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## EVALUATING APPALACHIAN DISTINCTIVENESS FOR GENDER EXPECTATIONS, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, AND RAPE MYTHS

BY ERIC SWANK, BREANNE FAHS, AND HOLLY N. HAYWOOD

*Scholars and pundits have asserted that the United States has regions and pockets that serve as hotbeds of traditional gender roles. Through quantitative techniques, this analysis explores whether Appalachian college students differentiated themselves from others on a litany of different gender role measures (n = 508). Ultimately, Appalachian college students failed to distinguish themselves in the Feminist Perspectives Scale, the Modern Sexism Scale, Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale, and the Sexual Experiences Scale. In fact, the only statistically significant measures found that Appalachians were less likely to know school acquaintances who were the survivors of sexual violence, thus implying that Appalachians did not distinguish themselves by their "rural distinctiveness" with regard to gender roles.*

### Introduction

Perceptions of proper gender roles have a profound effect on many aspects of human life. Societal definitions of masculinity and femininity influence both the internal and external experiences of women and men. In social psychological realms, gender shapes the images of personal and collective

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identities and impinges upon one's sense of self worth and community membership. Additionally, the rules of societal institutions confer an endless array of specific rights, opportunities, and responsibilities to members of each gender. Institutionalized gender roles often guide the fundamental questions of who makes the major decisions in the family and the state, how labor is divided in public and private realms, the extent to which "male" and "female" work is valued or rewarded, and the amount of access people have to important resources (e.g., education, health care, equity before the courts, settings that are free of sexual harassment).

While gender precepts reside in every society, there is always a question of how many gender roles exist among heterogeneous societies like the United States. Identifying all of the possible gender archetypes in the United States is a complicated task, but some scholars have attempted to classify these roles. In the 1980s, Deaux, Winston, Crowley, and Lewis (1985) suggested ten basic gender roles that ranged from the housewife and seductress to the blue-collar man and business tycoon. Later typologies have expanded or modified these rudimentary schemas and have devised nuanced descriptions of modern, benevolent, and hegemonic versions of sexism (Doss and Hopkins 1998; Glick and Fiske 1997; Swim and Cohen 1997). On top of identifying traditional or liberal gender roles, there remains the question of how people internalize or resist the various social mandates. It is toward this question of how people embrace or reject the conventional rules of gender that this study turns its attention.

A vast number of books and articles have studied the reasons as to why individuals embrace certain gender roles. Some of the more place-based studies have tried to determine if gender attitudes vary by social and geographical location (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Carter and Borch 2005; Rice and Coates 1995; Twenge 1997). In following the work of urban sociologists like Wirth (1938) and Fischer (1975), these studies assume that nations, regions, and localities can distinguish their cultures from another through the historical interplay of many social processes (e.g., state interventions, amount of industrialization, amount of racial-class-age heterogeneity, migration practices, population density, type of social networks available).

Several lines of inquiry have explored the possibility of gender norms being spatialized. Many studies have addressed differences in gender roles based on a participant's geographical locations, particularly the separation between rural and urban locations (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Burris 1983; Deffenbacher 2008; Johnson 1999; Konrad and Harris 2002; Rhodebeck 1996). Other studies have explored differences in frequency and severity of sexual aggression along the urban-rural continuum

(Logan, Evans, Stevenson and Jordan 2005; Marquart et al. 2007; Ruback and Menard 2001; Sudderth 2006).

Other studies have looked for regional subcultures along gender lines. Akin to the southern subculture of violence studies in the field of criminology (Borg 1997; Ellison 1991; Hayes and Lee 2005), and "southern exceptionalism" in religious studies (Chalfant and Heller 1991; Woodberry and Smith 1998), some studies have looked into the southern effect on gender norms. In doing so, these researchers tried to determine if individuals from one region have values and attitudes that differ from the broader society. Or, in the words of Ann Swindler (1986), subcultures can only exist when people share a defining trait that is different from the larger society, such as adhering to a distinct set of values and belonging to institutions that support their unique way of life. Accordingly, several recent studies have found that people who reside in the "Deep South" are more likely to endorse traditional conceptions of appropriate male and female behaviors (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Burris 1983; Carter and Borch 2005; Johnson and Stokes 1984; Konrad and Harris 2002; Marquart et al. 2007; Parker and Reckdenwald 2008; Rice and Coates 1995; Taylor, Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1999; Twenge 1997). Similarly, Powers et al. (2003) found evidence for a distinctive southern subculture that advocated more traditional gender roles than those from the northeast United States. Further, they suggested that white women and black women reported much more traditional gender roles than their northern counterparts, thereby challenging the commonly-held assumptions that white southern men singularly perpetuate traditional gender and race ideologies.

