interpretations will this discipline begin to flourish.

New Trajectories: The Twenty-First Century

Many of the twentieth-century historical accounts of Queer identity remain few and far between. Appalachian historiography significantly lacks the perspectives of Queer identities and their unique narratives. Journal articles and short essays have cleared a path in this diversification of scholarship; the realm of history continues to be left behind by other disciplines, despite these gains. However, Queer history remains a growing fascination for historians across the country. Gay scholars such as Lilian Faderman, George Chauncey, and Michael Bronski continue to push historiography in the direction of inclusivity. Monographs like *The Gay Revolution* center Queer narratives within the context of American history, social revolution, and the creation of new identities. Faderman's monographs, for example, explain the importance of Queering history and offer new-age theories for discussing and celebrating Queer accomplishments.

For Appalachian scholarship, however, historians must turn their attention to other sources of information. The lack of meaningful monographs investigating Queer identity in highland communities represents the stagnation of the discipline. English literature can, perhaps, shed light on how new ideologies can break through this glass ceiling of Queer narratives. In *Storytelling in Queer Appalachia: Imagining and Writing the Unspeakable Other*, Queer identities are brought to the forefront. Taking accounts from this region's campuses, churches, valleys, and community centers, provided historians with the blends of personal accounts and

historical precedent. More than just a historical account, however, this collection of essays employs other academic disciplines within its methodological framework.²⁹

Utilizing the accounts of journalists, sociologists, historians, divinity scholars, students, teachers, activists, and social workers, a more comprehensive portrait of these queer communities comes more critically into focus. However, most important to this book's arsenal of scholarly insight comes from the overarching motifs of literature and composition. Combining these disciplines provides the historiographical record with something that *Appalachia On Our Mind* misses—the understanding of queer spaces as “other.”

Storytelling in Queer Appalachia confirmed the existence of gay subcultures within this region. It affirmed that these communities have existed here since the very introduction of European colonizers in these mountain landscapes. More significantly, however, this collection of essays represents new-age historical cataloging by providing the significance of Queer lives and practices within communities like West Virginia.³⁰ Unlike Kephart's diminishing study, chapters like “Challenging Dominant Christianity's Queerphobic Rhetoric” attempt to reexamine religion and community structures. Using the lens of Queer history, a broader understanding of those erased from traditional characterizations of this region extends academic insight into the twenty-first century.

Justin Dutton's chapter “Challenging Dominant Christianity's Queerphobic Rhetoric” exemplified the significant benchmarks of how Appalachian historiography should proceed. By

²⁹ Justin Ray Dutton, “Challenging Dominant Christianity's Queerphobic Rhetoric” in *Storytelling in Queer Appalachia: Imagining and Writing the Unspeakable Other*, ed. Hillery Glasby, Sherrie Gradin, and Rachael Ryerson, 37-59 (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2021)

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 37-40.

examining religion and homophobia, a portrait of Queer identity emerges, a facet of modern scholarship lacking within academic discussions.³¹ Just as Mary Anglin investigated the connections between religion, disease, and Appalachian culture, Dutton's recollection of Queerphobia measures how religion and regional "otherness" combine. Stating "neither Appalachia nor Christianity have a unique claim to queerphobia," Dutton highlighted the pressing issues with understanding and documenting, Queer identity in Appalachia.³² When other disciplines begin to examine the connectedness between these power structures of rural communities, historians must also include themselves within the discourse. Yet, modern scholarship lacks the necessary availability of detailed interpretations, leaving historiography empty of Queer understanding. Just as Dutton examined how homophobia expresses a "top-down" authority, historiography remains limited by these same factors.

Outside of *Storytelling in Queer Appalachia*, various authors have released their accounts of personal struggle. For Jeff Mann, his existence as a Queer mountaineer represented a poisonous experience, one he attempted to escape by fleeing his rural hometown of Hinton, West Virginia.³³ In his article, "Stonewall and Matewan: Some Thoughts on Gay Life in Appalachia," Mann discussed his "escape" to West Virginia University in 1985.³⁴ Yet, according to Mann, the escape to urban "gay meccas" did not fulfill his desire for community as he once thought.³⁵ For the scholar, the "metronormative" notion of escapism underscored the complex identities of

³¹ Ibid.,

³² Ibid., 38.

³³ Jeff Mann, "Stonewall and Matewan: Some Thoughts on Gay Life in Appalachia," in *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 207.

³⁴ Ibid., 207-209.

³⁵ Rachel Garringer, "Well, We're Fabulous and We're Appalachians, So We're Fabulachians': Country Queers in Central Appalachia," in *Southern Cultures* 23, no. 1 (2017), 80.

