The Appalachian Discourse:
A Critical Analysis of the Media Coverage within the Appalachian Region during the 2016
American Presidential Election

.

Shane Tilton, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of

Multimedia Journalism

Ohio Northern University

email: s-tilton@onu.edu

July 25, 2017

Abstract

One of the focal points in the media coverage of the 2016 presidential election was the Appalachia region and the amount of support Donald Trump would receive from its voters in his attempt to become the 45th president of the United States. An aftereffect of the election was the media outlets' surprise in the region's 20% shift from Obama voters in 2012 to Trump voters in 2016 (Cottrell, Herron, & Westwood, 2016). One thought is that the media may have "misread" some of the important issues voters in the region faced. The purpose of this article is to examine the ways in which the Appalachian people were represented by national media outlets and regional outlets. A mixed-method analysis of the mediated stories that focused on the region found a type of "narrative flattening" (Reese, 2010) occurring in both the Appalachian regional coverage and the national media coverage.

Keywords: Appalachia, journalism, narratives, elections, content analysis, case study, Appalachian Regional Commission

Appalachian Discourse

Among the interesting focal points of the 2016 presidential election were the continual media narratives regarding the Appalachian region of the United States. Specifically, one of the strongest narratives was the question of how much support Donald Trump would receive from the region. Trump's rhetoric was built on a perceived support of the culture and community of the Appalachian region. Much of the centralized focus was built on the coal and agriculture industries improving under a Trump presidency. This focus spoke to the wishes of the community, but against the economic norms of the region. Specifically, there is a higher level of unemployment in the Appalachian region as compared to the rest of the nation (Lobao et al., 2016). Also, the per capita market income in this region is $6,000 less than the national average. Reasons for this difference include the decline of coal production in the region and the drop in prices for agricultural products (Ford, 2015).

What was starting to emerge in the press during the latter half of 2016 was a type of hyper-focus on the Appalachian region. The focus became more coherent during in light of the presidential primaries, the general election, and two natural disasters that occurred in the region (specifically flooding in West Virginia that happened in the early part of the summer and the Gatlinburg wildfires near Tennessee in November 2016). It was during this period that the various media organizations attempted to contextualize what was happening in the region in relationship to the election and natural disasters. This mediated focus led to an increase of media coverage in the region between the beginning of June and the end of November. According to a review of Google News in December 2016, there were 11,103 stories that referenced Appalachia from June 2016 to November 2016. In 2015, that figure was 4,980, and just 1,190 news stories

referenced Appalachia in 2012. This higher level of news coverage saturation would seem to indicate that throughout the United States there was more interest in what was happening in the region.

Even with this focus on the Appalachian region, the national press and media outlets were "unprepared" for the level of support that Trump received during the general election. Specifically, the national media organizations noted the support Donald Trump received from the region as a catalyst for his political victories. Anthony DiMaggio (2016) noticed this support when he mentioned this election outcome was "more about growing working class and white voter disgust with the Democratic status quo than it was about being enamored with the Trump candidacy." Monnat (2016) approached the disconnection of the media outlets and Trump's strength in Appalachia by stating that the results of the election "demonstrates that community-level well-being played an important role in the 2016 election, particularly in the parts of America far-removed from the world of urban elites, media, and foundations." (pg. 6) This disconnection was also demonstrated in the language of the campaign. As described by Agnew & Shin (2016) "above all, as pollsters report from their pro-Trump informants: 'He tells it like it is,' 'Can bring change,' and is 'From outside the establishment.' The term "establishment" refers entirely to practicing politicians. Billionaires are exempted" (pg. 266).

The post-election analysis shows two key factors that were hidden during the vote. First, the Appalachian region (along with the "Rust Belt") made up the highest shift of support from one party to another. Specifically, there was a nearly 20% shift from Democratic support to support for the Republican party. This support meant those that who voted for Obama in 2012 voted for Trump in 2016. This shift didn't match the polling or projections from national media outlets (Cottrell, Herron, & Westwood, 2016). The second hidden factor was the fact that polling

was media organizations' primary mode of defining the nature of the American voting public, instead of describing the unfiltered narratives of the various regions of the nation. Media outlets depended on quantitative data points to create a meta-narrative of the 2016 American presidential election.

A question raised by these factors and the result of the 2016 election was: Did the national and international media outlets accurately represent the Appalachian community? In presenting the election as a competitive sport (Takens et al., 2013), media outlets used sporting analogies as a means for framing the election. This framing pushed polls to the forefront of the construction of the stories surrounding the election. Polling as a primary means of narrative construction tends to leave out the cultural aspects that define the region (Obermiller & Maloney, 2016), the nature of relationship between the local community and the nation (Lobao et al., 2016), and the underlying factors that help or hinder the development of the region (James & James, 2015). These polling narratives overlooked the narrative of the community. Kyle Rowland (2016) of the *Toledo Blade* described the narrative of Appalachia Ohio in his July 18 article by stating

With his assault on NAFTA and unfair trade deals, Mr. Trump carried 29 of Ohio's 32 Appalachian counties in the primary election. The common theme is lost union jobs in manufacturing, mining, and steel. The isolated and economically depressed counties also voted in large numbers for insurgent candidates George Wallace and Ross Perot.

