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Dumb Hillbillies? Media Portrayal in the Age of Trump A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Dumb Hillbillies?

Media Portrayal in the Age of Trump

A Critical Discourse Analysis

By

Alana M. Anton

Under the Direction of Erin Ruel, PhD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

Appalachia is a place of mystery rarely examined with a systematic methodological lens (Van Leeuwen; 2008; Carbó et al. 2016). The term "Appalachian" has remained a synonym for "backward" or "ignorant" or "hillbillies" for much of modern history. Do media outlet framings of Appalachians, who primarily supported Donald Trump over two U.S. election periods (2015-2021) reinforce the national understanding of Appalachians as uneducated whites? To answer the question, I used Critical Discourse Analysis to interpret 51 news articles from *The New York Times, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, The Charleston Gazette-Mail, The Daily Yonder,* and *The Roanoke Times* from the announcement of Donald Trump's presidential campaign in July 2015 to the inauguration of Joe Biden in January 2021.

A comparison of articles written in responses posted by Appalachian sources reveals themes from reporting within and outside the region during this timeframe. In my analysis, I found five major themes demonstrating that media framings do indeed support the status quo understandings of white Appalachians as ignorant hillbillies. The stereotypes of Appalachians are like the caricatures of many other marginalized groups -- criminalized and demonized. Stereotypes lead to implicit bias, impacting services, policies, and individual interactions.

INDEX WORDS: Appalachia, Hillbilly, White working-class, Rural sociology, Critical discourse analysis

Dumb Hillbillies?

Media Portrayal of Appalachia in the Age of Trump

by

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May 2023

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my mother, Melodie Copeland Janin, my son, Madison Graham Rittlinger, my partner Shaine Cabrera, and all the friends and loved ones who supported me along the way. Thank you for always having my back.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARC-Appalachian Regional Commission

CDA-Critical Discourse Analysis

CGM-*Charleston Gazette-Mail*

NYT-*New York Times*

PPG-*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

RT-*Roanoke Times*

RFT-Racial Formation Theory

SSDI-Social Security Disability Insurance

TDY-*The Daily Yonder*

TWP-Traditional Worker Party

1   INTRODUCTION

Popular discourse often lumps Appalachia into a monolithic region, but it's not. As seen in figure one, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) (2008) currently defines the area as encompassing parts of 13 states from Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi to rural northwestern New York (ARC 2009; Campbell 2011). There are at least three sub-regions: Northern, Central, and Southern (ARC 2005). Like subcultures, these subregions have many variations. For example, Pennsylvanian areas are quite different from North and South Carolina (Biggers 2006; ARC 2009; Catte 2017).
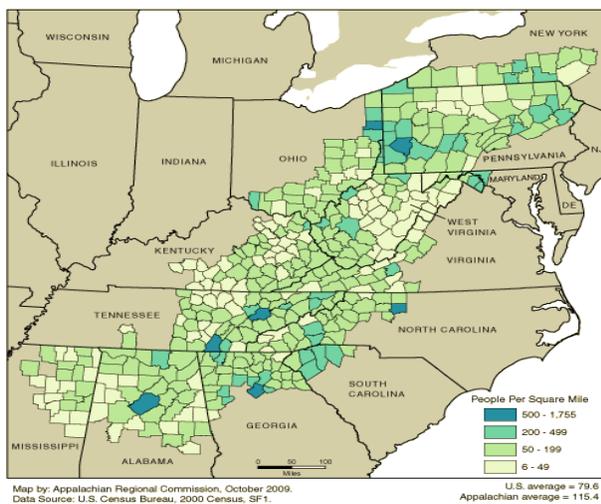
Figure 1 The ARC Defined Area of Appalachia

While most of the counties are demographically white, heterosexual, cis-gender, and working class, it is inaccurate to frame the entire region in this way. For example, areas in the southern region have populations as high as 30% non-white (Census 2010). Parts of Kentucky are experiencing large in-migrations of Latinx people, and West Virginia has one of the highest rates of trans-identifying individuals in the country (Doyle 2005; Staley 2009:3; Kingsolver 2014; Jordan 2015:9, 23-26; Ezell 2019; Dakin,

Williams, and McNamara 2020). The Appalachian people and cultures are more multifaceted and varied than is portrayed by media.

1.1   Hillbilly and the White Working-Class

The term "white working class" (WWC), like "hillbilly," became synonymous with ignorant, poor, and reactionary over the last decade (Perrin 2018). Beginning with Donald Trump's campaign announcement in 2015, news editors and political analysts asked many pundits and academics to decipher the mindset of the WWC mountaineer (Vance 2017; Catte 2017a, 2018b; Harkins and McCarroll 2019). These terms do not reflect the demographic realities (Batteau 1979; Anglin 2004; ARC 2008; Pollard and Jacobson 2019).

The sobriquet of "hillbilly" often refers to Appalachians. "Hillbilly" as a pejorative has existed since the 17th century (Wilkinson 2001; BBC 2003). Initially, hillbilly was a term referencing supporters of King William of Scotland, "Billy's Boys," also known as "Orangemen" at that time (this is how the mascot of Syracuse University came to be) (Wilkinson 2001; BBC 2003; Montgomery 2017). People from the hills of Scotland and Northern Ireland brought the name "hillbilly" with them when migrating to the British colonies. Choosing to settle in the mountains of Appalachia, the derogatory perceptions by others of hill-folk followed. American colonists were often loyal to the British Crown, making the derogatory name stick.

Described in *The Trainmen's Journal* in July of 1892 and reprinted later in the *New York Journal* on April 23, 1900:

A Hill-Billie is a free and untrammeled white citizen of Alabama,

who lives in the hills, has no means to speak of, dresses as he can, talks as

he pleases, drinks whiskey when he gets it, and fires off his revolver as the

fancy takes him.

The mountain man who resisted outside interference in his life became cemented

in American colonial vernacular. In everyday colloquial speech, "hillbilly" is seen as

disparaging; even those Appalachians who have chosen to reclaim it have been

discouraged from doing so by upperclass Southerners and the country music elite, like

the leadership at the Grand Ole Opry (Click 2018; Leimkuehler 2019). One example is

the album *Guitars, Cadillacs, and Hillbilly Music* by country artist Dwight Yoakam. The

title song was initially released as "Guitars and Cadillacs," as the record company

determined that Hillbilly music would be seen as disparaging by country music fans

(Montgomery 2017; Burns et al. 2020). It has not been until recent years that the word

has come to express an identity. "Hillbilly" has been reclaimed by many country and

rural folks, specifically the Appalachians, to whom it referred initially (Burns and

O'Leary 2017; Montgomery 2017).

There is considerable demographic data that dispute the stereotype of the white,

cisgender, heteronormative "hillbilly." However, misinformation remains the norm

when describing the region. Music, with lyrics and public reaction to songs, is one

illustration. In *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music,* Hubbs (2014) describes this

phenomenon as the WWC being defined and reaffirmed through lyrics, perceptions of

culture, and public responses to country, bluegrass, and singer-songwriter folk music.

Various types of media perpetuate these stereotypes.

In the more recent era, shows like *Justified* (2010-2015) and movies like *Deliverance* (1972) and *The Wild and Wonderful Whites* (2009) expose inaccurate stereotypes of violent and uneducated people (Hubbs 2014; Stone 2016). These representations make it easy, expected even, to frame actual residents in this way. In "'You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive': Using FX's *Justified* to Form a Cultural Understanding of Crime in Harlan County, Kentucky," Stone (2016) analyzes episodes of *Justified,* a show about Kentucky drug and moonshine culture. The writers filled the show with violent storylines. Stone (2016) compares the violence in the show with reported crime from the FBI Uniform Crime Report and finds a big difference. The actual violence in Harlan, KY, is significantly lower than portrayed (Stone 2016). Hubbs's (2014) work also highlights music that uses rural stereotypes. The author holds up the band Foo Fighters as one example of how stereotypes can be reified across time and types of discourse. The song "Keep it Clean (Hot Buns)" emphasizes not just the general idea of the ignorant, racist mountain man but the participation in the bifurcation of being Appalachian and being...well, anything else. In writing a song about homophobia and classism, the music itself exposes the homophobia and classism of the lyricist and the fans of the song (Grohl 2011):

> *Rubbin' and a lovin' and a scrubbin' and a truckin'*
> *Maybe if we're lucky, just a little bear huggin'*
> *Know what I mean, keep it clean*

An attempt at a gay love song, "Keep It Clean" leans into stereotypes about "rednecks" and working-class men. When taken with the video for the song, which

depicts the band as "redneck truckers," complete with a corn cob pipe, showering at a truck stop. Instead of depicting working-class queers as "normal," they are caricatures, portrayed with flannel shirts, long, dirty hair, and bad teeth, all stereotypes that mock, rather than support rural queers.

The election season of 2015 led to a feverish need by pundits and politicos to understand WWC people living in rural areas. Candidate Trump spent targeted time in Appalachia, specifically Southern Appalachia, to lean into the narrative that this was "Trump Country" (Davis and Ballhaus 2016; Jenkins 2016). Even though many in these areas voted Democrat in 2008 and 2012, election reporting suggested that frustration over a lack of fulfilled campaign promises by Obama and rural Democrats led to votes for Trump in 2016 (Cohen 2016; Jenkins 2016; Catte 2017; Vance 2017). *The New York Times* published an article in 2016 immediately following the election, stating: "Donald J. Trump Won the Presidency by Riding an Enormous Wave of Support Among White Working-Class Voters" (Cohen 2016).

This reporting, coupled with the historical stereotyping of the "hillbilly," produced a flurry of articles, books, podcasts, and pundits of every ideological stripe. Much of this work, written often by outsiders to the region, was eager to explain the class and labor realities of a region to many who know nothing about the area (Solomon 2016; Campbell 2011; Eller 2017; Stoll 2017; Catte 2018). These outsiders exclude those living in Appalachia who do not meet the stereotype, and that discourse reinforces such labels (Otto 1985; Man 2005; So 2014; Obermiller and Maloney 2016; Harkins and McCarrol 2019).

The Appalachian region of the United States has very high disability and substance addiction rates, low access to Internet services, quality education, clean water, and

sanitation services (Goodstein 1989; Behringer and Friedell 2006; Arcipowski 2017). When media's framing influences the public's view of Appalachians as dirty, criminalized people without culture, it is unlikely there will be broad support to address these social issues. Discursive strategies have real-world consequences.

Both media and scholarship often hide Appalachians' lived cultural experience behind either a culture in decay or a romanticized area with little government oversight and people who care little about the outside world (Detamore 2010; Campbell 2011; Solomon 2016; Stoll 2017; Catte 2018). Often portrayals of authentic Appalachian culture become buried under hegemonic media portrayals (Herring 2014). Appalachia has become categorized as enmeshed in poverty (Shifflet 1991; Biggers 2017; Vance 2017; Catte 2018). The discourse around the region has belittled people, describing them as lacking basic social skills, living in squalor, and as violent. The added attention brought by the addiction health crisis has shown a region full of suffering from many vices. These include moonshine and related alcoholism, methamphetamine and opioid use, and an area desperate for expanded government social services. While these struggles are accurate, they exclude positive representations of culture and material existence.

The authentic culture created by Appalachian people is a tapestry of food, language, values, and music – like all cultures. But it also includes a long history of fighting oppression in many forms; economic struggle, corporate colonization, energizing labor movements, and civil rights engagement for women, African Americans, and the poor (McGee and Boone 1979; Turner and Cabball 1985; Wagner and Obermiller 2004; Hubbs 2014; Stoll 2017). In most discursive framing, this richness of time, space, and people is lost.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Many contributions to Appalachian studies and rural sociology discuss how the media portray people in those demographics (ARC 2020; Census Scope 2019; Census 2010). There is essential literature addressing culture as well. However, Appalachian studies and sociology have neglected the intersection of identity and media's framing of Appalachians. In this research, I examine the discourse about Appalachia during the two election seasons that sandwich Donald Trump's time in office. I examine *The New York Times* to represent mainstream national media and local Appalachian-focused media to compare discursive strategies used by outlets outside and inside the area. There is minimal scholarship that uses CDA to examine discourse about Appalachia. This study seeks to fill that gap by recognizing "Appalachian" as a distinct cultural and ethnic identity.

President Lyndon Johnson started the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to combat the societal ills considered rampant in the area. Johnson's poverty tour included Appalachia and conjured up images of despair about "The Other America." Many outside the region had little to no basic knowledge about Appalachia. Once the federal government created the institution, the ARC became the standard-bearer for regional definition and boundaries. One issue that comes from outsiders' descriptions is a failure to see how stereotypes and definitions might influence individual living experiences and policy outcomes. Given the renewed attention on Appalachia in the 2015 and 2019 presidential campaigns coinciding with the rise in populism and nationalism tied to Appalachia, I propose questions about news media's portrayal of the area.

1.3   Research and Knowledge Contribution

1.3.1   Research Questions

This study seeks to understand how articles published in a national press outlet categorized Appalachia during the period stated (June 16, 2015-January 20, 2021) compared to similar articles published within local Appalachian outlets. I use van Dijk's and Igwebuike's method to examine those articles to answer the following questions: What discursive strategies are used by news outlets in their reporting on Appalachia during this period? Compared to a national outlet, are there significant differences in discursive strategies Appalachian outlets use in reporting on the region? What identity-forming discourses regarding Appalachians are unveiled in the reporting on the region in these outlets? What accurate portrayals about Appalachia are divulged in the reporting? How do the discursive strategies utilized by news media support the status quo?

Historically, the framing of Appalachia has been that of the WWC coupled with the longstanding media and social stereotype of the "hillbilly." This framing places the region's population within a particular context, marking the people as queerphobic, classist, xenophobic, and racist (Campbell 2011; Solomon 2016; Eller 2017; Stoll 2017; Catte 2018). This framing lacks any mentions of Black and Queer populations, though these groups are the most likely to be working-class or working poor, regardless of region (Cabbell 1980; Williams 1985; Black and Roher 1995; Mann 2005; ARC 2008; Gary 2009; Gary, Johnson, and Gilley 2016; CensusScope.org 2020).

1.3.2   Importance of the Project

There is a significant absence of scholarship on how the media portrays Appalachia and what responses those portrayals invoke (Newcomb 1979; Biggers 2006; Cooke-

Jackson and Hansen 2008; Denham 2016; Obermiller and Maloney 2016). Often in the available scholarship, those stereotypes make many Appalachians invisible by ignoring demographics and material and systemic problems affecting the area. The scholarship mirrors popular discourse. Implicit biases are hidden and automatic prejudices that can impact important decision-making, judgments, and actions. These biases can affect the implementation of social programs, environmental policy, and corporate regulations. A wealth of data link stereotypes and representation in media to implicit bias. Understanding how news media make linguistic choices and uses strategic discourse to support the status quo is crucial. This understanding makes it possible to name some of the barriers to solutions for systemic problems and take steps toward finding solutions.

Multiple studies examine the ways media depict Appalachians as ignorant, white hillbillies. Most of these studies focus on visual media, like television shows and movies. There is very little research on the discourse around Appalachia in news. I take this opportunity to examine textual representations of Appalachia by outsider and insider sources to determine if there is a difference in how the region is discussed and the discursive strategies used in regional and national newspapers.

This study adds to the sociological knowledge of Appalachia by shining a light on how Appalachia is talked about via textual representations. As a major agent of socialization, media greatly impact identity formation. This study looks to understand the impact of news media by examining news media framings regarding Appalachia.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Early Settler-Colonization

Modern Appalachia's reputation as outsider unfriendly, impoverished, and backward begins with the wave of immigration from Scotland, Ireland, Britain, and Wales in the late 17th century to the early 18th. These immigrants included voluntary migrants and displaced people fleeing religious persecution, crushing debt, or sent by the British monarchy as an alternative to workhouses and orphanages. Ulster-Scots ousted by King James I in the Plantation Siege were the first wave of Northern European immigrants to Appalachia (Lenihan 2008; MacRaild and Smith 2013). Loyalists and the British Crown advocated moving Ulster-Scots from Northern Ireland and the Irish underclass to the colonies in North America (Foras and Gaeilg*e* 2001; Painter 2010; Isenberg 2016:18; Brennan 2019).

Upon arrival, many became indentured servants to pay for their passage. Conditions were terrible, and contracts lasted an average of seven years. Indentured servants, along with enslaved Africans, provided most of the labor force for the planter class. Picking cotton, harvesting tobacco, and mining for coal were just some of the many tasks they were responsible for. The conditions they lived in were wretched. By the late 17th century, the labor force was almost entirely made up of enslaved people in Appalachia and the Deep South. However, tenant farming by formerly indentured servants persisted in Appalachia. Regardless of their status or class, their invasion of native land created friction with the indigenous people. Eventually, most native tribes were displaced or forcibly removed during the enforcement of the Indian Removal Act by Presidents Andrew Jackson and Martin van Buren from 1830-1838 (Satz 1989; Carney 1996).

2.2   Underclass

Even after indentured servants had served their bond, they were not given resources to increase their station. They continued to be dependent on the owner/planter class for work and housing, either living on established farms as tenant workers or moving from job to job as poor independent laborers. Indentured servants had little choice but to continue to work for their previous employers. By being unable to demand fair wages, especially since the free labor of enslaved people undercut the wages and benefits of unfree labor, the poor Scots Irish came to make up a large portion of the underclass. Enslaved Africans already laboring in Appalachia often made common cause with natives and the new underclass of poor farmers and indentured servants, those who would come to be known as "white trash." The planter class often referred to the poor white class as "clay eaters" or "waste people." The members of the underclass had more in common with other oppressed communities than they had with white plantation owners, railroad barons, or mine owners (Cabbell 1980; Isenberg 2016:28, 87, 122).