While research on the broad differences between urban-rural and southern-other constituencies is fairly well developed, the study of specific rural subcultures within the United States is still in its infancy. For example, little is known about the possibility of rural people from the Midwest, Pacific West, Southwest, and Deep South all presenting unique gender subcultures. To address this oversight in the social scientific literature, this study tests the possibility of distinct Appalachian difference in how gender is conceived and performed.

### **Appalachian distinctiveness**

Although social scientific studies of Appalachian peoples are somewhat rare, the characterizations in movies, books, and cartoons regularly chide Appalachians for being simple-minded people who are inarticulate, prone to violence, incestuous, bucktoothed, and lazy (e.g., historian Phyllis Wilson Moore coined the acronym PIWASH—poor, ignorant, white, Anglo-shoeless, hillbilly).<sup>1</sup> Historian David Hsuing (1997) has suggested that such stereotypes emerged as a result of late eighteenth-century settlement

patterns, disconnection from other regions prior to the construction of the railroads, commercial exchanges with imbalanced power relations, and population changes throughout the past two centuries. More specifically, he suggested that the notion of Appalachian difference—or what he terms “two worlds”—arose from *within* Appalachia prior to the emergence of the pervasive stereotypes of Appalachia as different from other regions in the United States.

Much of the early scholarly writings on Appalachian people promoted stereotypical impressions, in that they characterized the people of Appalachia as a culturally-isolated people who maintained ancient or abhorrent attitudes (Lewis 1999). For example, William Frost's (1899, 2) first “ethnography” of Appalachia portrayed the locals as archaic remnants of a departed era and referred to his informants as our “contemporary ancestors” and our “eighteenth century neighbors.” By the mid 1960s, a good deal of social scientific studies continued the theme of Appalachians as deviant “Others.” In looking for distinctive United States subcultures, Thomas Ford (1962) claimed he discovered a homogenous Appalachian worldview typified by a strong sense of self-reliance, traditionalism, fatalism, and religious fundamentalism.

While the notion of Appalachian distinctiveness flourished in academic journals for most of the twentieth century, a group of historians and literary scholars began to seriously challenge elements of these claims in the last thirty years (Batteau 1990; Billings 1999; Fisher 1993; Gaventa 1982; Shapiro 1978; Whisnant 1981). Although the critics have not offered a united front, they have regularly agreed that the concept of Appalachian distinctiveness is seriously flawed because it essentializes the character of all Appalachians and imposes a false unity on a somewhat heterogeneous populace. In fact, the prominent Appalachian scholar Dwight Billings (1999) contended: “While the peoples and cultures in the Appalachian mountains are decidedly plural, outside the region in the arts, the academy and popular culture, many representations of them now, as for the past one hundred years, are often monolithic, pejorative, and unquestioned” (3).

### Appalachian distinctiveness and gender relations

To address the way Appalachian women have been caricatured, Maggard (1994) contended, “Popular images of mountain women have included cartoon characters like Daisy Mae, amusing television ‘heroines’ like Granny Clampett, and the forgotten, uneducated, and shy hill woman” (137). While these gendered stereotypes may have flourished in television shows like *The Beverly Hillbillies* or *The Dukes of Hazard*, the field of Appalachian studies has only occasionally studied gender relations through social scientific methods. Maggard (1994) argued, “Appalachian

scholarship is largely silent about the fundamental importance of gender in the region” (137). Consequently, social scientific studies on gender relations in Appalachia are relatively rare, a bit outdated, and often undermined by limited research designs (Smith 1998). While these existing studies come from a hodgepodge of disciplines, most of them are qualitative case studies that do not analyze gender roles as a whole. Among other things, this means the Appalachian gender studies have not always utilized reliable measures, representative samples, longitudinal data, and non-Appalachian comparison groups. Accordingly, these studies often over-sample poor and working-class respondents and one cannot tell if Appalachian respondents display greater tendencies to gender conservatism.