Those themes were traditionally lost in the coverage of this region.

There are three functions that the article seeks to fulfill. The first is to serve as a type of reflective analysis of the post-election status of American politics and American media platforms. This should go beyond a knee-jerk "why did this happen?" to a more helpful focus on the narratives and status that led to the election outcome in November 2016. The second function is to examine national and international media outlets' presentation of the shift of the Appalachia populace as described by Cottrell, Herron, and Westwood (2016). It is important to note if this sizable shift from Democratic to Republican support was given the attention and focus that it deserved within the stories produced by these outlets. Finally, the article will examine the role of the national and international media outlets in providing a clear representation of the voice of the Appalachian electorate. Specifically, was there realistic presentation of the issues and concerns that the Appalachian communities were facing and did the national and international press use the right amount of ethos, pathos, and logos in these representations and narratives during the election season?

Literature Review

The two central themes of this work dealt with: 1) the Appalachian region itself and 2) the role of journalism in a modern society, specifically how journalistic organizations explain what is happening to cultures outside those with which the audience is familiar.

Any discussion about the Appalachian region must be understood through three conceptual frames. The first frame is geographic. For those unfamiliar with the Appalachian region of the United States, Smith and Fisher (2016) defined the region as a complex area of the United States that comprises of "many Appalachias" marked by "uneven development, whereby some places are economically dispossessed and culturally denigrated while others are enriched

and valorized… Appalachia is indeed America's 'Other'" (p. 76), where the only commonality is the geographical presence of the Appalachian mountain range. The second framework is the cultural traditions of the Appalachian region. Primarily, we talk about the traditions of the region in terms of music and other cultural signifiers, the working habits of those in the region and the modified representations of those who live and work in the region via media constructions. The third framework is the current issues that the region is facing. The two biggest issues in the Appalachian region are the widespread poverty and the use of drugs and drug addiction within the region. All the major economic indicators (e.g., average household income in the region, unemployment rate, retail sales in the region, and the housing market) show that Appalachia is behind the economic development and prosperity of the rest of the United States (Greenberg, 2016), whereas the number of issues related to opiate abuse (Keyes et al., 2014) and cancer diagnoses (Riehman et al., 2017) are above the national average.

The other central theme in this research is the role of journalism in explaining narratives. Specifically, the discussion is how journalists present issues of concerns within a given community to larger mediated audiences. Journalists are considered the way important issues of the day are disseminated to the larger public. A conceptualization of journalism is required in order to have a reasonable discussion of this role. The conceptualization of journalism in this article will come from an "American Legacy" view of journalism. For this article, journalism will be defined as:

1) any type of content that uses a truthful, compelling narrative to explain what is happening to a given community during a specific period

2) to a given audience in a manner that allows the audience to understand anything that

influences that given narrative as the voice or record of the given community.

3) It must also explain why the audience should care about that topic/issue/point of interest/event, and

4) finally, it must follow the ethos and spirit of the practice of journalism.

The concept of truth in this definition means that story uses facts verified by independent sources. If the story is not truthful, then it does not represent the communities it covers and therefore, does not serve the audience to which it reports. The stories must be compelling to the audience. If those stories are not compelling, the audience will not read the full story. This idea of being truthful and compelling comes from Scheufele's (1999) analysis of framing. "Compelling" is one of the key aspects of the framing of a given story as it creates the relationship between the audience and the subject matter of the story.

The concept of a journalistic organization representing the voice and record of a given community speaks to the traditional role of the media being a record of source and the record of time (Tilton, 2016) that a community shows to the rest of the world. It is important to frame this concept of the presentation of a given community during a certain period within a theoretical construction. For this work, Erving Goffman's (2008) Dramaturgical Theory has proven its worth as a means of discussing the members within the community as "performing" various actions to various audiences based on the social and cultural relationships between themselves and those audiences.

There are two key points raised when discussing why the audience should care about a story. The primary point is the ability of journalists to create a hook for the story in order to make the audience interested in the narrative. The second point is the ability of media

organizations to encourage the audience to focus on particular topics and keep those topics in the forefront of their minds—thus setting the agenda for the audience member (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The last and most important concept raised by this definition of journalism is how a journalist follows the ethos and spirit of the practice of journalism. The most basic level of this concept is following the code of ethics and best practices of journalism (Tilton, 2014). However, the spirit of journalism is influenced by the means in which story was presented in the past. Reese's (2010) "Narrative Flattening" model is one framework to understand the means in which narratives are traditionally presented through journalistic works. This model says that as stories move from local communities to regions, and then from national to international that those stories become more simplified as a way of getting the message across to various audiences.

Research Question/Hypotheses

With the two research themes in mind, this research article will focus on a single research question broken out with two different foci. The research question is:

RQ1) What are the common themes in the stories of the Appalachian region and its people…

RQ1a) … as presented by national news organizations?

RQ1b.) … as presented by Appalachian regional news organizations?