The planter or gentry class included politicians, mine owners, business leaders, professionals and large farm or plantation proprietors who owned many slaves. This group made up the smallest class, less than 10% of the population, creating a minority-ruled society.

While fraternization among oppressed groups was discouraged, absentee landlords and their need for labor prevented absolute crackdowns on fraternization. These suppression tactics might include breaking up enslaved families through selling people to another enslaver or evictions of tenant farmers by the planter class (Isenberg

2016:135-153). Socialization between groups created space for black markets, familial relationships, and community services among white, Black, Creek, and Cherokee people. Because of this historical mix of cultures and races, Southern and Middle Appalachia are still racially and ethnically diverse areas of the United States (Census 2010; Census Scope 2019; ARC 2020; McCann 2021). Following the end of the Civil War, while the rest of the country was grappling with Reconstruction, many of the federal programs during that era barely touched the mountains, leaving the permanently poor and unemployed class intact in the area (Cabbell 1980; Smith 2004).

2.3   Resources and Infrastructure

Coal is the resource most associated with Appalachia, but timber, gold, and granite are also abundant and were integral to the economic boom of the British colonies and the move toward a formal capitalist system during the industrial revolution in the United States (Stephenson and Mulder 2017; Wagner and Obermiller 2017; Lyons 2020; Carson and Pulit 2020). While these resources contributed to increased living standards for some, wealth did not generally trickle down to the poor or enslaved. Railroads became crucial as the need for expanding resources increased and a need for consistent delivery of these resources across an expanding empire. Part of those resources were, of course people, wooed away from places like Alabama, to higher wages father north. (Shapiro 1966; Walls 1978; Weller 2013). These resources underpin much of the region's economies today.

The Blue Ridge Railroad was a necessary infrastructure for building the United States Capitol building and the District of Columbia. Materials including granite, timber, tobacco, and cotton helped build The University of Virginia (Lyons 2020:15 -- 17).

Additionally, following the demolition of Reconstruction, Kentucky and other states sent railroad representatives --**i**ncluding union organizers **--** to recruit Alabamian Black workers from mills to railroad and coal camps. This recruitment was part of the Great Migration of the early 20th century partially brought on by WWI, and secondary migration in the 1950-1970s following WWII (Shapiro, 1966; Walls, 1978; Lyons 2020:18 -- 20; El-Amin and Dennis 2020, 2021; Weller 2013; Walls, 1978). The railroads also carried gold, coal, granite, cotton, and textiles from Southern and mid-Appalachia to the Northeastern states (Lyon 2020:21-25).

For a time in the mid-20th century, coal, timber, and tobacco jobs, along with high union participation, contributed to a strong but small middle class. These conditions were in contrast to the rhetoric that all Appalachians have always been very impoverished. The reality is extreme poverty has come in cycles. Unionized workers challenged living conditions, lack of services like schooling, and low wages and poor working conditions across Appalachia. These challenges were often violently and sparked off in the late 19th and early 20th century. Higher wages and other benefits were won in the 1920s and 30s. However, these gains were mainly enjoyed by coal miners and their families. Capitalism kept most people in poverty. This continued into the late 20th century. In the 1980s, coal prices plummeted, and labor union participation fell significantly. Several factors contributed to this decline, including globalization of many industries, deregulation of public utilities, and "right to work" legislation that made it difficult to build union support. With the increase in natural gas production in the 21st century, coal production has plunged, putting many in the small middle-class out of work, increasing the poverty rate significantly over the last several decades.

Following this decline of union participation, massive layoffs, and low production, infrastructure fell into disrepair, many older workers found themselves sick from black lung disease or otherwise disabled from work, and large out migration began to happen. Oxycontin prescriptions increased wildly across the entire United States from 1990-2000. However, this increase was specifically seen in areas with large populations of disabled people, like Appalachia. By 2017, the rate of prescriptions was 47% higher in Appalachia than in other areas of the country. The death rate from opioid overdoses increased from 1 in 100,000 to 24 in 100,000 from 1990 to 2017, making it one of the leading causes of death in the region (NACo, ARC 2019). Poverty combined with substance use disorders can contribute to feelings of hopelessness and depression (Quello, Brady, and Sonne 2005). These realities have contributed to the public misunderstanding that Appalachia is a desolate place filled with addicts, poverty, and despair.

2.4 Current Demographics

According to the ARC's (2012) most recent demographic report, the Appalachian region is whiter than the country at 81.4% vs. 60.7%, respectively. However, these data also show that almost 20% of the population is non-white, a percentage that is predominantly Black and Latinx. Other demographic sources support the ARC numbers, the Southern sub-region mirrors the United States' racial demographic makeup more closely than the whole. The Southern Sub-region area is 67% white, non-Hispanic, and 33% non-white (Kingsolver 2014; Pollard and Jacobson 2019).

There is little demographic information on the percentage of LGBT residents in Appalachia, particularly for Southern Appalachia. Researchers attribute this lack of data

to conservative values that prevent queer Appalachians from participating in demographic studies (Doyle 2005; Staley 2009:3; Jordan 2015:9, 23-26; Ezell 2019; Dakin, Williams, and McNamara 2020). Cultural factors in these areas may make it difficult to be "out," even when using anonymous self-reports (Jordan 2015; Garringer 2017; Ezell 2019).

Setting aside the lack of comprehensive information, I can extrapolate using available data. The Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law (2019) puts the percentage of LGBT individuals in each state with counties represented in the Appalachian region at approximately 4%. This is a significant difference from the entirety of the United States, which is approximately 6% self-identified LGBT, but is in line with about half of the states (Lewis 2006; Newport 2018; UCLA 2019; PRRI American Values 2019). While Appalachia is predominately white and heterosexual, the region is more diverse concerning race, ethnicity, and sexuality than are suggest using stereotypes (Doyle 2005; Staley 2009:3; Jordan 2015:9, 23-26; Ezell 2019; Dakin, Williams, and McNamara 2020).

The stereotype of Appalachia as a region without diversity has led to the "myth of the innocence of Appalachia" (Smith 2004). Smith (2004) describes this myth as the belief that shared poverty and shared effects of systematic failures outstrip any impact of systematic racism, xenophobia, and homophobia. Smith posits that the reasons for this twofold: first, there is a belief among white Appalachians that very few non-white people live there so how can racism occur? Secondly, everyone who lives in Appalachia is in the same poverty boat. However, Affrilachians, Latinlachians, and queerbillies experience the same adverse life-course outcomes as Black, Brown, and queer Americans in the larger U.S. population (Cabbell 1980; Smith 2004; Daniel 2010;

Kingsolver 2014; Catte 2017a). In addition to experiencing the same adverse life course

outcomes, racialized minorities living in Appalachia are subjected to the adverse

economic conditions faced by white Appalachians, while having their racial identity

erased or made invisible by the stereotypes used. Without stakeholders recognizing the

area's demographics, it is difficult to alleviate the conditions of the underclass.

Furthermore, the lack of recognition leaves out intersecting identities among

minoritized groups.

2.5   Current Discourse

Media have increased its scrutiny of Appalachia due to the economic impact of the

decline of coal mining and the impact of opioid use and addiction on the region. In turn,

the media have folded these issues into categorizing the white working-class. When

Donald Trump's campaign announcement came in 2015, newsrooms asked many

pundits and academics to decipher the mindset of the WWC from the mountains (Vance

2017; Catte 2017a, 2018b; Harkins and McCarroll 2019). The term WWC has been used

synonymously with "hillbilly" over the last decade to mean ignorant, poor, and

reactionary (Perrin 2018).

In sum, much of the current writing about Appalachia focuses on two main

topics: loss of coal jobs and the opioid crisis among the white working class. The news

media report on Appalachia as a Trump stronghold even as discussions of the 2024

election begin (Catte 2017a, 2018b; Vance 2017). There is a growing body of work on

Black Appalachians (Affrilachian) and queer Appalachians (Queerbilly), however, it

neglects more nuanced discussions of how politics and class intersect with other

identities.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1 Stereotyping and Stereotype Threat

Several theories are needed to understand the media's framing of Appalachia fully. News media produce content reflective of culture and society—the media's role in stereotyping, creating "stereotype threat," (a situation where a person feels themselves to be at risk of performing stereotypes about their group in a social setting) engaging in symbolic destruction is well established (Wagner and Obermiller 2004; Obermiller and Maloney 2016).

Stereotyping is the oversimplification of a group of people, usually negative, that becomes pervasive in society. When a person is apprehensive about confirming stereotypes about their identity and changes the activities or interests in which they engage in, they are experiencing stereotype threat (Beasely 2012). Identity formation occurs over the life-course of an individual. Identity formation is influenced by many factors, primary and secondary socializers like parents and peers, but is also heavily influenced by media representation (Cooley 1902; Mead 1913; Krok-Schoen et al. 2015).

Related to identity formation are Omi and Winant's (2014) theory of racial formation and media's role in how an individual experiences race and ethnicity. Stereotypes accumulate and support implicit biases (Greenwald and Banaji 1995). Implicit bias is the internal attribution of specific qualities by an individual onto a member of another who is a member of an outgroup (Greenwald and Banaji 1995). These biases can influence the personal and individual understanding of self and society's response to more significant social problems.

Media's representations encourage stereotyping and discrimination on a micro-level by the outgroup. An ingroup consists of a small collection of people with shared

characteristics and identity cohesion. When considering the overall culture, the ingroup is the dominant, hegemonic group that holds an outsized portion of power over the outgroup. The outgroup is everyone else not connected to the ingroup. The outgroup homogeneity effect is the tendency to think everyone in the outgroup is the same, with differences perceived as minor. Media representations prevent dominant group understanding and recognition of marginalized group life course experiences and lead to implicit biases, which affect macro level social support, governmental policy, and life-course outcomes (Tajfel 1973; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974; Greenwald and Banaji 1995; Page 1996; Sechrist and Stangor, 2001; Ashmore and Del Boca 2015).

Stereotype threat is "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (Steele 1999; Schmader 2010). Stereotype threat is an insidious and usually unseen or hidden force that impacts the life course and performance of those being stereotyped. The more an individual or group is reminded of how they are negatively perceived, the less well they perform on cognitive tasks, and their rate of anxiety experienced rises. A person may feel they must represent their in-group in a particular way (Cooley 1902; Mead 1913) or the stereotype must be valid (Steele 1999:48; Schmander 2010; Wilkerson 2018*)*

Stereotypes related to Appalachia have an impact on those who live there. Many leave and report that among issues of financial stability and educational attainment, "leavers" see those who stay as "white trash" or "dumb hillbillies" and seek to separate themselves from those identifiers (Isenberg 2016:497). This internalization correlates with the "brain drain" of the Appalachians. Young people continue to leave the area and do not return.

Younger Appalachians move to urban areas for many reasons including economic stability, better education, but also to make their image more cosmopolitan. These Appalachians assimilate into the larger dominant culture to shed negative stereotypes and the threat those images cause to internal identity (Hoare and Smith 1999; Krok-Schoen 2015).

3.2 Identity Formation

Identity formation is a social project with multiple players. To begin, an individual or group must determine which of their statuses is the commander or master status. The hegemonic group socially ascribes this status (Omi and Winant 1994:107). This categorization is a template for other types of oppression. Racialization is rooted in power by those who are white. Whiteness becomes not just a demographic descriptor, but capital "W" White, a symbol of power and domination. This symbol of social capital and property becomes powerful (Omi and Winant 1994:25, 29, 43, 45, 55, 209; Crenshaw 1988, 1989; Hill-Collins 2012; Jacobson 2015; Jacobson 2015).

By labeling Appalachia as a place where only white people live, it becomes a place where race and racial inequity are denied or hidden. Appalachia then becomes synonymous with whiteness, even while whites in Appalachia do not share the same power, status, and control that whiteness provides in other areas. Additionally, this framing eliminates a discussion of the power whiteness does provide in comparison to Black, Latinx, and Indigenous Appalachians (Crenshaw 1988, 1989; Omi and Winant 1994: 43, 48, 45, 209; Hill-Collins 2012; Jacobson 2015; Jacobson 2015).

Racial Formation Theory's (RFT) central concept is the racial project (Omi and Winant 1986a; 1994b; 2008c; Page 1986). There is little research on the identity of

"hillbilly" and how identity might be created, obtained, or defined. Identities are created in part by the state and state-adjacent actors. Print media are state actor which supports the dominant group's status quo and has a vested interest in upholding capitalism (Omi and Winant 2014: 88-89, 95, 128-129, 190; Jung and Kwon 2013). The ways that the public understands a particular demographic is more about media consumption rather than the influences of political actors (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Weaver 1996; Cheng, Mitomo, Otsuka, and Jeon 2015; Charron and Annoni 2021).

Scholars have shown the impact of mass media on social perceptions of marginalized groups, including how distorted media representations can affect performance and personal identity (Ben-Zeev, Fein, and Inzlicht, 2004; Quinlan and Bates 2009). Shows like *Justified* and *The Hatfields and McCoys* portray Appalachia as a violent place where everyone always has a shotgun. The literature supports that news media representations create, change, and maintain identity (Davies et al. 2002; Haller, Dorris, and Rahn, 2006). The literature on "hixploitation" in Appalachian Studies also supports this perspective (Herring 2014).

3.3 Symbolic Annihilation

Symbolic annihilation is an outgroup's explicit or implicit erasure in media (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Tucjman 1978:17; Coleman and Yochim 2008). Groups most often erased in media are those outside the dominant or adjacent groups (Jhally and Lewis 1992; Coleman and Yochim 2010). This invisibility interacts with other theoretical concepts. A group may not see themselves represented, or their only representation is a caricature. A society that does not include the group and accurately represent them contributes to stereotype threat and its consequences while also interrupting the basic

process of personal and group identity (Haller et al. 2006; Davies, Spencer, Quinn, and Gerhardstern 2002; Zhang and Haller 2013). Bourdieu (1992, 1998) wrote about the impact of media on what people understand to be accurate and factual about a minority group. When representations of authentic culture and lived experiences are neglected, the dominant group falls victim to the belief in stereotypes that replace accurate portrayals (Bourdieu 1992, 1998; Vesno and Hans 2013).

Few accurate depictions of Appalachian culture exist. People of Appalachia belong to multiple marginalized ethnic and racial backgrounds. Theorists of race, class, gender, and sexuality all acknowledge the harm of exclusion to out-groups. I apply these theoretical concepts to the ways Appalachians are excluded in media (McGee and Boone 1979; Smith 2004; Colman and Yochim 2008).

3.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a complex and nuanced framework that examines the connections and intersections among and within different identities of an individual and how those intersections are impacted by social systems (Crenshaw 1988, 1989; Hill-Collins 2012). Black women legal and sociological experts conceptualized intersectionality to discuss the legal system's effects on Black women's experiences; a group at the intersection of two marginalized identities. Intersectionality has been broadened to include other marginalized identities, including queerness, disability, and different ethnicities. When applied in the context of this project, I look at how discourse treats Appalachians who are non-white, queer, or disabled -- among other identities -- to understand better how a lack of discussion about them impacts identity formation.

Symbolic annihilation combined with the stereotyping of Appalachians impacts those racially coded as other than white by eliminating them from discourse. A small and growing body of work discusses how Black Appalachians, Latinx Appalachians, and Queer Appalachians manage these identities (Kingsolver 2014; Carpenter 2016). When the media refuse to show the Appalachians who are not white, heterosexual, or "low class," the only representations are stereotypes of the people of Appalachia.

Historically, the portrayal of Appalachians and other underclass groups are similar: there is an assigned characteristic of animalistic savagery, a perception of an inability to control personal behavior, and a sexual component that depicts Appalachian men as sexual violators and women as "loose," "fast," or "trashy" (Massey 2007; Haywood and Swank 2008; Swank and Haywood 2011). Because these characteristics are assigned to specific identities like race, class, and gender, intersectionality is an appropriate perspective to apply to this topic (Hill Collins 2012; Crenshaw 1988a, 1989).

3.5 Implicit Bias

Implicit biases are the hidden, unrecognized biases we have about other groups. These biases inform racist, homophobic, classist, and xenophobic ideologies. Personal implicit biases do lead to adverse outcomes, such as a teacher or physician whose prejudiced ideas about the identity of a student or patient may lead to that student or patient not receiving the best education or care (Caroles et al. 2013; Fitzgerald and Hurst 2017; Gullo 2017; Beachum and Gullo 2020). Implicit biases of a crowd or group lead to systemic adverse outcomes and oppression and injustice (Jolls and Sunstein 2006a, 2006b; Payne, Vuletich, and Lundberg 2016). Societal understandings of ethnic groups can hinder or help promote justice, equality, and social cohesion — literature widely

acknowledges media as contributing to internal bias and perceptions. Political candidates, corporate advertisers, and charity organizations have used the power of media to impact internal perceptions for decades (Andrew 2007; Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007, 2009; Kellstedt 2000; Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Azrout, van Spanje, and de Vreese 2012).

