(DIS)EMPOWERING AGENTS OF CHANGE: A STUDY OF
THE ATHENS MESSENGER’S REPORTING ON COAL MINING PRACTICES AND
THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1990S

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ABSTRACT

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At the national level, the modern environmental movement and the environmental justice movement sparked increasing public awareness of threats to the environment and encouraged environmental policy changes from the 1960s to the 1990s. This study analyzes the Appalachian newspaper the Athens Messenger to identify the ways in which at the local level the paper’s reporting reflected the movements’ environmental concerns, in particular concerns regarding coal mining practices in rural communities, during these decades. Given the amount of national attention paid to environmental concerns from the 1960s to the 1990s, it would be reasonable to expect to find shifts in attitudes and policies reflected in the Athens Messenger’s reporting, as well as to find the newspaper’s rhetoric
encouraging its readers to act as political agents for environmental change. The findings of this thesis indicate otherwise. Analysis of the *Athens Messenger*’s reporting from the 1960s to the 1990s shows that despite the increasing awareness on a national level regarding environmental concerns, reporting in this regional newspaper on coal mining practices and related issues during these decades did not reflect the broader change in environmental awareness. Even more, analysis of the rhetorical strategies employed in the reporting indicates that the paper articulated readers to be less inclined toward taking political action on behalf of environmental concerns regarding coal mining practices.
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INTRODUCTION

Brief History of the Modern Environmental Movement

The modern environmental movement in the United States began in the 1960s with the creation and passing of the “first major wave of national environmental legislation” (Walls 3). Sparked by the publishing of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), a book that roused public concerns about the effects of pesticides on the environment, and by events such as an oil spill in California’s Santa Barbara Channel (1969), one of the worst oil spills in US history (Corwin), the modern environmental movement called for increased awareness of the ways in which the nation’s production and consumption practices and customs affected the environment. The movement encouraged the “sustainable management of resources ... through changes in public policy and individual behavior” (“Environmental Movement”).

In April 1970, the environmental movement garnered national media attention by holding the first Earth Day, established by Senator Gaylord Nelson (“Earth Day”). An estimated 20 million Americans participated in Earth Day, which included grassroots teach-ins and demonstrations that protested the unregulated pollution of air and water by US factories (“Earth Day”). By December 1970, President Nixon and the US Congress responded to the nation’s growing environmental consciousness by creating the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA was instituted to “repair the damage
already done to the environment and to establish guidelines to help Americans in making a cleaner—and safer—environment a reality” (“Earth Day”).

The EPA was not the only environmental organization to emerge from the modern environmental movement. During the 1970s, many Americans obtained more education and earned higher incomes than they had in earlier decades. Americans’ relative economic stability provided them the opportunity to be involved in more outdoor leisure activities, which “helped produce a shift in social values favoring protection of natural areas” (Walls 2). This shift encouraged Americans to join one of the increasing number of national grassroots environmental organizations such as the Natural Resources Defense Council (1970), Greenpeace (1971), and Friends of the Earth (1969-1971). These organizations focused on many issues related to cleaner air, water, and land. Beginning in the 1970s, “ozone depletion, global climate change, acid rain, nuclear power and weaponry, …[and] the harmful potential and threats to biodiversity presented by genetically modified organisms (GMOs)” became the foci of individual environmental organizations and of the environmental movement as a whole (“Environmental Movement”). As the movement continued to raise awareness of these various environmental issues, the federal government enacted numerous policies, including the Clean Air Act (1970, 1972), Water Pollution Act (1970, 1972), Pesticides Act (1972), and Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (1977), to lessen environmental degradation.

Of particular interest to this study is the Athens Messenger’s reporting on policies, issues, and concerns regarding coal mining’s impact on the environment, specifically on the environment of the Appalachian coal mining community. As the US became
increasingly devoted to restoring the environment to its natural state, concerns about the
effects coal mining practices had on the environment also gained attention. According to
Stephen F. Greb et al.’s *Coal and the Environment*, the public had three over-arching
concerns regarding coal mining practices: coal mining’s physical impact on the
landscape, including land stability and surface runoff; water quality and protection; and
conditions within coal mines, including mine fires and miners’ health and safety (18).
Greb et al. explain that “public realization of the environmental consequences of
unregulated mining led to enactment of modern surface mining laws in 1977” (4),
specifically the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act,² a subsection of the Clean
Air Act.