The rationale for the split foci was to see if the themes and discourses between the national/international presentations of the region and the regional presentation of itself align. A major "disconnect" between the composite representation of the Appalachian region in national/international journalistic outlets and the composite representation of the Appalachian

region in the local/community journalistic outlets could explain the difference of interpretation of what is happening in this region.

Methods

The process used to answer the central research question was a mixed-method analysis of the galaxy of news stories that covered the Appalachian region during the last five months of the 2016 American presidential election. The rationale for using a time-consuming process was to allow for more depth and a richer analysis of the various stories being produced. A quantitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) helped to determine how the distribution of thematic foci in the sample of Appalachian media outlets related to the sample of state and national media outlets, and to cull the galaxy to a manageable size by removing invalid cases that were outside the scope of the research. A qualitative case study (Neuendorf, 2016) was applied to address and answer the central research question by adding a "critical lens" to the research (Steensen, 2011). The case study allowed for the addition of dramaturgical theory under the guise of framing theory, as it was used in the earlier definition of journalism provided by this work. This type of multi-method research works well as the population being studied is being analyzed through the framework of the media lens as opposed to direct communication actions by the population itself. A type of network analysis (Tilton, 2008), direct interview (Burke et al., 2016), or cross-sectional survey (Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014) would have made more sense in the case of direct communication actions given the nature of the population of study.

Results & Analysis

In addressing the common themes reported on by national coverage vs. the Appalachian regional coverage as it relates to the presentation of the Appalachian region and its people, it is

important to note Reese's (2010) "Narrative Flattening" model. The argument is that if the journalist creates a simplified narrative from the complexity of a given story, the story will be much easier for the audience to understand the story and the story will be more likely to be accepted for publication or broadcast. This flattening theory holds when looking at the national coverage of the Appalachian region and its people.

The national news coverage primary narrative featured variations of the neglected region/forgotten people thematics. Three of the variations of this narrative were:

1.) The "timely parable of race": This narrative thread was used by Andrew Miller (2016) for the *Economist* in its August 27 edition in his story on the Melungeons, a group of "dark-skinned mountaineers of eastern Tennessee and southwest Virginia and into Kentucky." Miller writes "before long, alas, sentiments and laws sharpened, until interracial couples risked fearsome punishments. Still, the Melungeons offer an insight into a lost but documented history in which America's race relations were less hierarchical than they shortly became." Miller paints the region with a mythos of the free wilderness with the genealogical trace of this small pact of outsiders that makes the "fabric" of what it means to be an American.

Another example of the "timely parable of race" narrative came from the use of Nancy Isenberg's (2016) book "White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America" as a framing tool. Twenty-two of the 341 national news stories [$f(x)=.0645$] referenced this book. For example, Thomas J. Sugrue's (2016) book review in the June 24 edition of *The New York Times* where he states,

So, Isenberg's story is not, as her subtitle suggests, "untold." But she retells it with

unusual ambition and (to use a class-laden term) in a masterly manner. Ranging from

John Rolfe and Pocahontas to "The Beverly Hillbillies," Isenberg… provides a

cultural-history of changing concepts of class and inferiority,

or tied the message of the book to tangent narrative of the "underclass" of America, as Alec MacGillis and ProPublica did in the September 2016 issue of *The Atlantic* by stating,

As she makes plain, a white lower class not only figured more prominently in the

development of the colonies and the young country than national lore suggests, but was

spoken of from the start explicitly in terms of waste and refuse.

2.) The value of hope and promises made to the region: One of the overwhelming narratives presented in the national news coverage was the increase of hope in the region. CBS News' (2016) "For many supporters, Donald Trump is a thing called hope," *Omaha World-Herald* (2016) "Trump's vow to revive coal country met with measured hope in Appalachia," *Chicago Tribune's* (2016) "Trump's vow to bring back coal gives hope to weary regions," and WOSU's (Honig, 2016) "Outside Of Columbus, Trump's Victory Is A Ray Of Hope" represent a small segment of the news stories that expressed a rise in the emotion of the region with this newfound focus on the region. This emotional description of the region is a fundamental difference from the traditional representation of people of this region having a "fatalistic" view of the world (Caudill, 2001).

3.) The government response (or lack thereof) to the issues facing the Appalachia region after the region was neglected/forgotten for "so long": Three of the biggest issues facing the region are the increasing cancer rates in the region, the increase of opioid addiction among those living in the region, and the economic issues facing the region. National news organizations would normally approach these issues using the feature story model of journalistic narrative. The

feature story model of journalistic narrative will personify the story with a central feature-style

format for the story (Tilton, 2016) and use supporting facts to flesh out the details of the main

issues and quote experts to connect the personal to the audience.

For the increasing cancer rates, for example, Bob Tedeschi (2016) wrote for the PBS

Newshour in June 22 to connect Electra Paskett's work in Pomeroy, Ohio to work with the

community of cancer issues, with the larger issue of getting government support for rural cancer

programs. Paskett mentions this issue directly.

> But to complete more ambitious studies, Paskett and others will need to overcome a
>
> nagging obstacle: ignorance. "Everybody says where's the disparities here? Everybody is
>
> white," she said. Those who fund research, she said, often "don't really think of the
>
> populations we work with as underserved, and they are."