Media framing and language are integral to public understanding of identities and cultures. This influence affects public policy on medical services, disability, environmental justice, and education. In the modern era, media still portray many marginalized groups stereotypically and offensively. The stereotypes were seeded long before the current portrayals and are an outcome of an identity project (Omi and Winant 1994; Jolls and Sunstein 2006; Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, and Jackson 2008; Carson and Politte 2020). The lack of research using these theoretical concepts in tandem is a void of knowledge that, if filled, could help generate political policy aimed at need fulfillment.

Additionally, it is rare for popular articles to acknowledge the existences of harmful framing in far-reaching outlets (Black and Rhorer 1995; Campbell 2010). Media outlets habitually stereotype the Appalachian region as white, conservative, wretched, and miserable (Catte 2018:71-72; Solomon 2016). The representation of Appalachians as white mountain people who drink too much and depend on the government persists (Dabney 1974; Farr 2007; Cooke-Jackson and Hansen 2008; Roscoe 2017; Solomon 2916; Stoll 2017). Frank X Walker coined the term "Affrilachian" to accompany his book of poetry by the same name to bring awareness to the diversity of his home place (Walker 1999). Herring (2014) goes in-depth on this point when discussing media representations in his article "'Hixploitation' Cinema, Regional Drive-ins, and the Cultural Emergence of a Queer New Right" (2014). He discusses the "not quite white"

outsider identity, even while individuals may be coded as white when out of the region. They fall into this purgatory of racial otherness, a type of ethnic formation (Herring 2014; Harkins and McCarroll 2019; York and Rubin 2018).

The cultural understanding of Appalachia as white, poor, and backward leads to an inaccurate understanding of "hillbilly," as if it is a racialized minority. This misunderstanding contributes to the erasure of actual lived experiences of Appalachians from all intersecting identities and downplays issues of racial and ethnic discrimination (Smith 2004; Kaneen 2007). It is also evidence of the importance of language in Fanon's work, as "hillbilly" simultaneously erases the Black Appalachian while diminishing their experiences as an oppressed minority (Fanon 1952:9).

3.6 Research Expectations

National media have often misunderstood Appalachia; therefore, I would expect national media during this period to continue to use old stereotypes of the white hillbilly, whereas more local media would have less of a need to depend upon stereotypes in reporting on issues of Appalachia. I expected that a national outlet like the *NYT* would not only perpetuate Appalachian stereotypes but would engage in status quo understandings about the region. Status quo understandings of the region are those ideas that place the white working class at the center of all discussions about the area. The status quo makes Appalachians seem uncultured and ignorant. These understandings or stereotypes would include the elimination of diverse populations in reporting, focusing predominately on white, cis-het, working-class residents as subjects, and talking almost exclusively about certain issues in Appalachia like coal, addiction, and poverty. In contrast to this expectation, I would assume local media framing would

be more sympathetic and nuanced as those outlets and reporters have much more experience with the diversity of populations, outlooks, and issues that affect Appalachia. Much as Comer (2006) found in her examination of portrayals of Appalachia in national vs. regional papers, I also expected to find that regional outlets would be less likely to fall back on egregious stereotypes when discussing Appalachia.

4   DATA AND METHODS

4.1   Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA, as a method, primarily focuses on the maintenance and recreation of power structures. It is a method rooted in interest to understand current social issues with a specific and "explicit sociopolitical stance" (van Dijk 1993:249). It is an interdisciplinary approach to pressing social matters that seeks to name and understand discursive structures and strategies that maintain dominance and control by those in power over those without (van Dijk 1993, 2000; Teo 2000; Ahmadian and Farahani 2014).

As a qualitative methodology, CDA targets specific discursive texts and utilizes close reading and linguistic analysis. This approach differs from other qualitative methods focusing on specific words, themes, and frequency. While superficially interested in the number of instances of words or phrases or thematic comparisons, CDA primarily focuses on how the author uses words or phrases, in what context, to what end, and why. How does a word or phrase choice support or dismantle status quo power structures (van Dijk 1993, 2000)? CDA views discourse as a mechanism supportive of entrenched social structures and as a mechanism that reproduces existing ideologies and social processes (Foucault 1972; Fairclough 1992; van Dijk 1993, 2000; Tao 2000).

As an Appalachian and queerbilly myself, I seek an understanding of the people and culture: an accurate portrayal that neither romanticizes the positive aspects of Appalachia, nor downplays trouble nor exaggerates every negative characteristic. I believe that critically interrogating hegemonic discourse is a step toward that accuracy, which can lead to a better understanding of the region and help identify solutions to social problems.

It is also important to understand that discourse in and of itself is neither positive nor negative. While I searched for 15 of the strategies used by van Dijk, Teo, or Igwebuike in support of the status quo. Not all discursive strategies are used for nefarious purposes but can by used in service to the dismantling of hegemonic discourse. Additionally, there are many more discursive strategies that are not looked for here. These can include rhetorical fallacies or choosing a less powerful word to downplay the severity of the report topic.

For instance, in "Lies? The News Media is Starting to Describe Trump's 'falsehoods' that Way," in *The Washington* Post, Paul Farhi (2019) harshly condemns writers from refusing to call a lie a lie, particularly when it comes to political figures. Farhi points out the pedantic way newsrooms, editorial boards, and style guides view words like "lie" and how those perspectives actually prevent truth-telling. Still adhering to an undefined "the dictionary," which says the use of "lie" requires intent (which it is impossible for a writer to know – or is it?) However, we can know intent by past actions and words Farhi implores his colleagues to take a similar approach as Daniel Dale of the *Toronto Star* and *CNN*. Dale is precise with word choice mentioning, "Trump lies all the time. If we're only going to point out some of them, he wins with the other ones."

In addition to those strategies looked for here, and those outside this project, there are still many other strategies and counter strategies news media could use to pushback against hegemonic discourse in service to both accurate reporting and equity in storytelling.

In discussions of Appalachia, research indicates that media utilize and reinforce existing stereotypes and dismissive language related to the region and residents (Batteau 1979; Anglin 2004; Massey 2007; Cooke-Jackson and Hansen 2008; Campbell

2011; Herring 2014; Stone 2016). This understanding supports van Dijk's explanations

of discourse as ideological reproduction. On the one hand, discourse engages in

classism, racism, and queer antagonism; on the other, it is a foundational source of

these ideologies to readers.

This project utilizes a two-part process using the methodological procedures laid

out by van Dijk (1993, 2000) and Igwebuike (2018). First, I create a broad

generalization of the newspaper discourse that examines discursive strategies

potentially containing ideological meaning. Second a structural analysis for contrast is

conducted between the larger, worldwide outlet and smaller, region-specific sources

(van Dijk 1993, 2000; Teo 2000).

4.2 Source Material

The sources for this project are The *New York Times* and four independent news

outlets, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, The Roanoke Times, The Charleston Gazette-*

Mail, and *The Daily Yonder*. I obtained the articles from these outlets through database

searches of *The New York Times* and website searches of each news outlet.

The reasons for selecting these outlets are the scope of readership and breadth of

reporting. The *New York Times* has been considered the United States' "paper of

record" since 1913, when librarians originated the phrase to refer to the index of subjects

published daily in the paper (Augustyn 2021). The *NYT* has 5,496,000 subscribers

worldwide, is 18th in worldwide circulation, 3rd in the U.S., and has been awarded 132

Pulitzer Prizes for outstanding reporting (https://www.nytco.com/company/prizes-

awards/). The *NYT* reports on various issues and topics, including in-depth discussions

of politics and elections. These characteristics make the outlet ideal for examining

reporting representative of US national outlets.

The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* out of Pennsylvania and T*he Roanoke Times* out of

Virginia and Ohio are regional daily newspapers serving western Pennsylvania, eastern

Ohio, West Virginia, and Virginia- the heart of Appalachia. They reach from 10,000

subscribers daily to a maximum of 102,000 on Sunday. They each have a significant

online presence. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* has won three Pulitzers, a National Press

Club Freedom of Information Award, and a Wilbur Award (www.Post-gazette.com;

www.Pulitzer.org). *The Roanoke Times* has won multiple awards, including the Online

Journalism Award for Excellence in Reporting in a Small or Medium Outlet

(www.Roanoke.com/about).

The Charleston Gazette-Mail is a broadsheet newspaper serving Charleston, WV,

and surrounding areas. It has a circulation of 40,000 daily to 70,000 Sunday

subscribers. It is one of the oldest news sources in WV, founded in 1873. The paper and

its reporters have won multiple awards, including a Pulitzer, a MacArthur Foundation

Genius Grant, and West Virginia Press Association awards

(https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/gazette-mail-claims-21-wv-press-association-

awards/article_3affb85e-ad09-532a-8190-37c78e752fe4.html).

The Daily Yonder is an online news source that focuses solely on issues of rural

United States. It is supported by the Center for Rural Strategies. The Center's stated

mission is to "seek to improve economic and social conditions for communities in the

countryside and around the world" (https://www.ruralstrategies.org/mission-1). *The*

Daily Yonder has editorial independence from the Center for Rural Strategies. It is

based out of Whitesburg, KY. *TDY* provides news, commentary, editorials, opinions, and

analysis. *TDY*'s coverage has a sympathetic bend toward concerns of rural areas, which is in line with the stated mission of its parent organization.

To identify relevant news pieces, I conduct a keyword search in the *NYT* database and on each of the other news outlets' websites separately. I specifically sought writing on Appalachia and identity. The articles included are opinion pieces, political reporting, commentary, editorials, investigative, local news, and blog entries. Blog entries are treated as opinion pieces for the purpose of this study. During the time period from June 16-January 20, 2021, *The New York Times* published 316 articles containing the word "Appalachia"; seven appeared in the *Post-Gazette*; eight in the *Roanoke Times*; 34 in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*; and 13 in *The Daily Yonder*. Out of these articles, I focused my keyword search on politics and identity (Table 1).

Table 1 Key Word Searches

News Outlet	Keyword search 1	Return 1	Keyword Search 2	Return 2	Keyword search 3	Return 3	Keyword search 4	Return 4
The New York Times	Appalachia and WWC	15	Appalachia and WWC and Election	12	Appalachia and Populism	8	Appalachia and nationalism	8
The Post-Gazette	Post-Gazette and Appalachia and WWC and Post-Gazette not AP not Reuters	5	Post-Gazette and Appalachia and WWC and Election NOT AP NOT Reuters	4	Post-Gazette and Appalachia and Populism NOT AP NOT Reuters	3	Post-Gazette and Appalachia and nationalism NOT AP NOT Reuters	3
Roanoke Times	Roanoke Times and Appalachia and WWC and Roanoke Times	8	Roanoke Times and Appalachia and WWC and Election NOT AP NOT Reuters	8	Roanoke Times and Appalachia and Populism NOT AP NOT Reuters	5	Roanoke Times and Appalachia and nationalism NOT AP NOT Reuters	5
The Daily Yonder	The Daily Yonder and Appalachia and WWC	6	The Daily Yonder and Appalachia and WWC and Election NOT AP NOT Reuters	5	The Daily Yonder and Appalachia and Populism NOT AP NOT Reuters	3	The Daily Yonder and Appalachia and nationalism NOT AP NOT Reuters	0
The Charleston Gazette-Mail	The Charleston Gazette-Mail and Appalachia and WWC	34	The Charleston Gazette-Mail and WWC and Election NOT AP NOT Reuters	11	The Charleston Gazette-Mail and Appalachia and Populism NOT AP NOT Reuters	1	The Charleston Gazette-Mail and Appalachia and nationalism NOT AP NOT Reuters	1
Keywords: Appalachia, white-working class, election, populism, nationalism								

Based on this table, I selected 28 articles from *The New York Times* (keyword searches 2-4), 10 articles from the *Post-Gazette*, 18 articles from the *Roanoke times*, 11 articles from *The Gazette-Mail*, and 8 articles from the *Daily Yonder*. Altogether I analyzed a maximum of 51 articles, as there may be duplicates given the similarity in keyword searches. All duplicates were dropped.

4.3 *Dedoose* Coding

The data were analyzed using qualitative analysis software *Dedoose*, version 9.0.62 2022 release. *Dedoose* allows for clear coding of data and the development of concepts and shared themes. It provides many tools for visualizing data, making the program ideal for this project.

I downloaded each article as a PDF file or an HTML image capture. I only used the image capture when it was impossible to download as a PDF, as the image files are

more difficult to work with inside the software. Once downloaded, I categorized the articles by outlet, publishing date, whether the outlet is national or Appalachian/rural, the tone (positive, negative, or neutral) the article took towards Appalachia, and type of article (opinion or reporting). Units of analysis for coding are the articles themselves.

To begin primary data collection, I used the search tool to find each keyword or group of keywords to identify relevant articles. Searching in this way allowed me to identify the keywords' contexts. After multiple readings, initial codes were grouped into shared themes. In the results chapter, you will find a table of keyword themes.

Additionally, I further collapsed the concepts around broader shared themes that emerged. For example, "whiteness as power" includes "white working class," "white nationalism," and "white supremacy." For the purpose of this study, "whiteness" is considered both a racialized identity and a form of oppressive property. Because of this dual placement I have broken this one concept into two to discuss them separately. *Dedoose* shows all codes individually as well as part of a set, which allows me to examine how whiteness is used in multiple ways, as an institutional power, an identity, and a personal relationship with influence. I used the coding feature again to identify the discursive strategies and discourse structures discussed below to organize the articles for CDA analysis.

4.4 Discursive Strategies

To investigate the ways that discourse is used to prop up the status quo, I utilize the work of van Dijk's, Teo's, and Igwebuike's identified discursive strategies to examine these articles. This method of identifying and examining come from several of these authors' work including: "Discursive Strategies and Ideologies in Selected Newspaper

reports on the Nigerian-Cameroonian Bakassi Peninsula on the Nigerian-Cameroonian Border Conflict" (Igwebuike 208); Van Dijk, Teo's, and Igwebuike's common strategies with definitions and examples are presented here.

1. Slanted Headlining is a strategy often used to convey in-group favoritism or to bend the reader's attention toward one understanding of an article.

2. Negative Labeling is the process by which people or groups are described or tagged with either a positive or negative label that places them within the context of the perceived understanding of the group. Negative labeling condemns a certain group's activities and ideologies.

3. Evidentiality uses evidence or "proof" to make claims or opinions more credible. This evidence solidifies the good of the in-group and the bad of the out-group.

4. Number Game uses objectivity and numbers as a way to give credibility to facts over opinions. Numbers represent neutrality, hard facts, and truthfulness.

5. Hyperbolism is a strategy used to create a divide between 'us' and 'them' using extreme exaggerations. It emphasizes negative traits or actions by the out-groups.

6. Victimization is a strategy where the in-group is portrayed as a victim on the bad actions of the out-group.

7. Depersonalization deemphasizes the speaker in favor of the opinions or actions of the speaker. This strategy emphasizes the idea that 'experts' have drawn conclusions based on data but are actually personal opinions.

8. Humanitarianism is the strategy that brings an invitation to show empathy or engage in compassion, especially for the in-group.

9. Vagueness uses vague expressions like 'few,' 'a lot,' and 'very' to withhold complete information as positive self-expression or negative other representation.

10. Distancing is phrasing that allows the author, and through them, the reader, to distance themselves from the outgroup through self-deception or "othering" of the outgroup.

11. Illegality is a rhetorical and lexical device that positions the outgroup as criminal or antisocial.

12. Concealment plays down or leaves implicit relations of power

13. Legitimation is the justification of social practices through (1) emotions (particularly fear), (2) a hypothetical future, (3) rationality, (4) voices of expertise, and (5) altruism

14. Overlexicalization is the repetitive use of words or phrases, either the same or similar, to emphasize concepts, definitions, or characteristics.

15. Disclaimer is a strategy to save face by stating positive facts first, then negative attributes.

4.5 Comparison

Using the data from coding, I compared themes between different outlets discussed based on the specific outlet, type of outlet, and style of article. I examine whether there was a difference between opinion pieces and reporting, whether the discursive strategies outlined were used and if articles were more likely to be positive,

negative, or neutral in tone. I compared positive and negative articles to see which discursive strategies were more likely to be used in tone differences. Lastly, I looked to see which outlets did not utilize any of the discursive strategies outlined, where they were located, what the tone of the articles was, what type of outlet, and if they were opinion or traditional reporting.

After these basic descriptors were analyzed, I closely read to see how discursive strategies were utilized to support status quo understandings of the themes examined. For instance, since the dominant group considers whiteness the neutral or reference group to which all other groups are compared, it would be expected that these discursive strategies would be utilized to support the ideology of white supremacy. Additionally, these strategies might not be utilized to disrupt the status quo. I also scrutinize articles that did not use any of the discursive strategies I looked for to see if those articles had accurate portrayals, resistance to the status quo, or if inaccurate portrayals and support for the status quo is the norm.

I investigate which strategies are used, giving examples of how strategies intersect with the identified themes. I then consider the status quo understanding of those themes, and how the strategy supports that understanding. After this, I further probe into the ways some discursive strategies are used to discuss Appalachia or specific groups in either a negative or positive light. I report both descriptive findings and findings about specific strategies and themes.

5   ANALYSIS AND BROAD THEMES

Of the 51 articles used, 34 used known discursive strategies lined out in the method used. Seventeen did not use one or more of the discursive strategies.. In this chapter I will analyze both descriptively.

Using *Dedoose*, each article (n=51) was uploaded and read for initial codes. Then several close readings were completed to find codes that could be collapsed into broader themes. Each article was given an ID number and organized by several variables: paper published, the area served by the publication (Appalachian/rural or national), opinion/editorial/commentary or traditional reporting, tone of the article (as it relates to Appalachia), whether it used one of the 15 discursive strategies, and date published. All papers published at least one article related to each broad theme, but there were differences in which child codes were represented.