Just as the environmental movement was gathering momentum, much of its
progress in encouraging policy reform was stalled by the 1981 inauguration of President
Ronald Reagan, who had little interest in environmental policy. *Environmental Politics
and Policy* author Walter A. Rosenbaum states,

The Environmental Decade, as the 1970s were styled, created the legal,
political, and institutional foundations of the nation’s environmental
policies. It promoted an enduring public consciousness of environmental
degradation and fashioned a broad public agreement on the need for
governmental restoration and protection of environmental quality that has
become part of the American public policy consensus. All this changed
with the advent of the Reagan administration …The Reagan years severely
tested the foundations of the environmental movement. (11-12)
During Reagan’s presidency, the federal government made little effort to develop policies that would protect the environment. In “Conservation Reconsidered: Environmental Politics, Rhetoric, and the Reagan Revolution,” political scientist David Vogel states, “The most significant legacy of the Reagan years ... may be the complete absence of any fresh regulatory initiatives” (qtd. in Short 136). This legacy continued long after Reagan left office: “Although Reagan left the presidency in 1989, his vision was embraced by ... the 1990s, and it [found] adherents among many in George W. Bush’s administration” (Short 150). Reagan’s and Bush’s “policy” of doing nothing on behalf of preserving and safeguarding the environment continued until President Bill Clinton took office in 1993. Soon after Clinton took office, he began mandating that federal organizations examine environmental conditions across the US, particularly in areas with underprivileged communities.3

Although few environmentally related public policies were enacted during the 1980s and the early 1990s, a renewed energy to enact change developed among environmental organizations during these years (136). This energy helped solidify and bring to the forefront a more narrowly focused faction of the modern environmental movement: the environmental justice movement.

Development of the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM)

Beginning in the early 1980s, attention within the modern environmental movement began to turn toward combating racial and socioeconomic environmental injustices. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, “people who live, work and play in America’s most polluted environments are commonly people of color and the poor” (Skelton and Miller). Furthermore, these people often have little power to change
their environments: *Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy* author Kristin Shrader-Frechette asserts that “minorities (e.g., African Americans, *Appalachians* [emphasis added], Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and Native Americans) who are disadvantaged in terms of education, income, and occupation not only bear a disproportionate share of environmental risk and death but also have less power to protect themselves” (6). Championed primarily by these minority groups, the environmental justice movement (EJM) devoted its efforts to drawing attention to the nation’s environmental racism and “to equaliz[ing] the burdens of pollution, noxious development, and resource depletion” in underprivileged areas (6).

In Appalachia, coal mining practices caused many environmental burdens, especially pollution and resource depletion. As mining practices became more detrimental to the environment and to the community throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, Appalachians faced worsening living conditions. According to Robert Bullard, director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University, the EJM was not concerned with only “people of color;” it was “just as much concerned with inequities in Appalachia, for example, where the whites are basically dumped on because of lack of economic and political clout and lack of having a voice to say ‘no’” (“Environmental Justice/Environmental Racism”). In the 1990s, many grassroots environmental organizations began to incorporate EJM initiatives into their agendas. New environmental organizations were created during this decade as well, many of which were developed specifically with Appalachian coal mining concerns in mind; for example, Rural Action (1991) encouraged laws “protecting water resources from the effects of longwall mining and protecting those whose land was being affected by surface
mining” (“Our History”). The organization even testified before Congress regarding the implementation of such laws (“Our History”).

The activism of Rural Action and similar organizations, such as Appalachian Voices (1997), suggests that the EJM’s impact on national environmental policies was especially pertinent to the Appalachian community; more specifically, laws and policies enacted by the federal government to regulate coal mining practices nationally had the potential to impact coal mining practices locally within the Appalachian coal mining community.

The impact of the EJM at the national level raises questions about other more subtle forms of the movement’s impact—namely, the movement’s influence on human consciousness and discourse. The EJM, with its focus on environmental concerns of under-represented groups, invites an inquiry into the ways in which the movement impacted local discourse, in particular the discourse that the under-represented members of the Appalachian community used to navigate environmental issues that arose from longstanding coal mining practices throughout the region. This study focuses on the reporting of the *Athens Messenger*, a regional newspaper that serves the Appalachian coal mining community.

**Brief History of Coal Mining in Appalachia**

Since the 1800s, Appalachia relied on coal mining to survive economically, and the US as a nation depended upon it to “power the American industrial revolution starting in the early 1800s, making Ohio and surrounding states the industrial heartland of the United States by the end of the 19th century” (US Forest Service). The majority of coal mining during the 1800s took place in underground coal mines located “along the rivers,
since they furnished the only easy means of transportation” (Murphy and Spittal 625).