Andrew Joseph (2016) covered the local and state response to Huntington, WV issues

with the heroin abuse for *The Week* magazine. "The office [of drug control policy] brought

together law enforcement, health officials, community and faith leaders, and experts from

Marshall to try to tackle the problem together. Changes in state law have opened naloxone

dissemination to the public and protected people who report overdoses. But the city and its

partners have gone further, rolling out programs through the municipal court system to

encourage people to seek treatment.

Poverty was covered a little differently in the national news, specifically the central

argument was that the state and national government has done very little to curb the rise of

poverty in the region. A prime example of this narrative construction is Claire Galofaro's (2016)

article for the *Charlotte Observer* focusing on the economic issues facing Logan, WV. The

central tenet of the article would be,

> They gave up on their politicians—they elected both Republicans and Democrats and
> believe both failed them in favor of chasing campaign contributions from the class above
> them and votes from the one below, the neighbors they suspect would rather collect
> government welfare than get a job.

It is this framing of government that forms part of the analysis of the second research question.

The Appalachian regional outlets were more likely to present the region using a "candid" or "slice-of-life" approach in their reporting. Most of the stories in the Appalachian regional coverage that mentioned Appalachia described either the culture of the region (e.g., Roxy Todd's (2016) June 10 article for West Virginia Public Broadcasting called "Want to Eat Local in Appalachia? Here's a Map That Can Help") or the day-to-day lives of those in the region (e.g. Jessica Lilly & Roxy Todd's (2016) September 9 article called "Modern Day Coal Miner"). The Appalachian media outlets were more likely to write about the region and its people using quotes that explored that complexity of the region. The prime examples of this style of writing came from the West Virginia Public Broadcasting's series "Inside Appalachia." This series is detailed later in this article.

Findings

There were two important findings that were outside the strict scope of the research questions but emerged from the analysis of the case study. The first finding was the use of "Hillbilly Elegy" by J. D. Vance as a framing tool by both national and Appalachia media outlets as a starting point in the cultural discussion regarding the changes of the region in the past 50 years. The book describes Vance's experiences of moving from Kentucky to Ohio. Vance

describes his perceptions of the Appalachian region (specifically the workforce, family relations, and connection of those that live in Appalachia to their local community) over the past 25 years. He notes the decline is slightly connected to the economic depression that constantly faces the region. However, as Sarah Jones noted in her Nov. 17 article for the *New Republic*, "His great takeaway from life in America's underclass is: Pull up those bootstraps." This central thread was carried in many of the 59 stories that referenced this book in the national media outlets (out of 341 news articles in the national research pool) and 25 times this book was referenced in Appalachian media outlets (out of 366 news articles in the Appalachian research pool).

Vance attempts to show off the complexity in the region, and some of the articles pick up on this complexity. Those complex narratives were more likely to be addressed in the Appalachia regional media outlets. For example, Stefainierose Miles wrote for the *Lexington Herald-Leader* on the Sept. 9,

> Vance makes a strong case for the region being many different things at once—full of some of the nicest, most loyal, and hard-working people in the world as well as home to plenty of drug addicts, thieves and child-abandoning, sorry outfits.

Mark Lynn Ferguson also noted this complexity in his Sept. 12 article for the *Chicago Tribune*. This article was the best exemplar of how national news outlets tended to use the book to show the complexity of the region. According to Ferguson, "I have a lot in common with J. D. Vance, author of the new memoir 'Hillbilly Elegy.' We both grew up dirt poor in hillbilly households," Ferguson connects with the reader of the article by present example from the region that the reader would empathize with and relate to. He uses the book as an anchor in deconstructing some of the central arguments in the book, and generally levied against the region.

Ultimately, though, no one family, neither mine nor Vance's, can represent the entire

Appalachian South. The region is roughly the size of Greece with about 16 million

inhabitants. To gauge how it's doing, we have to look at data, and one of the best sources

is the Appalachian Regional Commission, which has been coordinating federal

investments in the area since the 1960s.

An oversimplification of the region can only be broken apart by understanding the region not as

a collective whole, but as the rich cultural tapestry it is. Ferguson addresses this idea,

Speaking of computing, try Googling the word "visit" and any of these places—

Asheville, Shepherdstown, Chattanooga, Greenville, Roanoke, Knoxville, Galax, Berea

or Staunton. The results give a peek at the new Appalachian South. From legal

moonshine to bands that merge punk rock and bluegrass, we're using our heritage to

innovate, our ready workforce to attract employers, and our natural resources to draw

tourists by the millions.

While both national media outlets and Appalachian regional media outlets used the book,

the difference was in how the book was used in the various articles. National media outlets were

more likely to use "Hillbilly Elegy" as an explainer for Trump's support in the region and

understanding the mindset of the voter in the region. Jocelyn McClurg (2016) is the best

exemplar of this technique in her Aug. 17 article for *USA Today* entitled "Best-selling 'Hillbilly

Elegy' helps explain Trump's appeal." The hook from the article is,

Now, Vance tells *USA Today*, "I love the way (Trump) criticizes party elites, but really

dislike the candidate himself. I'm definitely not supporting Trump, though I probably

won't vote for Hillary either—she just seems like she doesn't care about the people I

grew up around."