Several essays have suggested that Appalachian distinctiveness thrives in the spheres of family dynamics and gender expectations. Trent and Stout-Wiegand (1987) wrote, “Small towns in Appalachia tend to be bastions of traditionalism with highly conventional attitudes toward sex roles” (2). Essays of this sort routinely insist that the Appalachian lifestyle is stuck in the past and that gender expectations have been relatively untouched by any feminist advances in the last century. Hence, writers in this vein have argued that Appalachian males emphasize “masculinity, religiosity, rugged individualism, self-sufficiency, fatalism and traditionalism” (Hennon and Photiadis 1979, 610). In making a similar argument, McCoy (1993) claimed, “Appalachians maintain a patriarchal family structure in which the husband assumes the leadership role, making economic, social and familial decisions” (103).

A number of qualitative and quantitative studies have confirmed such notions (Hyjer Dyk and Wilson 1999; Miewald and McCann 2004; McCoy 1993). Several studies suggest that Appalachian daughters are pressured into accepting traditional caretaking roles. An ethnography found that female Appalachians stressed that marriage, motherhood, and doing domestic tasks should be the centerpiece of any woman's life (Fiene 1991). Another qualitative paper found that older women assumed that economic security would come through marriage, not education and a career (Miewald and McCann 2004). The authors contend that the “lack of education, few places for women to work outside of the home, the need to care for children and other family members, and social pressure to follow gender norms meant that there were few alternatives to the traditional role for women.” (Miewald and McCann 2004, 1054). Later quantitative studies echoed similar results. One survey concluded that 49 percent of its Appalachian respondents believed that the primary social role of women should be that of a mother and homemaker (McCoy 1993)—while another contended that Appalachian families generally praised male dominance

and pushed their daughters into being caregivers who dropped out of high school (Hyjer Dyk and Wilson 1999).

Other studies argued that expected performance of gender roles was equally traditional. When looking at the division of labor for Appalachian families, Scott (1996) found that men rarely did any housework and daughters were expected to interrupt their education in order to assist in childcare and housework. In a study of parenting styles, Peterson and Peters (1985) discovered that Appalachian daughters faced stricter social rules than the daughters from other U.S. regions, in that Appalachian girls were told to be more obedient, cleaner, and better mannered than their female counterparts from elsewhere. Similarly, Abbot's (1994) study of eastern Kentucky teenagers proposed that 93 percent of the girls and 66 percent of the boys thought that the best wives were deferential, sweet, and "other-directed" (i.e., wives should be obedient to authority figures, maintain a nice temperament, be respectful of other people's feelings, and be sociable and polite). Finally, a small study that evaluated a sex education project in eastern Tennessee noted that their teenage clients maintained somewhat traditional sex role orientations (Blinn-Pike 1996).

Some studies contend that the cultural, economic, and geographic milieus of Appalachia breed greater violence against women (Denham 2003; Dye et. al. 1995; Fiene 1995; Gagné 1992; Tunnell and Cox 1995; Willis 1998). For example, Patricia Gagné (1992) claimed that the structural settings of Central Appalachia fostered greater gender violence because women often lived in geographically isolated homes, had little surplus income, and lacked access to competent human service agencies. Likewise, Gagné suggested that the overarching mores devalued female worth, endorsed sexual double standards, and demanded greater passivity in wives. Much like Gagné, Websdale (1995) saw the same patterns but added that Appalachians showed a greater fondness toward the "disciplinary violence" that kept women, children, and others fearful and compliant. Moreover, Websdale (1995) contended that rural rape victims consistently endured sexual violence in deadening silence because sexuality was regularly deemed a "private matter" or that local police officers or social workers could not be trusted to follow professional standards of displaying empathy and practicing confidentiality. Websdale wrote, "Rural family life, gender roles, and patriarchal ideology generate acute forms of socio-cultural isolation, which render rural women particularly vulnerable to domestic violence" (1995, 113).