Of the 51 articles analyzed, 16 were from the *NYT*, 15 from the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, 7 from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 8 from the *Roanoke Times*, and 5 from *The Daily Yonder*. 66% of the articles were from Appalachian outlets, and 34% were from the *New York Times*. 53% of the articles were opinion or commentary, and 47% were traditional or investigative reporting. 43% of the articles were published from 2015-2018, and 57% from 2019-2021. These statistics can be seen in figure 2 and table 3 below.
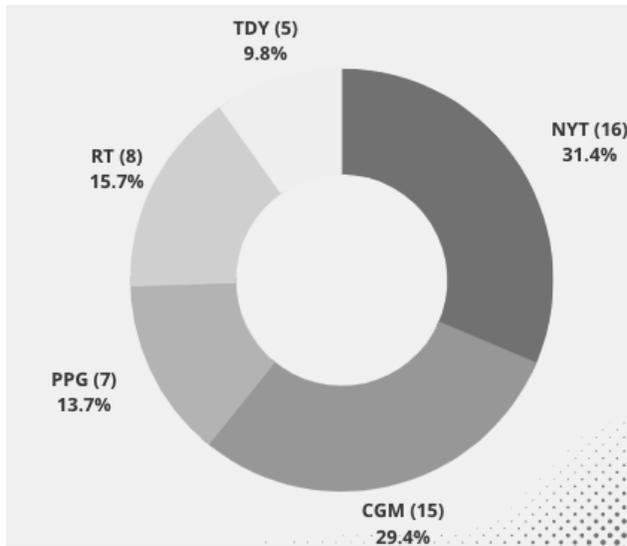
Figure 2 Article Distribution by Paper

Table 2 Basic Characteristics

Outlet Type		Article Style		Date of Publication	
Appalachian	National	Traditional	Opinion/Commentary	2015-2018	2019-2021
66% (35)	34% (16)	47% (24)	53% (27)	43% (22)	57% (29)

All the papers reported on themes of Appalachia, including addiction, coal, and rurality; Government, including Donald Trump, J.D. Vance, populism, and voting; Economy, including jobs, infrastructure, and poverty; Identity, including race, racism, hillbilly, sexism, and xenophobia; Values including education, healthcare, and family; whiteness as power including white working class, white nationalism, fascism, and Christian nationalism. "Whiteness as power" was examined as part of theme "white supremacy."

Codes were assigned based not only on specific words but also on the tone of what was written or what was alluded to in the writing. For example, in "Why an

Economic Populist Pitch Failed in Coal Country," Sabrina Tavernise writes, "He

channeled West Virginia's union roots when he championed a statewide teachers' strike

earlier this year." This sentence was given the codes "populism," "labor," "union," and

"jobs." "Union" is an obvious choice because it is directly stated, but "populism," "labor,"

and "jobs" are not. Unions are populist institutions that champion labor rights and job

creation. Because of the nature of what a union is, these codes make sense. This also

allows for this article to be included in themes of both populism and economy.

In another example, the Editorial Board of *The Roanoke Times* in "Why Do Some

Liberals Hate Appalachia So Much?" asks a very basic question. This headline was coded

with various discursive strategies, including "slanted headlining." I determined this

discursive strategy code by first assigning the code "democrat," which is a synonym for

"liberal" in U.S. politics, and "hyperbole" based on the use of the word "hate." Having

established that the Editorial Board is alluding to the idea that Democrats have

incredibly strong feelings about Appalachia based solely on the comments to another

article that is the subject of this piece, I assigned these codes. Since the use of hyperbole

is common in the slanted headlining, it makes sense to code this title with both

discursive strategies. Additionally, using the word "liberal," I could assign the codes

"politics" and "government" since the article spends significant time discussing the role

of both in solving issues in Appalachia. In "A Voice of Hate in the Heartland," Richard

Fausset writes:

> He helped start the Traditionalist Worker Party, one of the extreme right-
>
> wing groups that marched in Charlottesville, VA, in August, and again at a

"White Lives Matter" rally last month in Tennessee. The group's stated

mission is to "fight for the interests of White Americans.

The words "white nationalism," "white identity," and "Nazism" do not appear in this passage. However, the cipher words for these codes are clear. The Traditionalist Worker Party was created by a far-right political party active from 2013-2018. Started by Matthew Heimbach, the group sought to establish Christian white nationalism and supported a racially separatist agenda. The Southern Poverty Law Center categorized the TWP as a hate group. Because of these characteristics, it made sense to code this passage with "white nationalism" and "white working-class," as TWP purported to speak for that very group, actively recruiting disillusioned working-class whites. This passage, in particular, highlights the need to be knowledgeable and engaged with the subject material of each article. Codes and themes can be hidden behind word and syntax choices.

There were differences in which aspects of Appalachia each source covered. Appalachian outlets covered issues of addiction in Appalachia more often than the *NYT*. Conversely, the *NYT* covered more topics related to coal mining than Appalachian outlets. The *NYT* covered issues of economy, jobs, and infrastructure more often than the Appalachian outlets. It also covered issues of wealth and power more often. Appalachian outlets were the only outlets to discuss "boot strap" ideology.

On issues related to government and politics, the *NYT* reported more often than Appalachian outlets. However, there were some topics that the Appalachian outlets discussed more than *NYT*, including socialism, Joe Biden, J.D. Vance, and conservative ideology. In George Will's piece in *The Roanoke Times*, he states

> Responding to political threats larded with the money of other people...
> The Republican party now shares one of progressivism's defining
> aspirations... This always involved the essence of socialism, capital
> allocation...

All outlets widely discussed Donald Trump. In, "Putting Trump's Promises to the Test," Nelson Schwartz puts the negative about the landscape front and center, for the *NYT*, opening the article, "In the hills and hollows of Mingo County, W.V., where unemployment is nearly triple the national average, it's coal."

Breakdowns by outlet of codes can be found in figure 3 below.
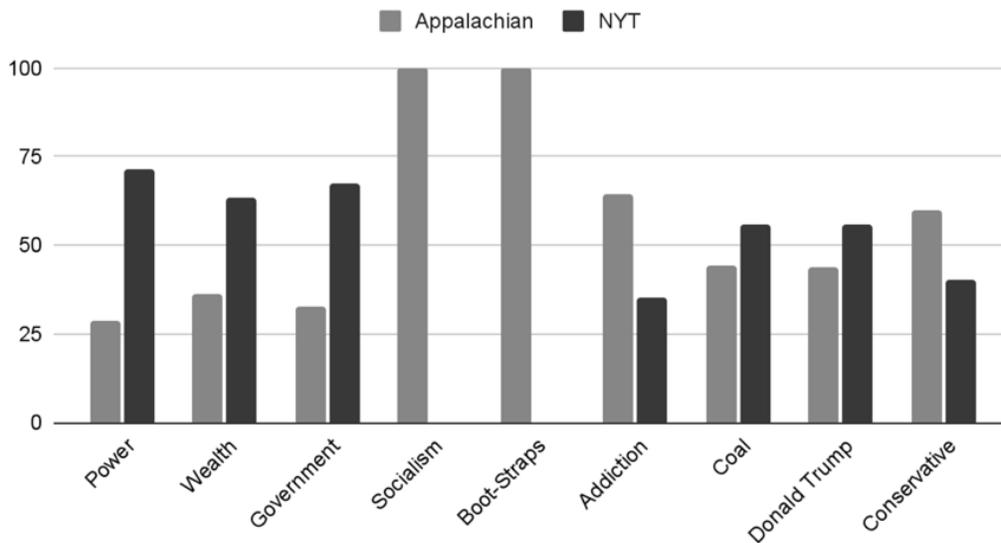

Figure 3 Codes by Outlet

Codes related to regional identity were, expectedly, discussed in regional outlets more often, while the *NYT* discussed gender, feminism, and sexism more often.

Regional outlets discussed Appalachian identity, homophobia, and racism more often

than the *NYT*. A breakdown of themes by paper can be found in table 3.

Table 3 Themes by Paper

Themes	NYT	CGM	TDY	PPG	RT	Total Number of Codes
Identity	31.6% (128)	14.2% (57.6)	25.3% (102.4)	6.8% (27.4)	22.2% (90)	100% (405.4)
Whiteness as Power	43.6% (79)	12.3% (22.4)	8.8% (16)	8.8% (16)	26.5% (48)	100% (197.3)
Values	22.8% (35)	14.6% (22.4)	37.6% (57.6)	11.9% (18.3)	13% (20)	100% (153.3)
Government/Politics	31.5% (67)	7.5% (16)	13.5% (28.8)	25.8% (54.9)	21.6% (46)	(100%) 296.6
Appalachia (Addiction)	10.8% (3)	15.4% (4.3)	34.6% (9.6)	24.7% (6.9)	14.4% (4)	100% 27.8
Appalachia (Coal)	22.4% (11)	13.1% (6.4)	19.6% (9.6)	32.7% (16)	12.2% (6)	100% 49

Positive and negative tone were assigned based on the general nature of the piece

when it came to describing Appalachia as a whole. For instance, in articles discussing

addiction, addiction is not shown to be a positive thing, but instead the article highlights

the positive work being done to combat addiction. Appalachian outlets were more likely

to discuss Appalachia issues like coal and addiction in a more positive tone than the

NYT. In Graham Marema's opinion piece, "Ron Howard's Film to Appalachia: 'Get a

Job'" for *The Daily Yonder*:

> I realized my whole life I'd been listening to Glenn Close (Mawmaw) yell at
>
> Amy Adams (Vance's mother) that she had no one to blame or being poor

but herself, and it taught me to be ashamed of living In an impoverished region, ashamed of my neighborhoods and classmates, ashamed of myself for been tied to this place and having no say in the matter. I had to relearn my childhood accept and unlearn shame.

In this excerpt, Marema, while bringing up the social ills of the Appalachian region, she laments she is encouraged to take the expected route (much like Dwight Yoakam) and eliminating one's "hillbilly-ness," even when that personal history is a positive one. She views Appalachia as a good place to be from.

Forty percent of the Appalachian outlet articles used a positive tone, 33% used a neutral tone, and 27% were negative. In "What the Next President Could do for Appalachia," Wilson Paine (2016) writing for *The Daily Yonder,* looks for positive solutions to the social problems of Appalachia:

There are, however, some important things that the next president can do to tear down some of the walls stunting economic prosperity in rural American. For starters, more money needs to be set aside for prevention and treatment services to get a handle on the opioid epidemic

To give an example of a neutral tone in an Appalachian outlet, Jonathan Tamari writes for the *PPG* in "Analysis: With the Vote Count Now Over, Here's how Pennsylvania Broke for Joe Biden:"

> Voters in every single Pennsylvania county cast more presidential votes this year than in 2016. And in every county Mr. Biden received more votes than Hillary Clinton did, while Mr. Trump recede more votes than he did four years ago.

In this except, Tamari gives a "just the facts ma'am" statement about the election in Pennsylvania in 2020. There are no descriptors about the place or people, regardless of who they voted for, in this passage. Appalachia is a neutral subject in this article.

In "A Good Community Shouldn't be Confused with a Good Economy," Bill Bishop writes commentary for *TRT* about "declining population and budgetary restraints" affecting the local schools, and "broke down miners, Medicaid users, drugs, a shuttered Wal-Mart and Make American Great Again stickers on rusty pickups." However, he follows up these comments by discussing just how wrong it is to pigeonhole the region based on these characteristics. Bishop uses a scientific study that showed a strong correlation to kids growing up in "hillbilly places" and positive life-course outcomes for kids. This information is disruptive to the status quo.

When it comes to addiction, putting a positive "spin" on Appalachia is difficult, however, an article does not need to say that addiction itself is good, but to speak about people with addiction problems with grace and to discuss solutions rather than just problems. In "What the Next President Could Do For Appalachia," commentariat Wilson Paine, talks about how J.D. Vance's book *Hillbilly Elegy* only shows readers a glimpse into the "struggles, social, cultural, and economic impacting the white working class...especially those hailing from ...regions like Appalachia." He goes on to offer three

solutions to the problems he discusses, making Appalachia a place that can be improved.

The *NYT* overwhelmingly took a negative tone, with 75% of the articles using negative or derogatory descriptions, with neutral and positive tones at 12.5% each. This breakdown can be found in figure 4.

On the other side, some articles talked negatively about Appalachia or its people, usually using stereotypes. In "Hillary. Clinton Denounces Unusual Protester: Donald Blankenship, Convicted Mine Executive," Amy Chozick begins by describing Donald Blankenship (a wealthy coal magnate who was convicted of safety violations related to the Upper Branch Mine disaster) as a "high profile rabble-rouser" and spends most of the article discussing how low -information voters support people like Don Blankenship and Donald Trump.

Another example of the *NYT* negative tone is in the article "When the Wrong are Right" by commentator Ross Douthat. "From this [liberal] perspective, Appalachia is almost a welcome relief: At last, all the white racists are safely in the other party, and we don't have to cater to them anymore." While Douthat is not only writing about Appalachia in this article, but his overall tone is also negative towards rural areas in general where "bigots" and "nativists" live and drag down society.
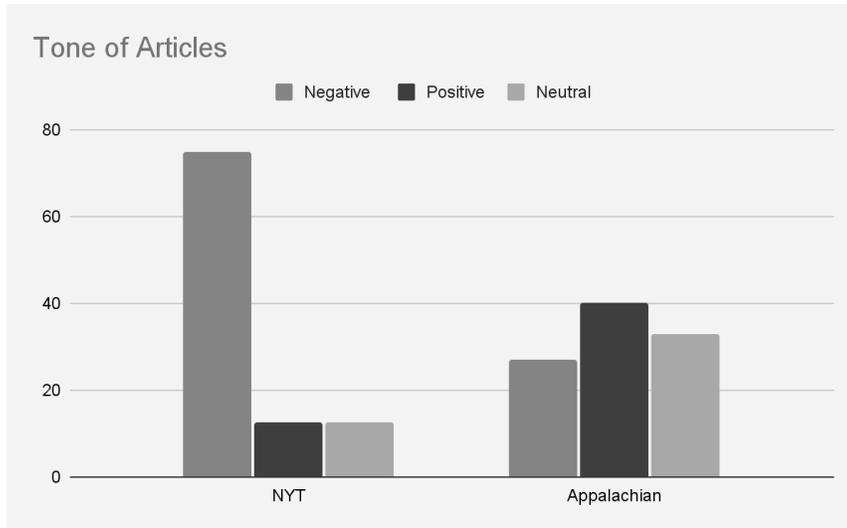
Figure 4 Tone off Articles (n=51)

There were differences between the papers related to tone and discursive strategies. When one of the 15 discursive strategies were used, such as slanted headlining, or hyperbole, the articles' tones were generally negative. This was true regardless of the paper. The *New York Times* used more of the examined discursive strategies than the regional outlets: 69% of the articles took a negative tone. However, when discursive strategies were not used, the tone was mixed, suggesting a more balanced perspective. Visuals of the use of discursive strategies and a breakdown of the relationship between strategies and tone by paper can be seen in figures 5, 6, and 7.
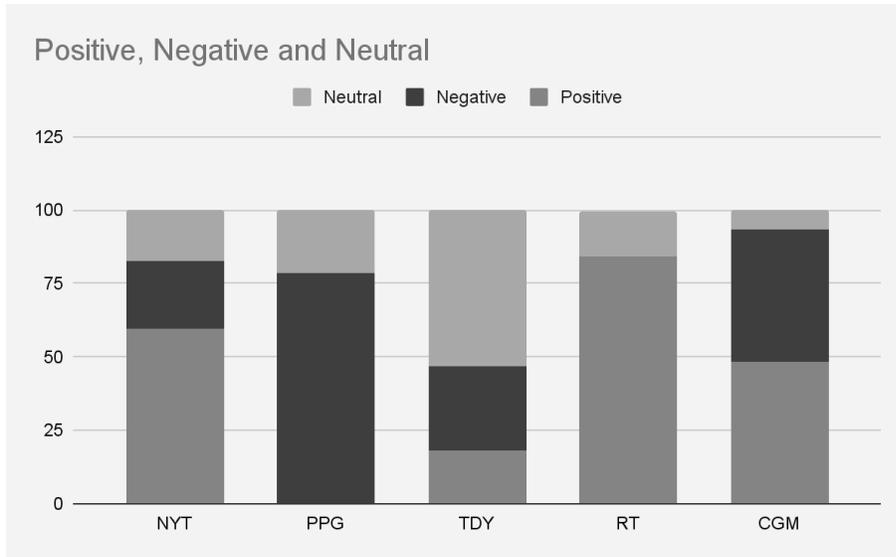
Figure 5 Tone by Outlet (n=51)
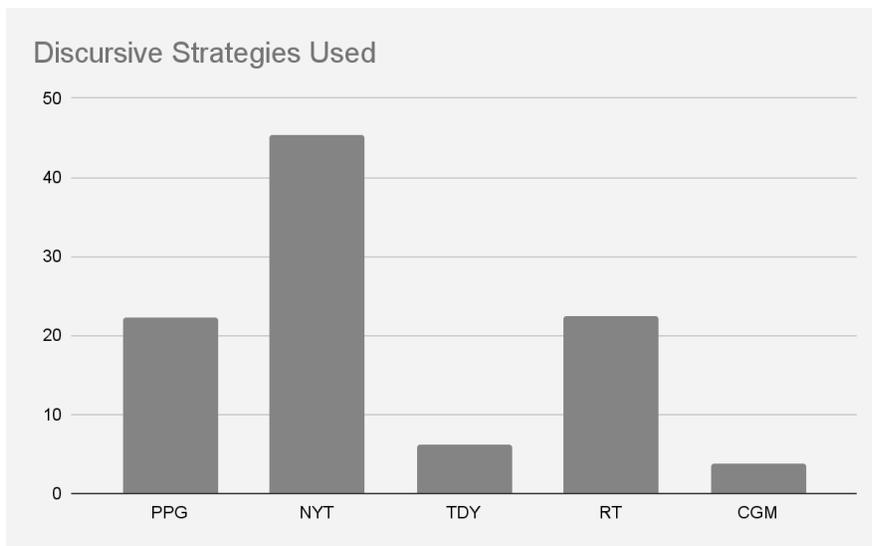
Figure 6 Percent of Articles Using Discursive Strategies (n=51)

The tone of the articles seems to depend quite a lot on whether or not an article was traditional reporting or commentary/opinion. When discursive strategies were used the tone was generally positive, however, when broken out by type of article, it is clear that opinion articles were more likely to be positive and traditional reporting more likely

to be negative or neutral. I have noted the type of article in the findings sections that

follow.