There are many others from national media outlet who use the book as a Rosetta Stone for translating the needs, wants, and desires of those living in the region.

Joshua Rothman (2016) wrote for the *New Yorker* that this book was published at the right time for all the issues raised about the region and the election.

Had 'Hillbilly Elegy' been published last year, or the year before, it still would have found readers: It's a detailed and moving account of American struggle. This year, though, the book has been adopted by an unusually large and passionate audience.

Peter Beinart's (2016) Nov. 28 article for *The Atlantic* notes, "His Appalachian and rust belt neighbors, Vance suggests, want easy answers. They want someone else to blame. By ditching the language of personal responsibility, Trump has created a Republican Party able to tell them what they want to hear." Jennifer Senior (2016) approaches this discussion in a different way by noting the relationships mentioned in the book.

His friends and relations are convinced that the media lies. That politicians lie. That the military, an institution they revere, is fighting two fruitless wars. Universities feel "rigged" and inaccessible; job prospects are slim. For what purpose do you live under such circumstances? When the stanchions of your life have sunk into the muck?

Finally, Lelia Moshref-Danesh (2016) approaches the book from the vantage point of the media commentator trying to connect the book to the larger media conversation about the region.

"Hillbilly Elegy" lays out these choices, along with their accompanying fears, hopes and dreams in intimate, human form, and in this way, makes it clear that we all at some point confront fears of change and aspirations of stability, success, and love. The world in

"Hillbilly Elegy" is one we don't necessarily like talking about. It's the America we sometimes would rather try to cover up, ignore, write off, or disown. But in reality, it's the one we need to understand.

The Appalachia regional media outlets used the book to make broader arguments about the region at-large. One of the more common positions was to dispute the narrow focus on the poverty of the region. Mark Lynn Ferguson remarked on this in an interview with Robbie Harris (2016) for WVTF Radio,

> You know, there are bluegrass bands in Japan now, which is remarkable that we've had this kind of cultural influence on the world and for all the stereotypes, for all the characterization of hillbillies as poor or backwoods, or like J. D. Vance portrays them as violent and apathetic, I think there's also a lot of magic that comes out of our region and people see that too.

Another example of this position came from Mike Smathers (2016) in his Sept. 10 article for the *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

> By no means are most Appalachian families as disoriented or dysfunctional as Vance describes his to be. Part of the trouble stems from the fact that there is no such thing as Appalachia. Appalachia is largely a figment of the imagination of government bureaucrats and popular authors who cannot see beyond the problems besetting much of the Southern mountain population.

Lastly, James Branscome (2016) for the *Daily Yonder* calls out Vance for the elements he believes are wrong in the book.

> There are enough stereotypes in this book to sink an aircraft carrier. To wit, from Uncle

Jimmy opining on the Scots-Irish, 'But yeah, like everyone else in our family, they could go from zero to murderous in a f***ing heartbeat.' To top off Vance's lack of knowledge on his topic, he says 'Bloody Breathitt' got its title from all the men volunteering to fight in WW I without a draft call. Actually, it was from all the feuding that followed the Civil War because many mountaineer families in the South fought for the Union side.

The final narrative to note in the findings for this research was the consistent referral to the region being composed of the "white working class." Juana Summers (2016) was one of the foundational reporters expressing this narrative in her Sept. 20 story for CNN.

Rural working class whites are more likely to blame the federal government for their economic problems than their urban counterparts. Seven in 10 say the federal government deserves all or most of the blame for the economic problems facing the working class, in the CNN Kaiser survey, compared with half of urban working class whites.

Alec MacGillis & ProPublica (2016) focused on this term as well for their article.

The label served to conjure a vast swath of salt-of-the-earth citizens living and working in the wide-open spaces between the coasts—Sarah Palin's "real America"—who were dubious of the effete, hifalutin types increasingly dominating the party that had once purported to represent the common man. The "white working class" connoted virtue and integrity. A party losing touch with it was a party unmoored.

Kirk Noden (2016) noted this in the Nov. 17 article for *The Nation*. "The first step was the collapse of the industrial heartland. This hit white working-class people incredibly hard—and it remains a phenomenon that is not understood on the East and West Coasts." Robert Kuttner (2016) also hits on this theme. "Historically, right-wing populism was contained as long as

working- and middle-class whites felt they were getting their fair share, and as long as government took seriously grievances of class." This theme (or variations on this theme) were found in 63 of the 341 national stories on the region [f(x)=.1847]. By comparison, only 10 of the 366 stories published from Appalachian media outlets used the term "white working class" in their stories [f(x)=.0273].

The focus on the white working class as one of the only narratives about the region is another example of the flattening that occurred in framing. This almost exclusive focus of the white working class narrative eliminates the idea of the complexity of class and race in the region. The region was diluted to one race and one class in 52 of the 63 times this term "white working class" appeared. This eliminates any sense of complexity to the region and narrows the interpretation and representation of the region to a selected class and race.