Other empirical research has verified such assertions. Along attitudinal lines, one quantitative study found that corporal punishment was accepted more in southern Appalachia (Flynn 1994) while interviews with women in eastern Tennessee's and southwest Virginia's domestic violence shelters

found widespread complaints that family members berated victims while male abusers faced little repercussions (Few 2005; Fiene 1995). Similarly, studies from Kentucky found that Appalachian rape survivors anticipated more dismissive or punitive reactions than their urban counterparts (Logan et al. 2005), and workers at Appalachian domestic violence shelters felt that their neighbors downplayed the extent of violence and were extremely resistant to feminist interrogations of gender inequalities (Tice 1991). Studies of incidence rates sometimes found similar patterns. Cantrell's (1995) sample of Appalachian high school students found that girls in this area were twice as likely to be raped by a brother or uncle.

Logan, Shannon, and Walker (2005) also found that rural Kentucky wives were more likely to experience nineteen types of domestic violence than urban wives (the actions ranged from denying access for friends and family to forcing sexual intercourse to breaking bones). Two studies of medical patients also found that the incidence of domestic violence and rape was slightly higher in Appalachian settings than that of national samples (Denham 2003; Dye et. al. 1995).

While most gender studies support some notion of greater Appalachian traditionalism, a few studies have been unable to detect any signs of Appalachian distinctiveness (Dowd Hall 1986; Scott 1994). A quantitative study of parents found no Appalachian effects in the desire of parents to control their children (Fish, Amerikaner, and Lucas 2007) and a 1983 survey found similar approval rates for the Equal Rights Amendment for people from West Virginia and elsewhere (Trent and Stout-Wiegand 1987). Likewise, a later study found that Appalachians failed to differentiate themselves on the Bem sex-role inventory (Kimweli 2002), and an ethnographic study suggested that West Virginian men did not display any greater preferences for male-dominated and authoritarian marriages (Stratton and Moore 2002). When addressing "sexual double-standards" Kelly and Bazzini (2001) found that Appalachian college students were less likely to chastise women for initiating sexual encounters, having more sexual partners than men, and demanding the use of contraception during intercourse. An ethnography of teenage girls in West Virginia found that liberal feminism was flourishing. Most of the girls had a strong gender consciousness as they recognized some gender biases in their everyday lives (e.g., their teachers emphasized that girls should be polite-deferential, that sons were given more autonomy than daughters, and the threat of sexual violence was always present). Moreover, rather than simply accepting or tolerating male privilege, these adolescents often publicly voiced feminist critiques of patriarchy (Spatig et al. 2001).

Similarly, several studies have argued that gender violence is not worse in Appalachia.

One quantitative study discovered similar levels of unwanted sexual activity for both Appalachian and non-Appalachian teenage girls (Vicary et al. 1995), and a national survey of six thousand married women found no higher levels of spousal aggression among women from Appalachian states (Straus 1994). Likewise, one study on incarcerated men found no difference in the amount of violence perpetrated by Appalachian and non-Appalachian prisoners (Leukefeld et al. 2004).

In sum, this research confronts the debates over Appalachian distinctiveness in gender practices. As the early rounds of research on this topic have been hindered by methodological shortcomings and incompatible findings, this work asks some straight-forward questions: Are Appalachian people "stuck in the past," as evidenced by embracing traditional gender roles at greater frequencies than people from other regions of the United States? Similarly, are Appalachians more likely to accept and enact gender violence at higher rates than non-Appalachians? In doubting the claim that Appalachians represent a homogeneous subculture, we also ask if Appalachian women and men view gender expectations in the same fashion. That is, we wonder if there is a standard Appalachian ethos on gender relations or if gender consciousness differs along gender lines.

## Method

### *Participants*

Our data were collected on students at a public university in Eastern Kentucky during the fall semester of 2005. Being a regional university in Central Appalachia, the characteristics of the undergraduate population mirrors the qualities of the surrounding communities. Roughly 85 percent of the students come from the Appalachian part of Kentucky. The student body is predominantly white, with 95.2 percent of the eight thousand students identifying as Euro-American. Further, many of the students are first-generation college students since surrounding counties have only 7 percent of the population with bachelor's degrees. The university attracts a noticeable contingency of older returning students, as 24 percent are over 25 years of age, and a large percentage of the students grew up in economically-distressed communities. According to the 2000 census data, most students were raised in counties with a 1998 per capita income of around \$15,000 per year, with poverty rates affecting between 19 - 33 percent of the adult populace. As such, our sample included many poor and working-class students.