Tone When Discursive Strategies Used
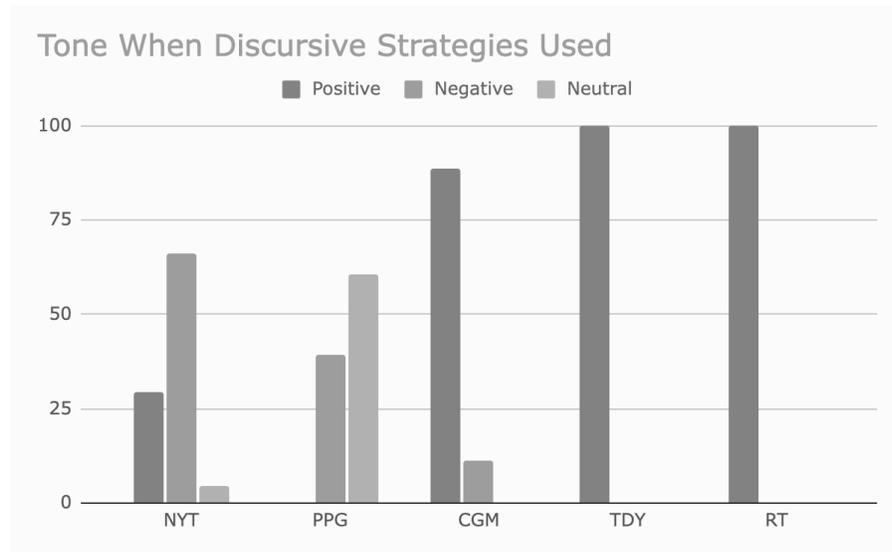
Figure 7 *Tone when Discursive Strategies Were used (n=34)*

Tone and Type of Articles Using Discursive Strategies
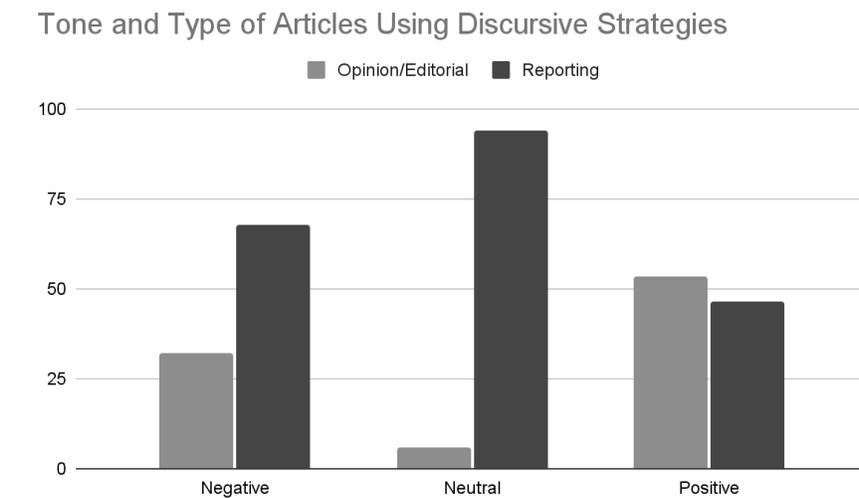
Figure 8 *Tone and Type of Articles Using Discursive Strategies (n=34)*

While discursive strategies as a parent code were more closely related to a

negative tone, there were differences in the strategy and tone used. For instance, the

discursive strategy of overlexicalization (the use of the same or similar words

repeatedly) was often used in positive articles, even where the strategy of

humanitarianism, usually associated with positivity, was actually aligned with a negative

tone. These relationships between tone, discursive strategies, and themes are discussed

further in Chapter Six.

6 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I use the themes revealed in coding to analyze the articles through CDA. The themes discussed include (1) identity, whiteness as power, and white supremacy; (2) government, including politics; (3) Appalachian issues, specifically coal and opioid addiction; (4) values; and (5) the economy. Within each theme, I discuss how these articles use discursive strategies to support status quo ideologies. I also discuss how articles that did not use any of the 15 strategies handled the theme.

Following the election of Donald Trump in 2016, voters elected many diverse candidates to office across the country. These included the first Black woman mayor of Charlotte, NC, Vi Lyes, candidates from the Democratic Socialists of America party, including into the Virginia House of Delegates, and Danica Roem, the first transgender person to hold a state seat in Virginia. This wave of "backlash" candidates coincides with the rise of white identity politics.

6.1 Identity

Getting to identity in Appalachia is a tough needle to thread. There is little to no research on how Appalachians identify regarding their regional identity in congruence or comparison with racial or ethnic identity. This is also true for other identity categories like sexuality and gender. There is a growing body of work in the area of identity in Appalachia. One of the first works on this subject, *Blacks in Appalachia*, discussed multiple issues of the intersections of Black and Appalachian identity. This work includes articles on experiences of racism, coal mining as a Black Appalachian, and how the whitening of Appalachia erases Black people (Turner, Cabbell, and Painter 1985). Cooper, Knotts, and Livingston (2010) found that "Appalachian Identifiers"

(people who identify *as* Appalachian) are older, more highly educated, and have spent the majority of their lives in the region. More recent work discusses what it is like to be queer, Black, or Latinx in the mountains (Detamore 2010; Allen 2015; Shuster 2019; Enriquez 2020). Still, there is no comprehensive quantitative study asking a wide range of Appalachians how they identify and if "Appalachian" is even one of the identities they consider for themselves. Because of this lack of information, it is necessary to examine how news media handle topics of identity closely. Of the 51 articles analyzed, 17 discussed identity-related issues, including whiteness as power, LGBTQ+, antisemitism, racialization, and xenophobia.

Of the 17 articles, 7 framed identity from a victimhood perspective. The use of victimization places the subject into the outgroup, even though they are part of the dominant ingroup. In the next article, the ingroup is the dominant class and the outgroup are, well, everyone else: minoritized and marginalized, the people who live without much privilege.

The progressive, liberal national Democratic Party treats West Virginians as being so dumb that it can "win" them back by criticizing them. The party misplaces the dumbness honor – it belongs to the accuser.

"WV Needs Big Federal Government?" uses this strategy. Published in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, commentariat Charles McElwee places West Virginians as the victims of identity politics at the hands of "progressive, liberal national Democrat(s)." He calls Hillary Clinton's remarks about white working-class voters racist and xenophobic. Still, he does not offer any evidence to the contrary, nor does he include

other identities in his criticism of the progressive platform to improve the social safety net in WV.

Five articles frame Appalachians as people who do not want people of color, LGBTQ+ folks, or immigrants to receive benefits from the government. McElwee's article, uses the strategy of victimization to make subjects more sympathetic and engages in the symbolic annihilation of other identities in WV, "This is not the first time that the national Democratic Party has maligned West Virginians. West Virginia was obviously the poster child for Hillary's 'Basket of deplorables,' the place where she perceived citizens in great numbers have the negative traits she assigned to them." McElwee, rather than pushback against the "basket of deplorables" with a response that disproves all West Virginians are "racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic – you name it," chooses to double-down on speaking only to those West Virginians who identify as a "Deplorable." Now the bigoted are seen as being bullied, but outgroup Appalachians are invisible. This strategy supports a status quo understanding of identity by depicting the dominant group, white, cis-gendered heterosexual men, as the discriminated-against party. This choice eliminates the struggles of other identities, especially in Appalachia, where news reporting often erases them.

Immigration is increasingly becoming a hot topic in Appalachia. The largest group of people moving *into* Appalachia are Latinx immigrants (Enriques 2020). In many ways, this has led to increased fear and anxiety from the mostly white-working class. Misguided anxiety has many residents blaming immigrants for the lack of jobs and higher taxes because many think immigrants are eligible for welfare programs. In general, immigrants, mainly undocumented persons, are not eligible for these, and

immigrants are more likely to perform low-wage, highly oppressive jobs in factories, mills, and farms.

In George Goehl's news article for *tNYT*, "If Progressives Don't Try to Win Over Rural Areas, Guess Who Will," the use of concealment and distancing appears to give a pass to the social structures that support xenophobia. "At a trailer park home, a white man told canvassers from our local affiliate group, he did not know of any undocumented immigrants receiving federal benefits or wage protections." There is no discussion here, even in an article about helping the rural poor, about how these beliefs (undocumented people receive benefits) harm solidarity among poorer people and conceal the power structures that keep them in place. Even when the interviewee comes to a resolution about his xenophobia, "He then admitted to a sense of shame for struggling with addiction and poverty. In a single conversation, he realized that he actually *identifies* with migrant workers, and maybe his views aren't set in stone," this is brushed past, even though it would seem to be a big revelation for someone to have over a core belief. There is no discussion on how power structures impact local sentiments about new neighbors. Additionally, the framing allows the reader to distance themselves from a stereotypical "racist hillbilly" who reveals he has struggled with addiction and poverty, leading to the man's misplaced resentment in the interview.

Gender is a little reviewed topic in discussing Appalachia. The default view of the stereotypical Appalachian is exclusively male. Few women besides Hillary Clinton are discussed in any of the articles. When gender is the topic, it is primarily about the lack of support female candidates receive from white men. Again, social structures are often concealed by the writing, leading to the symbolic annihilation of women as political

actors with a distinct identity apart from white men. However, several articles did point

out that women, people of color, and queer folks mostly build progressive coalitions.

In "The One Demographic That is Hurting Hillary Clinton," Nate Cohn mentions,

in the *NYT,* "white men" four times in three short paragraphs, an example of

overlexicalization, where word choice repeats over and over to emphasize one group to

the exclusion of others. The article does not mention women from any demographic

group except that Clinton suffers from a "gender gap." However, the "gender gap" is

understood as a lack of male voters, not equal support for women candidates.

There is also significant discussion of "low information voters" that conceals the

institutions that lead to this problem, like a lack of comprehensive civics education.

Further, given the readership of *The New York Times* (highly educated white liberals),

this framing allows the reader to distance themselves from the article's subjects. This

supports the stereotype that all Appalachians are white, eliminating other identities

using symbolic annihilation. This also contributes to the negative tone *The New York

Times* tends to take toward Appalachia and rural America.

Of the articles that did not use any of the discursive strategies, six discussed

topics related to identity. The Editorial Board of *TRT* writes (emphasis theirs),

"**Appalachia is more diverse than people realize**. There are more people in

Appalachia who identify as African American than as Scots Irish." In this article the tone

is positive, hopeful. The Board wants to emphasize the diversity of the region in

opposition to the stereotypical portrayal of Appalachia.

Another article that did not utilize the 15 discursive strategies, is "Which Party

Can Best Rebuild Robert Kennedy's Unique Coalition?" by the Editorial Board of *TRT*.

This article is neutral in tone, from a rural outlet, and also discusses issues of identity.

"Kennedy built a coalition that was remarkable then and remains so today. It was a coalition of minorities and working-class whites." This Board describes multiple perspectives similarly. One thing this article also does, is discuss identity in a non-contentious way. "A half-century ago, a champion of civil rights offered a third approach: a liberalism without elitism and a populism without racism." This style of writing may not disrupt the status quo, but it does not support it.

Most articles did not discuss identity outside of whiteness and race. Articles only mentioned women and LGBTQ+ people in passing. The authors left out Indigenous people from all conversations. This lack of discussion can be understood through several theoretical frameworks. As previously mentioned, the missing discussions of multiple identities contribute to symbolic annihilation except for working-class white men. Because of this disappearing of identities, the stereotype of the dumb, white male hillbilly persists.

6.2   Whiteness as Power and White Supremacy

Racial formation begins in childhood as part of the primary socialization process (Omi and Winant 2014). Children learn to understand their racial or ethnic identity from their parents, peers, school, and other agents of socialization. The Internet, as a form of media, is becoming more influential in the development of white identity and white nationalist politics. While whiteness historically has been considered the "default" racial category by the dominant culture, it is becoming a specific and acknowledged racial category, especially for a growing group of avowed white supremacists.

White nationalism has been rising over the seven years covered by this project (ADL 2021). This has been true for Appalachia and the nation. Appalachians have a long

history of refusing to acknowledge the role of white supremacy in the region (Smith 2004). Appalachia's refusal to acknowledge racism has changed over time as more outlets cover white nationalism, racial violence, and hate crimes.

Of the 51 articles analyzed, 13 discussed topics related to white supremacy. These articles show numerous examples of discursive strategies supporting a white supremacist status quo. While the articles were spread out across the timeline examined, more articles related to whiteness and white supremacy were published following the inauguration of Donald Trump. Kevin Roose wrote his article I examined "The Making of a YouTube Radical" two years to the week after James Alex Fields murdered Heather Heyer at the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, VA. The timings of the articles in the dataset examined here give credence to the fact that white supremacy has been on the rise since Donald J. Trump's announcement in June 2015, as testified before Congress by Lecia Brooks of the Southern Poverty Law Center on February 11, 2020.

Seven articles begin with slanted headlining. Headlines are the first thing readers see and signify the story's *lede* or *main point*. While "The Making of a YouTube Radical" gives the reader a clue into the story's topic, it also utilizes passive voice. The headline does not explain *who* might have made the subject a YouTube radical, removing the subject's responsibility for his radicalization. This use of slanted headlining infantilizes the subject. In removing his agency, the headline buys into the simplistic view that racism is an individual action that can be placed upon or acted out by a person, and then that person can shrug off or change their mind about it.

In Smith's (2004) article, "De-gradations Of Whiteness: Appalachia and The Complexities Of Race," she considers the problem of racism in Appalachia. Smith posits

that Appalachia has essentially been given a pass regarding whiteness and white

supremacy. The region is impoverished, leading to the ideology that class is more critical

than other identities, specifically whiteness. When news media utilize strategies like

slanted headlining, it contributes to this understanding that issues of white supremacy

do not apply to Appalachia, only to the larger United States. Racism is not viewed by

white Appalachians as a problem (Smith 2004).

Lacie Pierson reports on racist attacks by inmates and law enforcement brutality

in a WV prison in a headline that disguises white supremacy and does not consider

other identities. "Black WV Inmate Says He was Attacked by White Supremacist as

Prison Guards Stood By," published in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, is also an example

of slanted headlining. Using the phrase "Black WV Inmate Says" places the subject

outside of the in-group in three ways: the first is through race. By placing "Black" as the

first word, the mostly white readership of this paper will be less likely to identify with

the subject. Secondly, using the word "says" makes the subject less credible. Lastly, the

headline uses the exonerative passive voice, a tactic of reporters that draws attention

away from the bad behavior of law enforcement actors. The exonerative passive voice is

a grammatical device used often when law enforcement is involved in misconduct,

particularly use of force. It is common for communications officers to use press releases

to get the LEO's side of the story to the public. This is communication is often used as a

way of describing what happened rather than assigning responsibility. For instance,

"...last night a burglary suspect was shot and killed." This is Rather than placing the

action where it belongs, the guards in this article are an afterthought. A more assertive

headline could have been, "Guards Watch as White Supremacist Attacks Black Inmate."

White supremacy is a cultural ideology that requires the aid not only of the collective of

individuals but institutions, like news media, which can use tactics like slanted headlining to downplay the role of news media itself and other institutions in upholding white supremacy.

"A Voice of Hate in the Heartland" was published on November 25, 2017, just three weeks after election day. It was written by Richard Fausset. This article, updated in October 2020, reports on the ordinary lives of avowed Nazi sympathizers, Tony and Maria Hovater.

White nationalism as an identity has become more prevalent over the past 5-7 years. By speaking about the subject as if he is just another ordinary "normie," (marriage plans, Applebee's, working-class existence) the Fausset's makes the subjects' white nationalist views seem normal, going so far as to mention that the alt-right are "hoping to make those ideas seem less than shocking for the "normies." Additionally, rather than discussing Hovater's wedding as the joining of two up and coming white nationalist "foot soldiers," it's discussed like any other life event, "Weddings are hard enough to plan for when your fiancé isn't an avowed white nationalist." The article goes on to discuss the regular life of the Hovater's with Tony being "polite and low key" and the couple as being "young and in love."

