



# **Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College (Studies in Writing and Rhetoric)**

*Katherine Kelleher Sohn*

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Even some enlightened academicians automatically—and incorrectly—connect illiteracy to Appalachia, contends Katherine Kelleher Sohn. After overhearing two education professionals refer to the southern accent of a waiter and then launch into a few redneck jokes, Sohn wondered why rural, working-class white people are not considered part of the multicultural community. *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College* examines the power of women to rise above cultural constraints, complete their college degrees, assume positions of responsibility, and ultimately come to voice.

Sohn, a born southerner and assimilated Appalachian who moved from the city more than thirty years ago, argues that an underclass of rural whites is being left out of multicultural conversations. She shares how her own search for identity in the academic world (after enrolling in a doctoral program at age fifty) parallels the journeys of eight nontraditional, working-class women. Through interviews and case studies, Sohn illustrates how academic literacy empowers women in their homes, jobs, and communities, effectively disproving the Appalachian adage: “Whistlin’ women and crowin’ hens, always come to no good ends.”

Sohn situates the women’s stories within the context of theory, self confidence, and place. She weaves the women’s words with her own, relating voice to language, identity, and power. As the women move from silence to voice throughout and after college—by maintaining their dialect, discovering the power of expressivist writing, gaining economic and social power, and remaining in their communities—they discover their identity as strong women of Appalachia.

Sohn focuses on the power of place, which figures predominantly in the identity of these women, and colorfully describes the region. These Appalachian women who move from silence to voice are the purveyors of literacy and the keepers of community, says Sohn. Serving as the foundation of Appalachian culture in spite of a patriarchal society, the women shape the region even as it shapes them.

Geared to scholars of literacy studies, women’s studies, and regional studies, *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia* will also resonate with those working with other marginalized populations who are isolated economically, geographically, or culturally.

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