Respondents in this study were selected through a stratified sample of different classrooms. Surveys were distributed to thirty-six sections of classes taught in the Natural Science, Social Science, Education,

Humanities, and Business schools. These different disciplines were selected since gender attitudes can vary by major, academic department and year in college (Brewster and Padavic 2000; Gilmartin-Zena 1987; Kane 1995; Stake and Rose 1994). Likewise, efforts were made to recruit participants from an equal number of upper and lower division classes in each discipline; the total sample included 25 percent freshmen, 14 percent sophomores, 24 percent juniors, and 35 percent seniors.

The profile of the 508 respondents closely matched that of the campus population. The gender distribution was skewed toward women (61.9 percent of the respondents were female) and the sample was extremely white (95 percent of the students labeled themselves "Euro-American" while 3.3 percent called themselves "African American"). Among other demographics, 53 percent of the students indicated an Appalachian background, 90 percent declared complete heterosexuality, and 8.4 percent of students acknowledged being rape victims.<sup>2</sup>

### *Measures*

Data were collected through a six-page survey of close ended items. The instrument contained a wide range of demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal questions, in which roughly one-third of the items focused on gender matters. To obtain completed surveys, and avoid missing data, the survey was kept short. For the sake of brevity, the survey often contained shortened subscales of larger scales (e.g., the "Radical Feminist" subscale of the "Feminist Perspectives Scale"). After survey responses were typed into SPSS, the reliability of the scales was maximized by occasionally dropping some items from the previously published subscales (Wilkinson and APA TFSI 1999).<sup>3</sup>

### *Measures of gender attitudes and gender experiences*

Earlier studies have argued that Appalachian gender relations are different in many ways. Regional variations may emerge from conceptions of the traits that are considered appropriate qualities for men and women (gender roles) or the extent to which people recognize institutionalized forms of male privilege (modern sexism theories). Moreover, with the belief that Appalachia is a hyper-violent subculture, issues of how people legitimize and experience gender violence are especially important for this study. Consequently, this study included ten sorts of gender variables that could differentiate Appalachian college students from students in other geographical regions.

To address contrasting gender role expectations, we used two subscales of the Feminist Perspectives Scale (Henley et al. 1996). We utilized two items from the conservative perspective subscale that focused on the support of

traditional gender arrangements (higher scores represented greater gender conservatism). One item highlighted the importance of wives remaining in the domestic realm: "A man's first responsibility is to obtain economic success, while his wife should care for the family's needs" (Strongly Agree = 5). The last items dealt with the use of the "he" pronoun when speaking about women (Cronbach alpha = .647). The radical feminist perspective subscale viewed tradition gender expectations as illegitimate, dangerous, and oppressive. One item described romantic love as "brainwashing" that subordinates women, while other items argued that the workplace was organized to oppress women, and that men used abortion laws to control women (Cronbach alpha = .672).

To address participants' awareness of systematic gender biases, we used three items from the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim and Cohen 1997). Rather than focusing on the approval of unequal treatment against women, this scale addressed "subtle" or "covert" forms of gender beliefs. This scale was designed to locate people who denied the existence of modern day discrimination against women, and it honed in on various resentments people had about those who challenge such discrimination. Such sentiments tend to reproduce inequality because they tacitly support prevailing gender arrangements. One item claimed: "Women miss out on good jobs due to discrimination" while the other items suggested that it is rare to see sexism on television, or that it is understandable that feminist groups are still concerned about injustices (Cronbach alpha = .692).

To check the amount of bitterness people hold toward women we used the Hostility Towards Women Scale (Check and Malamuth 1985). The two-item composite scale contained accusations such as: "When it really comes down to it, a lot of women are deceitful" (Cronbach alpha = .643).

We also administered Ward's (1988) Attitudes toward Rape Victims Scale that addressed the etiologies of sexual violence. By focusing upon victim culpability, these rape myth items trivialized victim experiences by arguing that rape victims somehow elicited their attacks. The statement in our two-item scale contended that rapes occur because of amoral female sexuality: (e.g., "When women talk and act sexy, they are inviting rape"). Our last item honed in on participants' likelihood to castigate survivors for sinister motives: "Some women ask to be raped and may enjoy it" (Cronbach alpha = .669). Scores were coded to indicate higher levels of blaming rape victims (Strongly Agree = 5).