Since then, though coal mining in Appalachia has continued to thrive\(^5\), the mining practices have changed. During the 20\(^{th}\) century, the coal mining industry developed new mining practices that allowed for various coal extraction and transportation methods. While underground coal mining continued frequently throughout the first half of the century, surface mining eventually became the more popular method of coal extraction throughout Appalachia. By the 1960s, strip mining was the preferred method, but by the 1970s, mountaintop removal surpassed strip mining as the most popular method of extraction for many mining companies. According to Greb et al., these coal mining methods had a significant negative impact on the environment, causing coal fires, acid mine drainage into waterways, and loss of whole ecosystems.

When the histories of the modern environmental movement and EJM and the history of coal mining in Appalachia are juxtaposed, a tension becomes visible between them. Just as the environmental movement and EJM were making strides to increase awareness about the fate of the Earth, the coal mining industry was becoming more aggressive and destructive in its mining practices. Because the national level the environmental movement and EJM spawned local environmental organizations such as Rural Action, Appalachian Voices, and chapters of the Sierra Club, these movements address concerns of the Appalachian community affected by the coal mining industry. This study considers whether the movements’ influence on political and personal discourse at the national level also influenced discourse at the local level, in particular the ways that the Appalachian coal mining community talked about coal mining practices through the regional newspaper the *Athens Messenger*. Specifically, this study looks at
whether the discourse of these movements shaped news reporting in a region populated by an under-represented group – namely, the Appalachian coal mining community. Given the public awareness and policy changes particularly during the 1960s to the 1970s, it is reasonable to expect that news reporting at the local level would reflect these changes in environmental attitude and policy. Testing this expectation, this study examines news reporting in the *Athens Messenger*, which has been printed and circulated in an area of heavy mining in rural southeast Ohio from the 1960s to the 1990s.
METHOD

Aim of Study

The aim of this study is to test the expectation that the discourse of the modern environmental movement and the environmental justice movement (EJM) at the national level had an impact on the discourse of the regional newspaper the *Athens Messenger* at the local level from the 1960s to the 1990s. In particular, this study inquires into whether the *Athens Messenger*’s reporting reflected the movements’ discourse and how the paper’s reporting impacted its readers. The best way to achieve this aim is to take a close look at what was actually published in the *Athens Messenger* during these years. More specifically, this study conducts a content analysis on a sample of the paper’s reporting from the 1960s to the 1990s. Then, using Michel Foucault’s theory of discourse, this study seeks to characterize the discourse of the *Athens Messenger* and, in particular, to describe the readers as they were shaped by the discourse.

Foucault asserts that human consciousness is shaped by the discourses that circulate and that these discourses help human beings make sense of the world in particular ways. These discourses are historically situated and pervasive, and they change over time. Furthermore, Foucault asserts that discourses are bigger than the human beings who speak them; through his notion of discursive formation, Foucault argues that discourses are made up not only by the institutions in which and through
which they are spoken, but they are made up also by influences beyond the institutions. When human beings take up these discourses, they inhabit subject positions, or what Foucault calls “I-slots”\textsuperscript{7} within a given discourse, that either enable or disable the exercise of power in certain ways. Therefore, discourses make it possible for human beings to act politically in some ways and not in others.

This study borrows Foucault’s notion of subject positions and seeks to characterize the subject positions articulated by the \textit{Athens Messenger}, e.g. as coal miners, coal miners’ families, coal mining community members, etc., from the 1960s to the 1990s. It also explores how these subject positions, made available to the Appalachian coal mining community, enabled or disabled (or empowered or disempowered) them to act as political subjects with regard to coal mining practices and their human and environmental and consequences.

The \textit{Athens Messenger} seems an appropriate object of study for this research project. The \textit{Athens Messenger} was established in Athens, Ohio, in 1848 and has been publishing a daily newspaper since 1904 (“About”). The paper circulates among several rural counties in Ohio\textsuperscript{8} and is read throughout Appalachia. What makes the \textit{Athens Messenger} a particularly good choice for this study is its location and circulation: The paper is influenced not only by its rural Appalachian community but also by Ohio University (located in Athens, Ohio), a public university that has often worked to improve environmental conditions throughout Appalachia by encouraging policy changes.\textsuperscript{9} Therefore, the \textit{Athens Messenger}’s reporting would seem to be in a position to reflect environmental concerns at least of the local level and possibly of the national level as well.
Research Methods