As previously stated, the outgroup is usually the marginalized or victimized group. The ingroup is either the dominant group, or the group that shares most characteristics with the dominant group. Cishet, white men of means and power are the dominant group. The article describes a cishet, white male as its subject. This article attempts to place a Nazi sympathizer in the out-group, with marginalized people, relying on victimization to gain the reader's pity for the subject, being the in-group. "I guess it seems weird when talking about these types of things," highlighting Hovater's anxiety,

and also noting he is "fueled by the kinds of frustrations that would not seem exotic to most American conservatives."

> He spoke dispassionately about the injustice of affirmative action, about the 'malice directed toward white people' in popular media, about how the cartoon comedy 'King of the Hill' was the last TV show to portray 'a straight white male patriarch' in a positive light.

The article seems to identify Appalachia as an area welcoming to Nazism, where the white-working class might find a group to belong. "There are times when it can feel toxic to openly identify as a far-right extremist (in Ohio) …. But not always."

This framing ignores efforts to push back against that narrative by groups like Appalshop and news media like the independent paper *Black by God* and the *Black in Appalachia* podcast, which tell diverse stories of Appalachia, particularly of Affrilachians. Rather than feeling empathy for the marginalized out-groups, the reader should feel sympathy for the subject. Fausset portrays the white nationalist as having a normal childhood with loving parents.

In the same article, there is the use of disclaimer, discussing the positive traits and actions of the subject before noting the negative.

> It was a weeknight at Applebee's in Huber Heights, a suburb of Dayton, a few weeks before the wedding. The couple…were shoulder to shoulder at a table, young and in love.

The article begins by telling the reader that Tony and Maria are normal, that they were married in the fall, registered at Target and that on their registry were a "muffin pan, a four-drawer dresser and a pineapple slicer," positives traits or actions most Americans would agree are acceptable. But in the next sentences, the true nature of the subjects is revealed, "Ms. Hovater was worried about Antifa bashing up the ceremony. Weddings are hard enough to plan or when your fiancé is not an avowed white supremacist." Later, the subject says that he is against race-mixing but is not a racist. It is not until the next paragraph that the writer divulges that he posted anti-Semitic and racist memes on the internet, was a regular user of 4chan, and marched in Charlottesville, VA, where multiple people were injured when a white supremacist drove his car into a crowd of peaceful counter-protestors, murdering Heather Heyer.

Disclaimers hide the bad behaviors or characteristics of the in-group. In these examples, the ingroup consists of people racialized as white. Excusing the negative traits of the ingroup makes it easier for a reader to identify with the ingroup rather than the outgroup because they do not note the negative attributes. Fausset, using disclaimers seems to normalize these avowed white supremacists. Whether he does or does not, isn't clear. However, the discursive strategies used, do support the status quo understandings, even if that may not be the intent.

Again, in "A Voice of Hate in the Heartland," the Richard Fausset uses evidentiality by allowing the subject of the article to name drop debunked academic "experts" like Charles Murray to support the racist beliefs of the subject. Fausset does not challenge his use of this material, leaving the reader to assume books like Murray's are legitimate academic backing for bigoted values and opinions. "It was midday at Panera Bread, and Mr. Hovater was describing his political awakening over a turkey

sandwich. He mentioned books by Charles Murray and Pat Buchanan." There is no mention by Fausset of who these authors are, how they have been (or that they have been at all) debunked, or what their books espouse.

The most widely-discussed and properly-praised book germane to today's politics is J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* about the sufferings and pathologies of the white working class, largely of Scots-Irish decent, in Appalachia and the Rust Belt. This cohort, from which Vance comes, is, he says, on of America' most distinctive sub-cultures. His book has often been misread as primarily about the toll taken by economic forces.

Actually, Vance casts a cool eye on the theory that if they only had better access to jobs… His primary concern is with the lack of agency and learned helplessness.

In a different example, George F. Will's opinion article ("Trump's Carrier Ploy was a Repudiation of Conservatism") on Carrier's move away from Appalachia leans on J.D. Vance and his memoir *Hillbilly Elegy* to support the ideology of white Appalachia as a distinct sub-culture. Not only does the author not push back on Vance's interpretation of Appalachian identity, but he is also confident in Vance's understanding.

In another instance, Will calls on prominent politicians (who call on Edmund Burke) to lend credibility to the article:

Mike Pence said, The free market has been sorting it out. Edmund

Burke taught that respect for a free society's spontaneous order would

immunize politics from ruinous overreaching from the hubris of believing

that we have the information and power to order society by political

willfulness.

By using evidentiality, the author asks the reader to take the word of one or more

"experts" without questioning whether the expert's credentials support the points

written or are just being used as a citation that readers will automatically give credence

to. This supports the ideology that white identity is the ingroup in these cases. Therefore

the ingroup should be theose who make the decisions about using debunked experts as

evidence.

Vagueness is also employed in several articles discussing white supremacy.

Again, in "The Making of a YouTube Radical," paragraphs 8-9 use words like "many,"

"handful, and "reduce," which withhold any information that would specify what tactics

social media companies might utilize to quell the rise of a white supremacist ideology.

Many platforms have barred a handful of far-right influences…

…updating its policy to ban videos espousing neo-Nazism, white

supremacy and other bigoted views.

The company also said it was changing its recommendation algorithm to

reduce the spread of misinformation…

The opinion piece by Ross Douthat "The White Strategy," in *The New York Times,* is also vague in its description of whiteness and its effects on the United States political climate. Douthat writes that "conservative and liberal whites are divided by many, many things" but does not include those things. The most contentious differences between these two groups are issues of race and equality and the intentional dismantling of white supremacy. Several state Republican Party platforms, such as the Texas GOP, specifically call for eliminating historically accurate education about white supremacy under the guise of banning Critical Race Theory from being taught in public schools. In refusing to be specific, the author obfuscates those differences between political groups, one which outwardly supports white supremacy.

> American politics is still defined primarily by a "great white culture war," with competing tribes of conservative and liberal whites divided by many, many things besides their attitudes toward race.

In this sentence, "competing tribes" makes it appear as though the two groups are just sides of the same coin. Then, the author states, "A performative anti-whiteness is common of white lefties..." which is not a supported claim. Later, Douthat does some rescuing of the party, even though his own writing states has the reputation of being racist, by stating, "Fortunately for the G.O.P. there is an obvious and morally superior alternative" to the Democrats political strategy.

Another example of discursive strategies used to support the white supremacist status quo is overlexicalization. This strategy is employed when an author

wants to highlight or focus on one central point or group to exclude other important points or affected groups. In "The Making of a YouTube Radical," which was especially egregious in its apologetics for the subject, a section discusses the algorithm of several prominent social media and tech companies. The word "reinforce" and related words like "recommend" and "predict" appear ten times. This lexicalization brings attention to the type of A.I. called *reinforcement* learning. This technology predicts what *recommendations* will *steer* the learner/watcher toward new content. There is no discussion of how this algorithm might protect against guiding users towards harmful ideologies, only that *reinforcement* learning will make recommendations "more accurate." The author does not discuss the target being aimed for by the algorithm or what accuracy might look like. This framing excludes other tactics that might be used by tech and social media conglomerates to combat the rise of white supremacist ideology in online spaces.

   In "The White Strategy," the words "white working class," "white," "working class white," "white culture," and "missing white voters" highlight the white-working class to the exclusion of other groups. These similar terms are used more than seven times in a short piece. While the article's main theme is centered around whiteness as an identity, the framing, even when discussing race, leaves out non-white people while simultaneously victimizing whiteness. Quoting election analyst Sean Trende, Douthat notes that Appalachia has a large population of "missing white voters." This overlexicalization makes the case to the reader that whites are being overlooked, since they are "missing,", and do not have race-based power, saying antiracism is "performative," that some Democrats have an "increasing vehemence about the wickedness of 'whiteness'" and probably "encourages the white tribalism that Trump

rallied around and exploited." Overlexicalization is used to substantiate the existence of

missing white voters but does not produce evidence of those missing voters, in fact, he

highlights their participation, "conventional polling and conventional wisdom

underestimated the potential for white turnout."

In "Black WV Inmate Says He was Attacked by White Supremacist as Prison

Guards Stood By," the phrase "racial slur" occurs six times in this brief piece. This

choice draws attention to a specific type of abuse the inmate has experienced. However,

by emphasizing this concept but not the actual slur used, it *deemphasizes* both the

violence of the insults and the physical violence the inmate experienced at the hands of

both another inmate and a guard. These examples support white supremacy by

downplaying its existence and simplifying the outcomes of verbal and physical attacks

with no institutional consequences.

The last set of strategies is evidentiality, distancing, and concealment. In "Black

WV Inmate Says He was Attacked by White Supremacist as Prison Guards Stood By":

Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation Secretary Jeff Sandy told the

Gazette-mail that the photo was a case of young people who did not fully

understand the implications of the salute, but we not driven by hate. "The

investigation showed there was no white supremacy, I guess you could say that's

the silver lining."

These quotes go unchallenged by the reporter. The *evidence* comes from a person

of *authority*, from the same law enforcement agency that investigated itself, finding no

wrongdoing by corrections officers. The remarks by Secretary Sandy also *conceal* the

power structures at work–the lack of ability of inmates to present evidence, the power

differential between inmates and officers, and the dependence on a reporter to portray

the situation accurately. Often, in reporting on police misconduct, reporters rely on the

PR information provided directly by law enforcement departments, which are often just

regurgitated press releases. The Secretary further *distances* himself and the reporter

from responsibility by claiming the involved officers' behavior was merely puerile.

Of the articles that did not use the 15 discursive strategies, seven were written

about themes related to "whiteness as power" or "white supremacy." In "Progressive

Coalition Launches Campaign for Rural Voters'" Bryce Oates (2018) writes in *The Daily*

Yonder in a way that is positive. They use word choices that not only disrupt the status

quo, but disrupt the Appalachian stereotype:

> When it comes to assigning blame for current social problems, four
>
> times as many rural people blamed the role of big-money and corporate
>
> donors in government for problems in their communities than blamed
>
> immigrants.

In this except, Oates uses the word "blame" to describe the feelings of the people

towards the upper class while utilizing survey data to support the idea that Appalachians

are not all xenophobic or racist. Additionally, Oates quotes an interviewee, "Not a lot of

people of color are landowners – they are more involved as laborers, not as farmers and

owners. For us this is a core value; we can't more forward if we leave so many people

behind." Just by choosing to interview the non-stereotypical Appalachian, Oates has

provided a much-needed perspective.

With white supremacy on the rise around the United States, it is essential to portray this problem accurately. White nationalism as an identity is connected to protectionism, xenophobia, and racism. While this is also true in Appalachia, it does a disservice to the region to stereotype and obscure what is both a national and worldwide problem.

6.3 Government, Politics, and Populism

While the current stereotype casts Appalachia as a monolith of white conservatism, historically, it has been a fertile bed of populism. Strong union support in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio has only recently declined. Virginia and North Carolina are swing states that have gone Democratic in recent elections. People in Appalachia are known for distrusting government and "coastal elites," whose perspectives on the region often drip with contempt. Because of this, Appalachians do not view outsiders as capable of adequately providing services to them (Protivnak et al. 2017). It makes sense that government would be a strong theme.

Thirty-two articles discussed matters related to government, politics, or populism. These included topics like Donald Trump, J.D. Vance, liberalism vs. conservatism, and policy discussions. Several strategies were used to further the traditional understanding of politics in the region, including hyperbolism and victimization.

Hyperbolism is a strategy used to create a divide between 'us' and 'them' using extreme exaggerations. It emphasizes negative traits or actions by the out-groups.

In "Roy Moore's Alabama," Howell Raines writes,

I wanted to explore whether traditional Republicanism could fully explain how the Old South's most independent thinkers became Trump zombies....

In this example of hyperbole, Trump supporters are referred to as zombies, asleep going through life, who do not think or seriously engage in politics. The author made this point to position residents of Alabama as unthinking and uneducated.

In the second example, "WV Needs Big Federal Government?" McElwee states, "They want to bribe the citizens of West Virginia into rejoining the Democratic plantation...." The author reaches for an extreme comparison of Democrats and enslavers, portraying them as racists whose fight for a social safety net is a bribe rather than an entitlement to which all citizens would have access. This writing leans into the reactionary trope that the two main political parties never split or flipped in the mid-20th century, mainly over the movement for civil rights. This is also an example of the concealment of historical power systems and distancing the author and reader from the connection between reactionary politics and racist policies.

Victimization is again used as a strategy where the in-group, white conservatives, are portrayed as a victim of the wrong actions of the out-group. McElwee writes, "The progressive, liberal national Democratic Party treats West Virginians as being so dumb that it can 'win' them back by criticizing them." In Douthat's article, "When the Wrong are Right," he attacks the out-group by making the in-group the victim of bullying, "Because bigots bully transgender teenagers, liberalism has decided that everyone who differs with transgender activists must be complicit in that bigotry."

In these examples, the in-group is positioned as the victim of bullying by the out-group. It is not the bigotry or extreme right-wing views that are the issue, but that their politics are not being examined critically by the out-group, making the out-group the collective in a position of power, contrary to the reality that marginalized groups suffer from reactionary policies. The reality is that transgender people experience violence at four times the rate of cis-gendered people and are less likely to report that violence or speak about the challenges they face overall. This supposed victimization of reactionaries obscures the genuine danger queer and trans people face.

In "In the Land of Self-Defeat," Monica Potts, writing for the *NYT*, uses legitimization to justify social practices through (1) emotions (particularly fear), (2) a hypothetical future, (3) rationality, (4) voices of expertise and (5) altruism. The use of each part of this strategy comes in this order inside the article, which combines to create ingroup/outgroup friction. This article is about the fight over local tax dollars and funding a small local library. Using legitimization, the Potts, while having the opportunity to point out the multiple incorrect conceptions the local people have about their library and how taxes work, instead shows why the article is titled this way, it is the land of self-defeat where a scary future is all that awaits.

Each piece of legitimization builds on the previous, even if those parts or quotes are not chronological.

1) "I watched the fights unfold with a sense of sadness, anger and frustration. I started arguing. It didn't work. The pay request was pulled from the Quorum Court's agenda." (fear)

In this quote, the use of fear and call to emotion create anxiety for the reader. This highlights the anxiety over high taxes and the loss of services locals feel.

2) "What's also true, though, is that many here seem determined to get rid of the last institutions trying to help them…." (hypothetical)

Then, the emotional response from tactic one is joined with the second piece, a hypothetical future where all the last vestiges of help will disappear. Fear and anxiety increase as all the parts of this strategy come together.

3) "Call me narrow-minded but I never understood why a librarian needs a four year degree." (rationality)

In this third quote, the rational for the fear and anxiety is explained. It is okay to respond to the fear of an uncertain future by closing ranks. In this instance, residents justify the closing of the local library in order to protect against an uncertain financial future, where libraries are a luxury.

4) "Katherine J. Cramer, a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, summed up the attitudes she observed after years of studying rural Americans…" (expertise)

By utilizing the expertise of Dr. Cramer, Potts legitimizes the understandings others have about the people in the article. That they see her as a "lazy, urban professional" and do not want "racial minorities on welfare."

5) "Many of the Democratic front runners have released plans that call for more federal tax investment in rural infrastructure." (altruism)

Finally, the last piece of this strategy is altruism. The area is full of anxiety (bringing in the economically anxious poor-whites trope). The people are out of options and must now depend on not only outsiders, but political outsiders at that, to pick up the mess over funding the local library.

This article tackles the politics of small-town rural areas, particularly in the Ozarks and Appalachia. In this article, I can identify each aspect of the legitimation strategy. The author and the experts quoted look down on the subjects of the article, poor, mostly white, rural folks who feel left out of the larger political conversation ("The way *these* folks described the world to me…" "People like my neighbors hate…" "…people commented on the uselessness of education.") If something is not done, these people will wind up with the scary future the reporter references. They will be beholden to the altruism of those who know better, namely prominent Democrats, many of whom do not spend time in the area. They will begrudgingly receive benefits that they are entitled to, but come from the wrong benefactor.

It makes me wonder if appeals from the Democratic candidates still hoping to win Trump voters over by offering them more federal services will

work. Mr. Widener told me he had watched some of the Democratic debates, and

his reaction was that everything the candidates proposed was "going to cost me

money."

It is as if there will be a nationwide scramble to cover the shortfall…

As long as Democrats promise to make their lives better…these voters will

turn to Trump again.

This strategy accomplishes several goals. The first is to cement the idea that

Appalachians are a single voting bloc. The second establishes that Appalachians will be

indebted to the coastal elites they view with suspicion and from whom they receive

derision and hesitant altruism. Lastly, this contributes to implicit bias, where outsiders

may try to establish that they have the region's best interests at heart, but in reality,

their biases may prevent them from understanding what the region needs.

In "The One Demographic That is Hurting Hillary Clinton," the author uses

overlexicalization with repeated uses of the phrase "white working class" in a relatively

short essay. This overlexicalization emphasizes one demographic over others in voter

outreach initiatives, both personal and organized. The "white working class" becomes

the focus of empathy, worthy of special treatment, regardless of their harmful and

reactionary views.