To assess the extent of sexual violence in the sample, we utilized a modified version of the Sexual Experiences Scale (Koss and Oros 1982). To address personal or first-degree victimization statuses, the survey asked: "Have you ever been raped?" (yes = 1, no = 0). We intentionally used the

word "rape" because we hoped to find self-identified survivors. Second-degree victim status, or the recognition of rape among primary group members, was gauged through several items. Four items asked if a person knew a sister, mother, acquaintance, or a close friend who was a victim of sexual assault (yes = 1, no = 0). These second-degree victimization items used the term "sexual assault" rather than "rape" to address issues of social desirability, as rape typically carries stronger connotations of stigma.

#### *Measures of Independent Variables*

Appalachian statuses were ascertained through a conscious identification with Appalachia. Appalachian identity was ascertained through recognition of one's childhood communities: "Are you from an Appalachian background?" (yes = 1, no = 0). Gender was identified by: "Please identify your gender" (male = 1, female = 0).

#### **Results**

To evaluate possible subcultural and gender differences for the dependent variables, a series of student's t-tests were calculated.<sup>4</sup> As expected, the data met all of the relative assumptions to run these tests, in that the dependent variable was measured at the interval level, the independent variables were dichotomous, the data were cross-sectional, they were unpaired, independent samples, and there was an assumption of homogeneity of variance.

Table 1 provides the results for all of the gender belief variables. To investigate distinctiveness claims for the whole sample, the first set of computations tested for differences when women and men were both in the calculations (column 3). To see if regional differences were stronger among men or women, the ensuing computations were limited to same-sex groupings (columns 4 and 5). Parsing the data into separate gender subsets checked McCoy's (1993) and Miewald and McCann's (2004) assertion that it is mostly the men of Appalachia who maintain a greater allegiance to conservative gender roles.

Table 1 overwhelmingly refutes the Appalachian distinctiveness claim. When exploring the entire sample, none of the five gender beliefs reached statistical significance (column 3). Conservative and radical gender perspectives had probabilities of .593 to .264 while modern sexism and rape myth measures retained probabilities over .791. Hostility toward women was the only variable that came close to significance, but a probability of .114 is still not significant. Additionally, the direction of the means often went in the opposite direction as predicted (e.g., Appalachians showed greater liberalism on gender matters). Appalachian students generally scored slightly lower on the conservative and rape blaming scales and

**Table 1: T-tests for Gender Attitudes and Appalachian Identity (Total Sample and Male-Female Subsamples)**

Dependent Variable	Geographical Identity	Total Sample (n=508)		Men Only (n= 193)		Women Only (n= 315)	
		Mean	p	Mean	p	Mean	p
Conservative Gender Perspective	Appalachian	5.13	.264	5.69	.242	4.77	.510
	Other	5.31		6.00		4.89	
Radical Gender Perspective	Appalachian	4.93	.593	4.48	.257	5.44	.764
	Other	4.85		4.76		5.39	
Modern Sexism	Appalachian	5.60	.874	6.38	.301	5.12	.407
	Other	5.57		6.10		5.26	
Hostility Toward Women	Appalachian	5.83	.114	6.56	.231	5.36	.313
	Other	5.56		6.23		5.16	
Blame Rape Victims	Appalachian	3.35	.791	3.81	.802	3.06	.257
	Other	3.48		3.87		3.25	

\*p <.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001

higher on the radicalism scale. Conversely, Appalachian students scored higher on the hostility toward women scale. With this reversal on an emotive matter, one might wonder if there are differences between the attitudinal and affective aspects of gender, though the lack of significance suggests that one should not take this claim too seriously.

Similar findings were gleaned among the separate analyses of women and men. There were no instances in which Appalachian men statistically

distinguished themselves from non-Appalachian men, nor were there any major differences among the female respondents (probabilities ranged from .802 to .257). However, an interesting pattern was observed in these gender subsets. Appalachian women were slightly more liberal than women from elsewhere on all but one measure: hostility toward women. Conversely, Appalachian men were more liberal than non-Appalachian men on only two of the five variables: conservative gender roles and blaming rape victims. Nevertheless, this tendency toward greater conservatism among Appalachian men was still so miniscule that their difference was never large enough to even closely attain statistical significance.