Discussion

One of the exemplars of a media organization presenting the complex cultural tapestry of the Appalachia region is West Virginia Public Broadcasting's "Inside Appalachia." It presented a multi-story series of the role and influence of national politics in the region (e.g., "Is Appalachia Trump Country?" and "Inside Appalachia: The Issues and the Election"), the issues associated with drug abuse in the region (e.g., "A Generation of Addiction Inside Appalachia"), and the embedded cultural artifacts and rituals of the region (e.g., "Musical Heart Work: Retooling Appalachian Tradition" and "Ever Been Judged Because of Your Accent?"). Many of the articles are presented using a multimedia approach in the presentation of the region. The textual narrative uses the strength of the medium by presenting the "bullet points" of information needed for the audience to understand the nature of the story. The images used in the articles allows the

audience to see the people referenced and visualize the region. The audio adds a sense of reality

to the story through the natural sounds added to the story. In addition, the audience can hear the

emotion in people's voices. The format and focus of these stories seem to buck against the

narrative flattening that was occurring elsewhere. The stories tended to focus on one specific

issue facing the region (e.g., the impact of addiction on families in the region versus a general

report of drug addiction in the region) and drilled into the issue using a combination of personal

narratives, compelling images (Tilton, 2016), and enough data to help the audience why the issue

matters and why the reporter focused on the issue.

Conclusion

In concluding this analysis of the mediated representation of the Appalachian region and

its people, the focus should be on the need for future research raised by the disconnection this

analysis found. The major theme from the Appalachian region that arose at the end of the 2016

presidential election came from Washington D.C. Trump's 2018 budget called for the

elimination of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) (DelReal, 2017). His budget,

released March 15, 2017, removed support from social programs and moved the money to tax

cuts and support for the Department of Defense. It was unclear how Trump would be attempting

to improve the region without this central government agency. This change in support for the

region could affect the support for Trump in Appalachia, because the ARC was the lone

government agency that received relatively positive remarks in this research. Congress stepped

in to fund ARC in May and should maintain its budget for 2018 (Floyd, 2017).

If the ARC loses its funding in future, there must be a similar content analysis to examine

the difference between the regional reaction to the loss of funding. If Reese's (2010) model

holds, the national media outlets would be more likely to frame those stories into an overarching narrative of poverty in the United States. Meanwhile, the Appalachian regional outlets would present the complexity of the lack of support via the narratives of feature stories like the ones shown earlier in this article.

Appalachia remains connected but separate from the rest of the United States. The focus on the issues surrounding the "Digital Divide" in the region (van Dijk, 2005), poverty (Goetz, Partridge, & Stephens, 2017), cancer (Katz et al., 2017), drug abuse (Anglin, 2016), and the lack of social support (Young, 2017) are common stories that most Americans can understand. A way to better understand the overall scope of the issues in the region is by allowing the complexity of these problems be shown in national media outlets, rather than relying on the relatively flattened narratives being presented. The current state of national news stories show the region as a one-dimensional representation of rural poor white Americans rather than as a diverse region.

References

Agnew, J., & Shin, M. (2016). Electoral dramaturgy: Insights from Italian politics about Donald Trump's 2015-16 campaign strategy... and beyond. *Southeastern Geographer, 56*(3), 265-272.

Anglin, M. (2016). Framing Appalachia: A new drug in an old story. *Journal of Appalachian Studies, 22*(1), 136-150. doi:10.5406/jappastud.22.1.0136

Associated Press. (2016, November 21). Trump's vow to bring back coal gives hope to weary regions. *Chicago Tribune.* Retrieved July 13, 2017, from http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-trump-jobs-coal-country-biz-20161121-story.html

Associated Press. (2016, November 24). Trump's vow to revive coal country met with measured hope in Appalachia. *Omaha World-Tribune.* Retrieved July 13, 2017, from http://www.omaha.com/money/trump-s-vow-to-revive-coal-country-met-with-measured/article_bc4f8ec8-9375-526c-9ca7-b0015b27d1aa.html

Beinart, P. (2016, November 28). Trump excuses the white working class from the politics of personal responsibility. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved July 19, 2017, from https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/trumpisms-false-promises/508844/

Branscome, J. (2016, August 3). Review: Lamenting 'Hillbilly Elegy'. *Daily Yonder.* Retrieved July 19, 2017, from http://www.dailyyonder.com/review-lamenting-hillbilly-elegy/2016/08/03/14622/

Burke, B. J., Welch-Devine, M., Gustafson, S., Heynen, N., Rice, J. L., Gragson, T. L., Evans, S.R., & Nelson, D. R. (2016). Can science writing collectives overcome barriers to more democratic communication and collaboration? Lessons from environmental communication praxis in southern Appalachia. *Environmental Communication, 10*(2), 169-186.

Caudill, H. M. (2001). *Night comes to the Cumberlands: A biography of a depressed area.* Ashland, KY: Jesse Stuart Foundation.