Like the country as a whole, Appalachia is a place with complicated political

views. Many people still support a populist message of substantial government support

for environmental regulations, a solid and robust social safety net, and buttressing of

union participation. Conversely, the area is socially conservative and very religious. Appalachians from the white-working class may not wish to expand their views on race, queerness, or gender equality. However, these discursive strategies hide the nuanced nature of politics in Appalachia, further contributing to the stereotype of the ignorant, "low information" white voter. These tactics were more often used by the *NYT*, which focused on broad issues like how the WWC would vote, or voter issues that were more assigned to them, rather than communicated by them. Appalachian outlets covered local politics more, focusing on issues of corruption, ethics, and how national figures interacted with local issues.

6.4 Appalachian Issues: Coal and Opioid Abuse

For the past several decades, Appalachia has struggled with the decline of well-paying coal mining jobs. This decline has coincided with a rise in addiction, primarily opioid use. Many former coal miners are disabled and need opioids for pain management. Reports have found that the over-prescription and inadequate education on how opioids work have contributed to addiction (Sun et al. 2020; SAMHAS 2022). Because of these congruent issues, many news outlets have covered Appalachia from the perspective of the Appalachian stereotype.

Twelve articles discussed coal, while another nine talked about addiction in Appalachia. There was significant overlap in the topics that articles covered, specifically around politics, coal, and addiction. The traditional understanding of Appalachia as full of dirty and reactionary miners or opioid addicts is supported by several discursive strategies.

The Number Game uses objectivity and numbers to give credibility to facts over opinions. Numbers represent neutrality, hard facts, and truthfulness. Douglas Imbrogno wrote in "Documenting the Opioid Crisis in Numbers and Film" in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* on September 23, 2018, "One can get dizzy easily from the numbers as the Mountain State passed the 1,000 mark in overdose deaths for the first time last year:" The author uses numbers to emphasize overdoses in rural West Virginia without context in this example. Using words like "passed" gives urgency to this problem. However, there is no discussion on why overdoses are up from the year before and no talk about the responsibility of systems and not just on individuals.

Distancing employs phrasing that allows the author, and through them, the reader, to distance themselves from the outgroup through self-deception or "othering" of the outgroup. In "Documenting the Opioid Crisis in Numbers and Film," Imrogno reports

> We're introduced to them as they enter Jacob's Ladder; a rehab clinic founded by Dr. Kevin Blankenship, a big-spirited specialist in critical care, whose program pulls the young addicts out of the streets and onto a working farm.

The beginning of this quote positions the reader and the subjects as "us against them," assuming that the reader is not suffering from substance use disorder. It further distances the reader from the subject by labeling them as addicts rather than individuals struggling with addiction. This is an example of "it could never happen to me" framing.

The "us vs. them" strategy is often used alongside illegality, as labeling something or someone illegal permits the reader to distance themselves from the subjects. Illegality

is a rhetorical and lexical device that positions the outgroup as criminal or antisocial. In "Documenting the Opioid Crisis in Numbers and Film," Douglas Imbrogno of the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* writes: "The documentary...follows three women-Huntington's fire chief, a Cabell County family court judge, and a street missionary making outreach to prostitutes."

In this quote, the reporter chooses a derogatory term, one that is aligned with criminality, to describe those engaged in sex work. There is no further context about how or why those struggling with addiction might turn to sex work or how that work can further traumatize them or help them survive.

In "Alienated and Angry, Coal Miners See Donald Trump as Their Only Choice," Declan Walsh begins with negative labeling. When the paper describes the miners as "alienated" and "angry" it is ascribing attributes generally understood to be bad. Negative labeling is a lexical choice that pigeon-holes the out-group in a harmful way. While the ingroup usually consists of cishet white men, in this instance, the ingroup is dependent on wealth and regional privilege. In this instance, working-class miners of any other identity are the outgroup. However, as Appalachians, they are a part of an invisible minority characterized by many similar stereotypes as other minoritized communities. By combining these two strategies in one headline, the author has already told the reader how they should feel about the out-group, coal miners who have lost their jobs or fear the closing of the mines where they work, which labels them as enraged and isolated. Additionally, the headline has miners cozied up with Donald Trump. Later in the article, several interviewed miners admit that he was not their first choice and that they may have no affinity for him. Burying this information further

down into the article, where many readers may have stopped reading, contributes to this labeling. Negative labeling supports the stereotyping of the outgroup.

In, "Documenting the Opioid Crisis in Numbers and Film," Douglas Imbrogno writes in the *CGM*, that the documentary *Heroin(e)* is "revelatory" with "inspiring tough love" (for those with addiction problems). There are no discussions about the medical issues related to addiction. This is an example of distancing, where the in-group others the out group, in this case, people suffering from addiction.

The status quo understandings of Appalachian issues are commonly associated with status quo understandings of labor and addiction. Addicts are often labeled as undeserving of help. Those who are addicted and cannot find work or who are disabled are considered lazy. The discursive strategies laid out above contribute to these stereotypes. While it was be expected that the national outlet would engage in these tactics more than local outlets, this did not turn out to be the case. The national outlet took a broader approach, reporting less often from a micro level-talking to residents, mine owners, or addiction counselors and substance uses-and instead looking at the larger impact on the region. This approach has the effect of making sweeping generalizations about Appalachia. Local outlets took a more micro approach, speaking directly to residents more often. However, these outlets still utilized discursive strategies that supported the status quo by treating addiction as a personal rather than medical problem and neglecting to discuss the role of coal companies in the high rates of disability and high unemployment.

6.5 Values

Values are a tricky thing to tease out of newspaper writing. Values are based on our beliefs or things we know to be true; norms extend those beliefs to actions or concepts. I believe god is real; therefore, I value religion. Rarely does the writing say outright what values a group has, but it may include clues: a sentence about gun rights here, a short article about education there. It is clear that a set of values is evident, and they are essential to whom the media overwhelmingly refer to as "the people time forgot." Authors often write disparagingly about these values, but the subjects of these articles closely hold them. These values help to distinguish who is in the in-group and who is in the out-group.

Twenty-five articles discussed the values of the people in Appalachia. This theme includes education, healthcare, gun rights, family, religion, and the environment. Traditionalist views of Appalachians about these values say that Appalachians do not value education and are ignorant, that they do not want interference of government into healthcare, except where abortion rights are concerned, they support sweeping gun rights, a robust heterosexual family unit, and that coal production and natural gas fracking are more critical than solid policy on the environment.

Many discursive strategies are used to support these stereotypes. Many articles did not challenge these categorizations; instead, they sustained them. Negative labeling further entrenches marginalized people into the out-group, alienating them from the in-group.

Several articles referenced Hillary Clinton's "gaffe" in New York City on September 9, 2016. In this remark, Mrs. Clinton referred to a specific group of Trump supporters as racist, sexist, and xenophobic, a "basket of deplorables." This comment is a possible

throwback to former candidate Barak Obama's 2008 remark that rural people "cling to their god and their guns." These remarks play into the trope of Appalachians caring only about values as they pertain to themselves and little for their fellow person outside the region. Given the statistics surrounding baseline support for Mr. Trump, it is less likely that these things are absolute values and more likely that at least some of these accusations are a direct result of implicit bias in reporting that often talks only to Appalachian and rural voters exemplify the stereotype.

The use of overlexicalization by choice of words like "guns, "militia, and "3 Percenters" is repeated multiple times in "If Progressives Don't Try to Win Over Rural Areas, Guess Who Will." This negative labeling of rural voters conceals the facts beneath the next seven paragraphs where in an interview with a rural voter, the label is directly contradicted. A short conversation leads to the realization that this voter feels he has more in common with the working-class immigrant than the coastal elites and other outsiders who seem to know what is best for the region. Overlexicalization and concealment are widely utilized in articles. They emphasize these stereotypes through repetitive word choices while eliminating possible causes for these stereotypes and labels.

6.6   Economy

Appalachia has long been characterized as a place filled with poverty. Good jobs were few and far between, most of which were a part of the coal mining industry. The history of absentee landlords, coal barons intent on keeping workers poor, and a severe lack of public services contribute to this narrative.

Twenty articles talked about the economy, both nationally and in Appalachia. Most reporting focused on jobs and how factory work and coal mining have declined for several decades. Several articles that discussed economic issues included coal and coal jobs in the reporting. However, I chose to include this topic in Appalachian issues above. I made this choice due to the fact that coal is a major issue impacting multiple facets of Appalachian life. I decided this was best highlighted in the Appalachian issues section above.

In "Jobs Decline Helps to Make Ford City 'Trump Country,'" in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, several lexical choices advance the typical understanding of the Appalachian economy and its relationship to politics. When authors use the numbers game, they use statistics to emphasize the demise of Ford City, laying out the steady decline of jobs and infrastructure over 100+ years. While this decline is evident, the opinion that there is nothing but decline and despair obscures the lives people have carved out in their little town. The article also relies on evidentiality through the use of pundits and think tank researchers to explain the resentment of white working-class men again. Chris Potter, the author, says as much, "Pundits say that festering resentment among white working class communities…" is the biggest problem for the Democratic Party. This resentment is implied to be due to a lack of jobs and a rapidly changing social climate., "When you have people not working, they get into stuff like drugs." However, the real reasons for this supposed resentment are never supported by talking to residents.

The Roanoke Times published "Trump's Carrier Ploy was a Repudiation of Conservatism" in December of 2016, just before DJT's inauguration. This article also includes a disclaimer, noting that Donald Trump "has yet to dip a toe into the swamp, he practices the calculus by which Washington reasons," where the swamp is the Beltway

Politics of Washington, D.C. and the practices are bipartisan efforts to makes trade agreements between countries and the private sector. This disclaimer allows DJT to save face as the leader of the Appalachian white working-class, even as he supports the movement of jobs away from the region. The article discusses how DJT has supported the white working class and promised the return of coal and other industries tied to white identity politics.

Lack of jobs, crumbling infrastructure, and a failed social safety net are issues on top of mind for many Americans, not just in Appalachia but throughout the country. Authors and editors obfuscate the strong connections between the region's problems and the country in utilizing these discursive strategies. This works to 'other' the region, belittles the people, and hides the diversity of identities and viewpoints scattered across the area.

7   FINDINGS III: ELECTRIC BUGALOO

7.1   Maintaining the Status Quo

Of the 51 articles examined, 34 utilized the discursive strategies identified by van

Dijk, Teo or Igwebuike. Findings indicate that these strategies support status quo

ideology on the themes of identity; whiteness and white supremacy; government;

Appalachian issues; values; and the economy. Discursive strategies are used to promote

or to achieve specific social outcomes, political, cultural, or societal (van Dijk 1997).

These aims include protecting tradition, authority, or current social ideology. Of the 17

that did not utilize any of the 15 discursive strategies, some used discursive strategies

not included in the 15 I looked for here. Just because an article did not use one or more

of the 15 does not mean that article did not support the status quo. I chose these 15 as

they were the strategies examined by van Dijk and Igwebuike separately in different

works. Reading the literature about these strategies by these authors led me to the

conclusion that these were the best and most common strategies to look for.

In cases of commentary or editorial content, it may be easy to know the standpoint

of the writer and even have some understanding of the specific status quo ideologies

they are pushing. However, not only is it often not possible to know, but it is also the

greater institutions – the paper, the "news media" – that have the most influence

overall. Individual power matters, but papers wield immense power just by the editorial

and reporting choices it makes. A white supremacist reporter on their own can hold only

so much power, but a well-established paper can affect the critical thinking of so many.

In the articles I examined, these aims were met in several ways. Through the use of

discourse, stereotypes of identity in Appalachia were supported through the symbolic

annihilation of marginalized groups, hyper-focus by authors on one group over all other

groups, and the absence of "Appalachian" as its own distinct identity. White supremacy

was propped up by normalizing white identity and white nationalist ideology. The

authors' lexical choices often urged the reader to accept white supremacy as the obvious

default without challenging those ideas.

When writing about government and politics, the narrative was mostly that

Appalachia is a reactionary region; there was little nuance that acknowledged significant

pockets of progressive politics. Ideas about government were described stereotypically.

Two authors of 17 wrote specifically about corruption and citizen challenges to bad

behavior. Still, the area is overwhelmingly described as being resistant to a strong

government safety net ("They want to bribe the citizens of West Virginia into rejoining

the Democratic plantation by promising them increased social welfare...") and as

consistently voting against their best interests ("What's also true, though, is that many

here seem determined to get rid of the last institutions trying to help them.") These

descriptions rob residents of autonomy and assume that individuals do not know their

best interests.

Authors who wrote about Appalachian issues primarily focused on the

stereotypical problems of coal and addiction. This directs attention away from the fact

that Appalachia is a complicated area with complex problems that require complicated

solutions. It also does not acknowledge that many problems stem from outside

interference and a nation dependent on the resources Appalachia provides.

Articles on values supported that status quo by focusing mostly on what

Appalachians are against rather than what things they hold dear. Values like family

connectedness, environmental stewardship, and acceptance of those who are different

were rarely mentioned or were actively challenged. This framing rejects the

complications of the region, painting it in broad strokes as an area that can be described simplistically.

Talk about the economy was also in support of the status quo. Job loss was the number one economic topic. While the loss of mining and manufacturing are significant problems for the area, the framing of the article relegates the region to one of crumbling infrastructure, ghost mines, and overwhelming poverty.

This lack of nuance leaves many out of the dialogue. Topics of culture, such as music, and art, were non-existent. A few articles discussed race, but the framing was negative ("What happens if the bigoted sometimes get things right?" Ross Douthat asks in "When the Wrong Are Right." "Why is it social acceptable to pain an entire region as racist rubes in Klan robes?" the editorial board of *The Roanoke Times* asks in "Why are Some Liberals Okay with Shaming Appalachia?") No articles talked about thriving areas like Asheville, NC, Greenville, SC, or Roanoke, VA. Food, which is incredibly diverse across the region, was also absent. All the things that make Appalachia unique were missing.

7.2   History

It is unsurprising that stereotypes of Appalachians persist. It is easy to support the status quo. Just do what has always been done before. As the *Trainmens' Journal* (1892) first described him, the mountain man continues to be depicted as a person afraid of change and outsider influence who is uneducated, poor, and reactionary. The data show that not much has changed over time regarding media portrayals of Appalachians. Current newspaper depictions are similar to previous media portrayals in television, music, and movies. These media depictions confirm the biases of the reader

about Appalachia. Bias can impact the levels of proper social services and how much policy attention a place receives. In the article "Why Do Some Liberals Hate Appalachia?" the author takes note of comments made in retort to the article to which she is responding from *The Daily Kos*:

> We supported providing them disability and Medicaid and what do they do? They vote for Republicans that promised to dismantle Medicaid and disability…I really have no sympathy for them and I'm not going to lift a finger ever again to help them.

> It's about pouring trillions of blue state dollars into red areas as a reward for red voters voting for a liar, a bigot, a buffoon, and an ignoramus all rolled into one. I'm not in a generous mood to help such folks.

These comments provide evidence that the public either does not consider their own biases or is okay with them being confirmed. These comments are examples of how people discuss topics informed by news media. Some uses of discursive strategies in news media encourage and support biases. The stereotypes the public believes about Appalachia lead some to conclude that help for the region is misapplied and should be cut altogether, "There is advantage and disadvantage, and these folks have earned their disadvantage after 50 years of spite," writes a commenter referenced by the editorial board of the *Roanoke Times*. Another commentor says, "I really have no sympathy for them and I'm not going to lift a finger ever again to help them." The facts about the region --its demographics, the reality of gerrymandering and diluted voting power,

corruption, and general decline -- are hidden behind the confirmation of their

prejudices. Even public comments about Appalachia symbolically annihilate the

existence of Black, Latinx, queer, and Indigenous people.

The language in the above comments does not mention any people from

marginalized communities. These public comments do not recognize the multiple

intersecting identities held by people who live in Appalachia. The news media do not

consider that the people of Appalachia live at the intersections of multiple identities, like

the populace of the U.S. as a whole.

7.3   Against the Status Quo

Of course, not every journalistic choice is one of advancing the status quo. Most

articles use a mix of discursive strategies and objective writing. Several articles did not

use any of the strategies examined. These articles had three general themes; to state

facts only to inform the public; to shine a light on bad behavior, such as corruption; or to

give a more nuanced opinion on Appalachia as a region.

Several authors actively wrote in opposition to a status quo understanding of

Appalachia. Those articles utilized lexical choices to disrupt the status quo, pushing back

against stereotypes. The status quo understanding of journalism is that it should be fair

and balanced, but this is a fallacy. As the saying goes, "if one person says it's raining, an

another says it's not, the reporter's job is not to tell 'both-sides.' It's to go outside and

see if it's raining!" A pushback against the status quo can mean not using discursive

strategies like the ones I found here, but also avoiding reasoning fallacies, using active

voice, and avoiding "both-sideism" and "whataboutism." These last two tactics are

especially important to avoid as they muddy the facts and divert attention away from the main topic.

      "Welcome to Greenbrier, the Governor-Owned Luxury Resort Filled with Conflicts of Interest," published in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* on August 15, 2019, is a report on a resort owned by Jim Justice, the wealthiest man in West Virginia and also the current governor. This article begins by using the opposite of slanted headlining. Rather than bury the lede, the headline tells the reader what the article will tackle–the actions of the most influential person in West Virginia politics. The article goes on to give Justice space to give his side of the story; that his connections to an expensive, popular resort, often used for political gatherings and events, poses no threat to state democracy, that "I don't want a thing for my family in any way."

      While this article's tone about West Virginia was coded as negative, it is negative in a factual way. The stated reality is the truthful one. It does not sugarcoat WV's problems of perceived corruption in state government to make the region appear more inviting. Still, neither does it paint a picture of only rundown coal mines and a state overwhelmed by addiction and poverty. The issues of West Virginia are portrayed as nuanced and complex.