Table 2 represents the amount of sexual aggression participants—both

**Table 2: T-tests for Appalachian Identity and Gender Violence (Total Sample)**

	Appalachian	Other	p
	Percent Yes	Percent Yes	
Have you ever been raped?	7.0	10.0	.214
Has a sister ever been sexually assaulted?	7.3	10.1	.257
Has your mother been sexually assaulted?	10.2	12.4	.471
Has an acquaintance ever been sexually assaulted?	51.8	63.1	.009**
Has a close friend ever been sexually assaulted?	42.7	56.1	.002**

\*p <.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001

men and women—experienced during their lifetimes. Fundamentally, this table shows that sexual violence was common among all participants. One in ten respondents knew of rapes in their families and over half knew female peers who been sexually attacked. However, the table also revealed that sexual violence was *less* prevalent in Appalachian circles. In every form of sexual aggression, the Appalachian college students reported lower incidences of victimization. Some of these differences were very minor. Occurrences of sexual aggression for participants and their female family members were two to three percent less for Appalachians. However, some of the differences were larger. When addressing secondary levels of victimization, Appalachian students seemed to know fewer peers who had been sexually assaulted (gaps of 12 to 14 percent,  $p < .01$  for sexual aggression among acquaintances and close friends).

### Discussion

This study addressed the existing literature on traditional gender roles and sexual violence in Appalachia. By focusing on the Appalachian distinctiveness argument, we identified student geographical backgrounds and compared their responses on some standardized scales that measured different aspects of gender relations. This research design offers greater methodological rigor to the literature since earlier studies neglected comparison groups and did not measure as many facets of gender relations.

Numerous commentators and researchers have contended that gender dynamics in Appalachia tend toward traditional gender roles, increased sexual violence, and less progressive views of women. When exploring a sample of Central Appalachian college students, it was clear that these claims went unsubstantiated. Along attitudinal lines, the data found no evidence of an Appalachian subculture. Regardless of whether gender perceptions were conceptualized as idealized expectations of what women and men should be, antipathy toward women, rape etiologies, or perceptions of how societal practices currently operate, we did not detect any significant differences between the students who identified themselves as Appalachian and those who did not. This lack of significance was also present in our analysis for both the total sample and gender specific calculations.

Our victimization reports also challenge the accuracy of the Appalachian distinctiveness hypothesis. Rather than discovering greater levels of sexual violence among Appalachian students, we saw the exact opposite results. Appalachians were less likely to report their own rapes or to know a friend or family member that was sexually assaulted. Moreover, the relative difference of encountering second-degree sexual violence

was large enough to be statistically significant among the peer variables (knowing a close friend or acquaintance that has been sexually assaulted).

These findings as a whole suggest that future researchers ought to be suspicious of the assertion that Appalachians are quicker to accommodate or sanction traditional gender roles. While we think this work calls for an alteration or reconsideration of the Appalachia distinctiveness hypothesis, we realize that our findings are far from definitive. Although the Appalachian distinctiveness argument clearly fizzled in this sample—a finding we think is insightful and relevant in and of itself—this study had some methodological limitations.

Questions of measurement errors are found in every study. Although the items for our dependent variables traced attitudes toward occupational decisions, the division of labor in families, sexist language, dating issues, abortion laws, and perceptions of sexist discrimination and rape etiologies, it is possible and even likely that our scales ignored some important aspects of gender perceptions. The measures themselves might have shortcomings as well. While we used well-known scales that have survived many construct validity studies, issues of social desirability, problems with recall, and item vagueness might have restricted the validity of these measures. Moreover the emotionally charged and stigmatized nature of sexual violence measures might make them especially vulnerable to problems of measurement error (e.g., issues of what sexually aggressive behaviors are labeled as rape and problems of trying to forget painful experiences). There also could be issues of systematic measurement error since Appalachian students might be under-reporting sexual violence at higher rates due to a widespread fear of a negative response by others (Logan et al 2005; Websdale 1995). Interpreting the results for greater sexual violence among the friends and acquaintances of students from outside Appalachia was also a bit tricky. Since the item failed to distinguish *when* this violence occurred, it was impossible to know if this violence happened before or after the participant moved to Appalachia.