CBS News. (2016, November 10). For many supporters, Donald Trump is a thing called hope. Retrieved July 13, 2017, from http://www.cbsnews.com/news/for-many-supporters-donald-trump-is-a-thing-called-hope/.

Cottrell, D., Herron, M. C., & Westwood, S. J. (2016, December 2). Evaluating Donald Trump's allegations of voter fraud in the 2016 presidential election. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from http://www.dartmouth.edu/~voterfraud/

DelReal, J. A. (2017, March 22). Trump's budget targets rural development programs that provide lifeline in Appalachia. *Lexington Herald-Leader*. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from http://www.kentucky.com/news/state/article140062018.html

DiMaggio, A. (2016, December 15). The anti-Trump uprising: Forging a path forward in uncertain times. *Counterpunch.* Retrieved July 13, 2017, from http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/12/15/the-anti-trump-uprising-forging-a-path-forward-in-uncertain-times/

Ferguson, M. L. (2016, September 12). For Appalachia's hillbillies, more than an elegy. *Chicago Tribune.* Retrieved July 20, 2017, from http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-appalachia-hillbilly-elegy-white-poor-vance-perspec-0913-jm-20160912-story.html

Floyd, D. (2017, July 13). House committee approves funding for Appalachian Regional Commission. *Johnson City Press*. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from http://www.johnsoncitypress.com/Politics/2017/07/13/House-committee-approves-funding-for-Appalachian-Regional-Commission

Ford, T. R. (Ed.). (2015). *The southern Appalachian region: A survey.* Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

Galofaro, C. (2016, July 18). In desperate pockets of Appalachia, Trump is a desperate survival bid. *Charlotte Observer.* Retrieved July 20, 2017, from http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/politics-government/article90309262.html

Goetz, S., Partridge, M., & Stephens, H. (2017). The economic status of rural America in the Trump era. Retrieved July 12, 2017 from https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/77830/1/MPRA_paper_77830.pdf

Goffman, E. (2008). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* New York: Anchor Books

Greenberg, P. (2016). Spatial inequality and uneven development: The local stratification of poverty in Appalachia. *Journal of Appalachian Studies, 22*(2), 187-209.

Harris, R. (2016, November 11). "Hillbilly Elegy" A counterpoint. *WTVF-FM*. Retrieved July 19, 2017, from http://wvtf.org/post/hillbilly-elegy-counterpoint

Hollenbaugh, E. E., & Ferris, A. L. (2014). Facebook self-disclosure: Examining the role of traits, social cohesion, and motives. *Computers in Human Behavior, 30*, 50-58.

Honig, E. (2016, November 9). Outside of Columbus, Trump's victory is a ray of hope. *WOSU*. Retrieved July 13, 2017, from http://radio.wosu.org/post/outside-columbus-trumps-victory-ray-hope#stream/0

Isenberg, N. (2017). *White trash: The 400-year untold history of class in America*. New York, NY: Penguin.

James, R. D., & James, A. C. (2015). Regional income convergence in Appalachia: Exploring the factors of regional economic growth in a transitioning economy. *Southeastern Geographer, 55*(2), 164-192

Jones, S. (2016, November 17). J. D. Vance, the false prophet of blue America. *The New Republic*. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from https://newrepublic.com/article/138717/jd-vance-false-prophet-blue-america

Joseph, A. (2016, September 09). This town is at the epicenter of America's heroin epidemic. *The Week*. Retrieved July 13, 2017, from http://theweek.com/articles/647362/town-epicenter-americas-heroin-epidemic

Katz, M. L., Young, G. S., Reiter, P. L., Pennell, M. L., Plascak, J. J., Zimmermann, B. J., & Paskett, E. D. (2017). Process evaluation of cancer prevention media campaigns in Appalachian Ohio. *Health Promotion Practice, 18*(2), 201-210.

Keyes, K. M., Cerdá, M., Brady, J. E., Havens, J. R., & Galea, S. (2014). Understanding the rural-urban differences in nonmedical prescription opioid use and abuse in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health, 104*(2), e52-e59.

Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Kuttner, R. (2016, October 3). Hidden injuries. *The American Prospect.* Retrieved July 20, 2017, from http://prospect.org/article/hidden-injuries-0

Lilly, J., & Todd, R. (2016, September 9). Inside Appalachia: Modern day coal miner. *West Virginia Public Broadcasting.* Retrieved July 25, 2017, from http://wvpublic.org/post/inside-appalachia-modern-day-coal-miner#stream/0

Lobao, L., Zhou, M., Partridge, M., & Betz, M. (2016). Poverty, place, and coal employment across Appalachia and the United States in a new economic era. *Rural Sociology, 8*1(3), 343-386.