      For instance, it is noted in the article that the resort in question has "an outsized role in WV politics" and, while the poverty rate in WV is higher than the national average, the state has spent almost $400,000 on the resort since 2015. Small businesses are struggling and infrastructure needs are higher than ever, in WV. Rather than only pointing out the party line from the Governor's Office, the author notes that while these social ills are getting worse, the WV Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Office has increased its spending promoting or utilizing the governor's resort. An honest

accounting of the issue allows the reader to consider what solutions, be it through the

ballot box or by changing ethics rules, might be available for the citizens of West

Virginia to consider.

In "Trump's Rural Support Isn't the Story," published by *The Daily Yonder*, Bill

Bishop uses expert examples to counter stereotypical narratives about Appalachia. He

reports on the stereotype that Trump supporters are all poor or working-class, white,

and straight. It is a lesser-known fact that the median household income of a Trump

supporter was around $70,000 a year, well above the median income of $17,000 in

Appalachia. The narrative in most of the articles examined was that the poor white voter

is the bread and butter of Trump's support. Moreover, while Appalachia did

overwhelmingly break for Trump, his Bishop finds that supporters did not see

themselves so differently

> ...about three-quarters (74%) nonetheless hold that we should be more tolerant of
>
> people who adopt alternate lifestyles. And even though Trump supporters are
>
> overwhelmingly white...about 2/3 say their beliefs and values are similar to those
>
> of African Americans (62%) and Hispanics (68%).

Another example in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* discusses the illegal hiring

practices of the Kanawha County School System in West Virginia. Rather than downplay

or minimize the topic, the article shines a light on power structures at play. There is no

concealment. A gay educator, clearly the most qualified candidate for the principal job

she applied for, made credible accusations that her sexuality and not a lack of

experience prevented her from being hired. The reporter does not shy away from

challenging the statements of the ingroup, which said the applicant hired was the one

who scored the best, but the facts do not bear that out. Ryan Quinn writes in "Judge

Orders Kanawha to Immediately Replace South Charleston High Principal with

Applicant it Rejected

> Ryan White was tipped off before the hiring vote to review King's experience, the
>
> faculty's recommendations, and the district's official scoring of applicants, which
>
> ranked Kim William's the highest.

> One of the board members, Jim Crawford, allegedly told another member he
>
> couldn't support Williams because she's gay. He hasn't returned calls or testified
>
> to confirm or deny that accusation in the case.

 Indeed, the author highlights the county judge who ordered the immediate replacement

of the hired, less qualified educator, who noted that "the facts [around the qualifications

of the candidates] are not close." The facts being that the board did not choose the

candidate with the best qualifications. This inclusion uses an expert to support the

story's point, contrary to the evidentiality strategy.

17 articles utilized none of the 15 discursive strategies van Dijk and Igwebuike

identified in their work. Of these 17, 12 were regional/rural outlets. The tone of these

articles was coded as negative, a surprising finding, considering that the overall tone of

the regional articles tended to lean positive or neutral. These articles pushed back

against several narratives. The first is that that Appalachia is a monolith. Bishop notes in

"A Good Community shouldn't Be Confused with a Good Economy" that

These beneficial places (in Appalachia) had good schools, loads of social capital (civic organizations, churches, and low crime) and low levels of economic and racial segregation.

In another article, "Journalists, Forget the Rust Belt Diners, Head to Suburban Yoga Class," Jennifer Rubin writes

The suffering, isolation, addiction, unemployment and illness of these Americans were/are real, but the stories treated these Americans as Margaret Mead would have regarded a lost tribe of native peoples. (Oh, look, they hunt!) The reports wound up sounding patronizing and infantilizing.

The second is that Appalachia and rural areas are full of close-minded people who cannot be reasoned with. Anne McConnell writes in "White Privilege in Appalachia"

There are very real structural problems that disenfranchise white Americans in our region, not just Black Americans. That said, white Americans everywhere have the obligation to stand in solidarity with Black Americans against racism…"

Bryce Oates also counters this narrative in "Progressive Coalition Launches Campaign for Rural Voters" by writing about what is important to them, and it isn't necessarily what the status quo says, "When it comes to assigning blame or current

social problems, four times as many rural people blamed the role of big-money and

corporate donors in government for problems in their communities than blamed

immigrants."

The third is that Appalachians only care about issues of identity insofar as

traditional values are concerned, in "Race/Related: 'Hood to the Holler,' a Unifying Cry

in Kentucky," W.W. writes about Charles Booker's run for U.S. Senate as a Black man in

Appalachia. As a place that has a reputation for individual racism, Booker lost by just

3%. The author talks about "why people in predominantly white, Appalachian counties

may have more in common with urban, Black Kentuckians than one might expect."

And lastly, that all Appalachians believe coal and factory jobs are coming back,

and that hillbilly is a negative slur that causes great shame. In "From the Hood to the

Holler," the author writes about how residents want good jobs and are open to new

"green" jobs, "This is about fighting for families and investing in us so we can have good

jobs for a change. People get that."

Of course, disrupting power is not easy. There is pressure on news offices

to toe the status quo line, not to rock the boat, as it were. For instance, on December 28,

2022, West Virginia Public Broadcasting reporter Amelia Knisely was separated from

WVPB after reporting on abuses by the Department of Health and Human Services

(Adams 2022). The European Commissions "Knowledge for Policy" reports that

economic pressure to report on entertainment rather than political and social affairs has

increased and calls this a threat to democracy (KFP n.d.) Objectivity has somewhat lost

its meaning when it comes to journalism. It seems that in popular discourse, it means

telling two (or more) sides of a story, giving the same credence to all thoughts or

opinions. Objectivity does not mean a reporter or commentariat is not free of bias,

indeed there's no way to eliminate it. Rather than see a journalist as free of bias,

objectivity is a method rather than a state of being. Alter Lippmann, an associate editor

of the *New York World* says that journalism should be the study of "evidence and

verification (American Press Institute n.d.) In short, if a claim is made, it should be

investigated and verified. The reporter can personally hold whatever views they wish,

but the facts should be followed wherever they lead. Small, independent outlets have the

best chance to disrupt these status quo understandings so that the public can have a

more fact based accounting of what is happening worldwide.

8   CONCLUSION

8.1   Overview

This project seeks to find out how newspaper articles from locations both inside and outside Appalachia reported on the region and its people. Previous literature examines media bias and stereotypes about Appalachia but does not examine how discursive strategies support those things. Through the lenses of stereotyping, identity formation, and intersectionality, I analyzed newspaper articles using critical discourse analysis to find out how word choice and placement can contribute to symbolic annihilation, stereotype threat. and implicit biases. In using CDA, I identified multiple discursive strategies contributing to status quo understandings of Appalachia as a place and culture. Additionally, I found ways that some outlets pushed back against the status quo. While I found differences in how national vs. Appalachian outlets reported on Appalachia, all outlets utilized at least some discursive strategies contributing to or leaning on stereotypes that play a part in forming implicit biases, the symbolic annihilation of out-groups, and impact identity formation.

8.2   Theoretical Implications

Using several theoretical perspectives, I made some assumptions about the outcome of my analysis before data collection and synthesis. Stereotyping is the harmful, simplistic view of a group of people. Stereotyping does not allow for nuance or differences within that group. In my analysis, I find that multiple outlets engage in stereotyping through the choices made about what subject would be chosen for the article and how those subjects would be described. Stereotype threat is a "socially

premised psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies" (Steele and Aronson 1995). In several articles, subjects are portrayed in situations where negative traits about them will be assumed and, in fact, are assumed by the reporting. My analysis suggests that stereotyping is common in the reporting in the outlets I examined. My analysis also suggests that stereotyping is often concealed inside discursive strategies, which reveal the implicit biases of the author.

Implicit biases are those automatic and hidden biases about marginalized groups, leading to racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, and xenophobic ideologies. In my analysis, I find that not only does reporting that leans on stereotyping contribute to implicit bias, but the reporting itself is reflective of the reporter's biases. These biases are made evident in the discursive strategies the reporters choose to employ.

Identity formation is that lifelong project by which we develop our sense of who we are, our "self." Related to racial formation, this process depends on the many agents of socialization that impact a person's growth and development over the life course. One of the most influential agents of socialization is the media. I expected to find that media engaged in the use of discursive strategies that might influence how a person sees themselves and impact self-development. In their theory on racial formation, Omi and Winant acknowledge that media participate in a "racial project" that supports the status quo understandings around race and ethnicity. Identity is achieved through exploration and then commitment. By supporting the status quo, which is informed by stereotypes, media influence on that exploration entrenches stereotypes, impacting how someone thinks about themselves. In the articles examined here, I find many examples of media

reifying status quo ideologies that impact readers, particularly those who do not see themselves at all or those who only see a caricature of themselves.

Symbolic annihilation is the exclusion of groups from representation in media, politics, social institutions, and other social systems. This can be unintentional or by design. In most articles minoritized groups were not mentioned at all, neither were issues of oppression like racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism. It is impossible to know if these exclusions are intentional or a natural outcome of stereotypes that paint the region as exclusively white, cishet and mostly male. Regardless, the consequence is the same: marginalized Appalachians cannot see themselves in reporting and the dominant group cannot acknowledge the existence of these groups in the region. There was generally no difference when it comes to outlet locations, no outlets were committed to addressing issues affecting these communities.

Finding connections to racial formation was near impossible. Because of the symbolic annihilation of all non-white racial groups, there is no information to use to make conclusions about the impact of race-related reporting of non-white Appalachians. This project instead highlights the necessity of such reporting both by internal and external outlets. The lack of reporting on race or using diverse subjects contributes to the racial project by making race ambiguous or invisible, diminishing its importance.

8.3   Literature Implications

The literature around media representations of Appalachia is clear, media of all types utilize historic stereotypes in their portrayals. Whether it is movies, television shows, or music, media show Appalachians as toothless hillbillies, without culture. When any kind of culture is depicted, that culture tends to include violence, addiction

and alcoholism, and extreme poverty. Visual representations leave out marginalized

groups, limiting depictions of non-white and queer Appalachians (Newcomb 1979;

Comer 2006; Massey 2007; Cooke-Jackson and Hansen 2008; Herring 2014; Sone

2016). While literature on newspaper representations is scarce, there are several articles

that look at representations in newsprint. Those projects come to the same conclusion

as this one: newspapers are overall unsympathetic to Appalachia and its social

problems, large minoritized populations are missing from discourse, stereotype are the

foundation for much of the reporting examined, and, while discursive strategies were

not specifically defined, reporting used logical fallacies and lexical choices that

entrenched status quo understandings of the region. Additionally, of the articles that

compared news outlets inside and outside the region, researchers found that outlets

from inside the region portrayed subjects more positively than outside outlets.

My analysis finds mixed outcomes. Similar previous work looks specifically at

outlets that mention "Appalachia" with thematic analysis being the secondary goal

(Comer 2005). Comer's analysis is the project most closely aligned with this one. In

Comer's analysis, insider outlets were more likely to frame the region positively,

however, they also took a negative tone as often as a positive tone. I, too, find that

insider outlets frame the region more positively, specifically when discursive strategies

are used. However, "positive" can be a misnomer. Certain stereotypes are often

categorized as positive, but stereotypes are always harmful. Articles may frame self-

reliance as positive, but that framing still relies on inaccurate depictions of the

Appalachian people.

It is with this previous literature in mind that I place this project within that

scholarship. This analysis further complicates the questions around media portrayals of

Appalachia in a news media context. Because CDA and content analysis are dependent on the standpoint of the analyst, varying outcomes are to be expected. It is important to continue these lines of inquiry to find out how widespread stereotyping of Appalachia is, what role it plays in identity formation, and how different outlets contribute to status quo understandings of the region.

8.4 Future Discourse

J.D. Vance announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate in July 2021, renewing attention on the *Hillbilly Elegy* author and venture capitalist, as well as interest in the Appalachia for which he purports to speak. Donald Trump's third candidacy promises a return to more of the same rhetoric from his first two campaigns. Based on the media savvy of political figures and the attention the news will bring, will ensure a place for the WWC in continued political discourse. It seems unlikely that much attention will be given to out-groups in the region.

With just these two politicians openly socializing with white supremacists and anti-Semites it is incumbent upon the press to acknowledge these connections and call them out appropriately. Normalizing white identity politics in a time when hate crimes and extremism are on the rise is criminal. White supremacy targets all of the outgroups discussed here. On November 30, 2022, the Department of Homeland Security issued a warning to "the LGBTQI+ community, schools, racial and religious minorities" to be aware of the significant rise in hate crimes and protect us accordingly. Since extremists often find safe haven in secluded or rural areas, it is imperative that news media cover Appalachia accurately, including calling white supremacy what it is, a violent ideology with no place in a democratic society.

Additionally, this project looked at opinion/commentary and traditional reporting. In the future, these categories should be separated out to see if there are differences in strategy usage, tone, etc. This project briefly describes some of these characteristics in Chapter 5, but future projects should include these distinctions.

8.5   Limitations

Analyzing expressions of meaning inside discourse provides an understanding how language is used as part of a process that achieves the legitimation and reproductions of power systems. However, making sense of how discourse is used depends entirely on the analyst's semantic and grammatical knowledge. The analysis also depends on the social context in which the discourse is created. This context is shaped by the social conditions current during the discourse production. During my analysis, I strove to be as knowledgeable about the social context as possible, to manage my own biases, and to utilize a reliable and valid methodology.

I have endeavored to analyze the socio-semantic features of the articles not only to discover how the articles shaped their representations of Appalachia but how the discursive strategies used to achieve this purpose utilized grammar, word choice, and style to support the status quo ideologies. One of the limitations of this analysis is that, because this methodology is dependent on the standpoint of the analysis, another researcher may find practices and elements they may consider to be more important.

The standpoint of the researcher is imperative to discourse analysis. This methodology is not intended to be used apolitically. The analysis includes not only the social realities surrounding the discourse, but the identities and social realities of the analyst. The researcher's standpoint is therefore limiting by its very nature of being

specific to the person. As a white queer Appalachia (queerbilly), my standpoint is one of love for the region, fear as a queer person, and from the privilege that whiteness brings. I also come from the perspective that Appalachia deserves better than to be stereotyped and its people left out of discussions around intersectionality, stereotype threat, and being symbolically annihilated from discourse. Any researcher's standpoint will invariably impact their analysis, which is why it is so important to use strong methodology.

8.6 Looking Ahead

I attempted to apply 15 different discursive strategies from the methodology of van Dijk and Igwebuike. Thirty of the 51 articles utilized at least one discursive strategy in a way that supports a status quo understanding of the broad themes presented related to Appalachia.

While there were some differences in how regional and national outlets reported on Appalachia, the differences were inconsistent. For instance, *The Daily Yonder* and *Charleston Gazette-Mail* both use discursive strategies but less often and fewer times in service to the status quo. The *Roanoke Times* and *Pittsburgh Gazette* used many discursive strategies and were likelier to write in a style that supported the status quo. *The New York Times* utilized all the strategies listed. It was the paper most likely to support current political and social conditions and to criticize the Appalachian region.

Many of the articles that used one of the discursive strategies either noted that Appalachians do not identify with "hillbilly" as it is a derogatory term or to see using it as an act of reclamation. However, subjects of articles rarely used the term to describe themselves. They were more likely to discuss how Appalachia was portrayed rather than

talk about Appalachian as a recognized identity. Other strategies placed marginalized groups as the out-group or ignored them altogether.

News media, as the fourth estate, has the ability to support or change public perception. As an institution, it is uniquely positioned to influence groups of people and individuals. This influence can be used to positively reflect the region, utilizing strategies that challenge the status quo. These challenges could change perceptions and mitigate implicit biases, turning public opinion to one of understanding and sympathy for a region that is not only in need of social help but is much more diverse with a rich culture than many realize.

An article from *US News and World Report*, continues to discuss Appalachia in the context of the opioid crisis, disappearing jobs, and environmental disaster following the devastating flood in July 2022 that impacted thousands of residents. "Despite Dangers, Deep Roots Make Appalachia Hard to Leave" is an article by another national outlet leaning on stereotypes and eliminating out-groups. Looking at other national outlets in addition to *The New York Times* will be key to finding out how larger outlets discuss Appalachia in comparison to regional outlets.

Additionally, since the 2020 election, even international outlets have begun reporting on Appalachia. In contrast to the *US News* article, on August of 2022, *The Guardian*, based out of England, reported on a oil pipeline deal signed by senator Joe Manchin. This article, "'It's a Deal with the Devil': Outrage in Appalachia Over Manchin's 'vile' Pipeline Plan," makes clear that Appalachians care about the environment and how they are represented in government. This is much different perspective and could be an interesting approach to finding out how the viewpoint of international outlets might be different than regional and national outlets.

This project examined just a small sample of newspaper articles discussing Appalachia. In the sample provided here, many discursive strategies were found to be in service to status quo understandings about topics related to Appalachia. However, this project is just a start. To continue learning how Appalachia is understood by the wider populace, more research in this area should be conducted. Since the end of the time-period examined here, the stereotypes about Appalachia have continued. In order to combat these stereotypical portrayals, we must first acknowledge and analyze them. Naming the problem in the first step towards rectifying it.

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APPENDIX

Newspaper Articles Analyzed

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