There also may be some concerns over the representativeness of the sample. By relying on college students, one has to remember that the attitudes of college students do not necessarily map onto the attitudes of the general U.S. population. College students often come from the same age cohort and, as such, it is possible that their opinions diverge from people in older or younger generations. However, even if we extrapolate these findings to only young adults in Appalachia, college students often represent more privileged groups: they come from a higher socioeconomic status, are upwardly mobile, and tend to be more white and more female than non-college students who share their same age bracket. Moreover, since college settings often have a liberalizing effect, it is possible that



the completion of certain college classes could have lessened the amount of gender traditionalism among the Appalachian students (Henderson-King and Stewart 1999; Stake and Rose 1994). Finally, the selection of our sample presented some generalizability shortcomings. It is possible that the values of Northern, Central, and Southern Appalachia may diverge, in that the Appalachian region starts in New York and ends in Georgia. It is also possible that non-Appalachian students who enrolled in this college may not totally fit the attitudes of students from colleges located in northeastern or western parts of the United States, as this university is a regional university that draws most of its students from a 100-mile radius. Thus, we recommend the pursuit of national random samples of all adults in order to juxtapose the sentiments of Appalachians and non-Appalachians from all sorts of communities.

It is also possible that the results of this study may be time specific. A cross-sectional study from 2005 cannot trace the attitudinal changes of respondents over time. Without data from earlier decades, it is possible that our data are inapplicable to bygone eras. That is, our findings may contradict earlier studies in part because we have selected our sample from a younger generation that is much more egalitarian than their parents' and grandparents' generations. Moreover, the older studies in our literature review may have been more accurate when they were completed since there is some evidence that southerners and Appalachians were already seeing a gradual liberalization of gender roles by the 1970 and 1980s (Brewster and Padavic 2000; Hennon and Photiadis 1979; McCoy 1993; Miewald and McCann 2004; Rice and Coates 1995).

In sum, this study counters the idea that Appalachians have markedly different ideologies about gender roles and gender norms, and it suggests that Appalachians do not report increased sexual violence compared to their non-Appalachian peers. We think this study should serve as a cautionary tale about the problems of relying on Appalachian essentialist arguments when addressing gender relations. Clearly some reporters, pundits, and educators should reconsider their stereotypical caricatures of people from Appalachia, and researchers ought to be leery of building their theories with distinctiveness claims. Along methodological lines, future qualitative research could add to these findings by interviewing informants from several U.S. regions, just as future quantitative studies might simply use an Appalachian background as a demographic control variable in their multivariate models. While we ultimately support the continued study of Appalachian people—particularly about constructs like gender roles and sexual violence—we urge researchers to carefully avoid stereotypes or overgeneralizations that support the rural distinctiveness hypothesis.

## Notes

1. The Appalachian region is a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of twelve other states: Alabama Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Among other things, the region is poorer than the rest of the country as its per-capita income was 82 percent of the national average and the poverty rates of West Virginia and eastern Kentucky surpass, the national scores of 12.8 by four to six points (Lichter and Campbell 2005). Appalachia also has less racial diversity than the entire nation with Central Appalachia reporting less than 3 percent of its population as African-American, Asian-American or Latino-Latina (Pollard 2004). Finally, 42 percent of the region's population is rural, compared with 20 percent of the national population.
2. Bivariate analysis of Appalachian status and other demographic factors found that Appalachians only distinguished themselves along racial categories (statistical significance was present for being Euro-American). However, Appalachians and non-Appalachians failed to differentiate themselves for the variables of gender, age, sexual orientation, and parental education.
3. While researchers often prefer Cronbach alphas above .70, some measurement experts suggest that this guideline is flexible and reliability coefficients above .60 are adequate for early stage studies on neglected populations (Schmitt 1996; Streiner 2003).
4. The authors originally intended to place Appalachian status into a multivariate regression. However, the lack of significance in these bivariate calculations suggests that there is no need to control for other variables in more elaborate statistical techniques.

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