Queer Appalachians.³⁶ Metronormativism, which describes the desire for populations, usually Queer, to escape to urban centers to find community, remains wrought with problematic assumptions. As someone who emigrated to Washington D.C. following his tenure in graduate school, Mann fully realized his own identity as both a Queer man and Appalachian. Understanding this pan-Appalachian consciousness, scholars must utilize Mann's narratives to demonstrate the importance of defining and exploring Queer history.

Without a proper retelling of Queer histories, a confounding identity emerges for those identifying outside of established heteronormative structures. For scholars, this would provide a unique opportunity to explore the makings of Queer characters and how historical structures have impacted their connections with their homelands. Unfortunately, due to the existence of homophobia, a lack of proper sample sizes, and a historic indifference to explain these communities, Appalachian historiography lacks in scope. For those who exist with 'dual-citizenship,' Appalachian and Queer, the need to define a historical space mark the most pressing concern for historians and interdisciplinary scholars.

However, many researchers have already begun to define these unique identities and communities. While historiography languishes with the inability of combining Queer narratives inside of Appalachian cataloging, rural youth continue to take matters into their own hands. In the article, "Well, We're Fabulous and We're Appalachians, So We're Fabulachians": Country Queers in Central Appalachia," the notions of defining identity and community enter the forefront of academic consciousness. Rachel Garringer's oral history project "Country Queers" investigated the identities of Queer central Appalachians who refused to "escape" their rural

³⁶ Jeff Mann, "Stonewall and Matewan: Some Thoughts on Gay Life in Appalachia," in *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 208-211.

heritage.³⁷ For one interviewee, Sam Gleaves, a resident of Wytheville, Virginia, understanding his Queer identity also challenged his sense of Appalachian belonging. Yet, according to Gleaves, being Queer and embracing his Appalachian ancestry “go together beautifully.”³⁸

Garringer’s “Country Queers” project constituted a benchmark in defining, understanding, and celebrating the existence of Queer identity in regions that historically undervalued them. However, by revealing local attitudes of modern LGBTQ+ members, the question arises for scholars—have these communities remained undervalued? Upon first glance this question appears non sequitur, scholars have documented institutional homophobia for centuries. Yet, upon further examination, scholars must theorize how Queer individuals interacted with family, other Queer friends, and local leaders. By applying Garringer’s “Country Queens” project to fresher methodologies, a Pandora’s Box of questions rises to the surface. Historiography of this region, while lacking Queer interpretations, can begin to explore further the concepts of community, family, and unity that previous scholars have outlined. *Our Southern Highlanders*, in exploring Appalachian identity, could become enhanced by narratives and histories such as Mann’s or Gleaves’.

Conclusion

Kephart’s monograph highlighted the pitfalls of singular, one-dimensional historiography within Appalachian scholarship. With the explosion of new interpretations seeping into academic circles in the mid-to-late twentieth century, Kephart’s survey of highland communities began to

³⁷ Rachel Garringer, ““Well, We’re Fabulous and We’re Appalachians, So We’re Fabulachians’: Country Queers in Central Appalachia,” in *Southern Cultures* 23, no. 1 (2017), 78-79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

lose authority. These refreshing challenges to a stagnated discipline provided new questions as to whose histories should be investigated. Among contemporary historians, understanding the role of feminist, social, and Queer pedagogies on Appalachian scholarship demonstrated the weaknesses in works like *Our Southern Highlanders* and *Appalachia On Our Minds*. However, modern historians must interpret the significant sociocultural contexts that barred these perspectives from entering the discourse. Institutional homophobia, misogyny, and racism, combined to keep these marginalized groups out of academic discussions.

The possibilities of modern historiography to investigate Queer identity must look to non-Appalachian scholarship, outside disciplines, and personal histories to evolve with augmenting eras. Within the information age, scholars now have unprecedented access to personal narratives and historiographical paradigms. While scholarship struggles to combine Queer history with established pedagogies, Queer individuals continue to exist and create unique traditions and stories. Modern historiography, while evolving with accounts such as “Well, We’re Fabulous and We’re Appalachians, So We’re Fabulachians”: Country Queers in Central Appalachia,” and *Storytelling in Queer Appalachia*, scholarship has only scratched the surface of these resonant narratives. However, one must denote the significance of celebrating how Queer scholarship has transformed.

While far from finished, Queer history in Appalachia has evolved from a long duration of erasure and “invisibility” to understanding how mountain and gay identity work in tandem. Where previous scholarship rejected the notion of Queer “otherness,” new-age investigations now underscore the next phase of academia—intersectionality. When historians begin to unveil intensive monographs, begin to discuss these communities with fervor, and begin to revise

previous interpretations, a more comprehensive discernment on Queer identity will develop.

With the introduction of more diverse structures of historical surveying, coupled with a significant change in social attitudes in the 1970s, Queer identity has slowly entered academic consciousness, providing agency to groups previously silenced.

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