MacGillis, A., & ProPublica. (2016, September). The original underclass. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved July 12, 2017, from https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/09/the-original-underclass/492731/

McClurg, J. (2016, August 17). Best-selling 'Hillbilly Elegy' helps explain Trump's appeal. *USA Today.* Retrieved July 19, 2017, from https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/books/2016/08/17/jd-vance-hillbilly-elegy-donald-trump-usa-today-best-selling-books-book-buzz/88862854/

McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2) doi: 10.1086/26799

Miles, S. (2016, September 9). Author J.D. Vance does have hillbilly cred - like it or not. *Lexington Herald-Leader*. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from http://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article100925787.html

Miller, A. (2016, August 27). Down in the valley, up on the ridge; an American mystery. *The Economist (US)*. Retrieved July 11, 2017, from https://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21705639-appalachian-people-offers-timely-parable-nuanced-history-race

Monnat, S. M. (2016). Deaths of despair and support for Trump in the 2016 presidential election. Retrieved July 11, 2017, from http://aese.psu.edu/directory/smm67/Election16.pdf

Moshref-Danesh, L. (2016, July 12). In J. D. Vance's 'Hillbilly Elegy,' The America we've written off is the very one we need to understand. *Huffington Post.* Retrieved July 19, 2017, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/in-jd-vances-hillbilly-elegy-the-america-weve_us_5783e554e4b0f06648f57d62

Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). *The content analysis guidebook*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Noden, K. (2016, December 02). Why do white working-class people vote against their
        interests? They don't. *The Nation.* Retrieved July 20, 2017, from
        https://www.thenation.com/article/why-do-white-working-class-people-vote-against-
        their-interests-they-dont/

Obermiller, P. J., & Maloney, M. E. (2016). The uses and misuses of Appalachian culture.
        Journal of Appalachian Studies, 22(1), 103-11

Reese, S. D. (2010). Journalism and globalization. *Sociology Compass, 4*(6), 344-353.

Riehman, K. S., Fisher-Borne, M., Martinez, J. M., Daven, M., Thompson, L., Fouad, M. N., &
        Partridge, E. E. (2017). A Community Health Advisor program to reduce cancer
        screening disparities in the deep south and Appalachia. *Health Promotion Practice*,
        152483991769671. doi:10.1177/1524839917696712

Rothman, J. (2016, September 12). The lives of poor white people. *New Yorker.* Retrieved July
        19, 2017, from http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-lives-of-poor-
        white-people

Rowland, K. (2016, July 17). Closed plants shake central Ohio city. *Toledo Blade.* Retrieved July
        20, 2017, from http://www.toledoblade.com/Politics/2016/07/18/Closed-plants-shake-
        central-Ohio-city-Coshocton.html

Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication, 49*(1),
        103-122.

Senior, J. (2016, August 10). Review: In 'Hillbilly Elegy,' a tough love analysis of the poor who
        back Trump. *New York Times.* Retrieved July 19, 2017, from
        https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/11/books/review-in-hillbilly-elegy-a-compassionate-
        analysis-of-the-poor-who-love-trump.html

Smathers, M. (2016, September 10). 'Hillbilly Elegy' raises concerns of stereotypes. *Knoxville
        News Sentinel.* Retrieved July 19, 2017, from
        http://archive.knoxnews.com/opinion/columnists/hillbilly-elegy-raises-concerns-of-
        stereotypes-3bed45e2-3e3f-2ca8-e053-0100007f51a3-392927271.html/

Smith, B. E., & Fisher, S. (2016). Reinventing the region: Defining, theorizing, organizing Appalachia. *Journal of Appalachian Studies, 22*(1), 76-79.

Steensen, S. (2011). Online journalism and the promises of new technology. *Journalism Studies, 12*(3), 311-327. doi:10.1080/1461670x.2010.501151

Sugrue, T. J. (2016, June 24). A look at America's long and troubled history of white poverty. *New York Times.* Retrieved July 11, 2017, from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/26/books/review/white-trash-by-nancy-isenberg.html

Summers, J. (2016, September 20). Why America's white working class feels left behind. *CNN*. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/20/politics/election-2016-white-working-class-donald-trump-kaiser-family-foundation/index.html

Takens, J., Van Atteveldt, W., van Hoof, A., & Kleinnijenhuis, J. (2013). Media logic in election campaign coverage. *European Journal of Communication, 28*(3), 277-293.

Tedeschi, B. (2016, June 22). In Appalachia, cancer rates are stubbornly high. One woman's quest to find out why. *PBS Newshour.* Retrieved July 13, 2017, from http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/how-one-woman-is-battling-appalachias-stubbornly-high-cancer-rates/

Tilton, S. (2016). Steve Jobs is dead: iReport and the ethos of citizen journalism. In Davisson, A., & Booth, P. (Eds.). (2016). *Controversies in Digital Ethics.* New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Tilton, S. (2008). Virtual polling data: A social network analysis on a student government election. *Webology, 5*(4).

Todd, R. (2016, June 10). Want to eat local in Appalachia? Here's a map that can help. *West Virginia Public Broadcasting.* Retrieved July 13, 2017, from http://wvpublic.org/post/want-eat-local-appalachia-heres-map-can-help#stream/0

van Dijk, J.A.G.M. (2005). *The deepening divide: Inequality in the information society*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage.

Vance, J. D. (2016). *Hillbilly elegy.* New York: William Collins.

Young, S. T. (2017). Wild, wonderful, white criminality: Images of "white trash" Appalachia. *Critical Criminology, 25*(1), 103-117.