I began this study by creating a list of search terms, which included among others “coal,” “coal mines,” “mine explosions,” “coal mining disasters,” “environmental impact,” “environmental degradation,” and “environmental concerns.” Using a combination of these terms, I searched the *Newspaper Archive* database, which I accessed through Ohio University’s Alden Library website. I ran the various search term combinations in five-year increments, starting with 1960 to 1965 and moving chronologically up to 1976; I then organized all search results by ascending date. Next, I scanned through the results and eliminated legal and public notices and appointments. This narrowed my results from more than 1,200 articles to an average of 150 to 175 articles per each five-year increment. I skimmed through these results, looking for articles that directly addressed the concerns about which this study is interested: reporting on environmental concerns related to coal mining practices and reporting on coal mining practices related to coal mining disasters. From the results, I selected 12 articles from the 1960s and 15 articles from 1970 to 1976 that directly address these concerns.

Because the *Athens Messenger*’s online archives end in 1976, I traveled to Athens, Ohio, to complete the second half of my research at Alden Library, which houses the *Athens Messenger* archives from 1976 to the present on microfilm. I focused this part of my research by searching for articles surrounding several major mining disasters from 1976 to 1995: Grundy Mining Co.’s No. 21 mine explosion (December 8, 1981), Pyro Mining Co.’s William Station mine explosion (September 9, 1989), and Southmountain Coal Co.’s No. 3 mine explosion (December 7, 1992). Using the same criteria as before -- that is, looking for articles that reported on environmental concerns related to coal mining
practices and that reported on coal mining practices related to coal mining disasters – I selected 18 articles from the 1980s and five articles from 1990 to 1995. In total, I collected a sample of 50 articles from 1960 to 1995 for analysis.

Once I obtained my sample, I read each article. My aim was to rhetorically analyze each article by looking for patterns in the Athens Messenger’s reporting on coal mining-related issues. I was particularly interested in the newspaper’s reporting on coal mining in terms of its environmental effects, its reporting before and immediately following a mining disaster, the language used to talk about coal mining practices, and the language used to talk about the environmental impact coal mining had on the Appalachian community. After reading the articles in the sample, I considered the rhetorical impact of the discourse throughout the 1960s to the 1990s. Next, I identified topics related to environmental concerns and non-environmental topics that offset these concerns so that I was better able to see how the paper’s rhetorical impact changed over time. Finally, I noted the size and placement of the 50 articles in the newspaper.
RESULTS

What follows is a description of the sample of the *Athens Messenger*’s reporting on environmental concerns related to coal mining practices and reporting on coal mining practices related to coal mining disasters from the 1960s to the 1990s. Aspects of the reporting such as placement and length of articles, topics that reflect environmental concerns, topics that reflect concerns other than environmental, and language used to report environmental and other concerns are described for each decade so that changes in them and patterns in the reporting can be seen over time. Again, the purpose of this study is to test the expectation that the discourse of the modern environmental movement and the environmental justice movement (EJM) had an impact on the discourse of the *Athens Messenger* from the 1960s to the 1990s and to inquire into how the paper’s reporting impacted its readers.

**Placement and Length of Articles and Photographs that Address Environmental Concerns**

This study identified articles that address environmental concerns by the types of topics the articles reported. Topics included reporting on the impact of coal mining practices on the environment, reporting on the Appalachian community’s reactions to this impact, and reporting on policies that would regulate coal mining’s effects on the environment. These topics are discussed in length in later in this study.
**Reporting throughout the 1960s**

Of the sample, four articles address environmental concerns in the 1960s. Three of these articles appeared on the front page; one article measured 9 column inches out of an available 77 column inches (about 12 percent of the space), and the other two articles each measured 3 column inches out of an available 77 column inches (each about 4 percent of the space). The fourth article was printed on page 8 and measured 24 column inches out of an available 88 column inches (about 27 percent of the space). In total, 39 out of 319 total column inches (about 12 percent of the total column inches) of the sample address environmental concerns. Altogether, 8 percent of the sample included articles that address environmental concerns during the 1960s. Only one photo related to environmental concerns appeared in the sample during the this decade; it was printed on the front page and measured 3 column inches out of an available 77 column inches (about 4 percent of the space).

**Reporting throughout the 1970s**

During the 1970s, the *Athens Messenger* published four articles in the sample that address environmental concerns. Only one article from the 1970s appeared on the front page. This article measured 2.5 column inches out of an available 77 column inches (about 3 percent of the space). Two other articles appeared on page 4 and page C-6 and measured 8 column inches out of an available 88 column inches (about 9 percent of the space) and 16 column inches out of an available 88 column inches (about 18 percent of the space) respectively. The fourth article appeared on page D-1 and measured 9 column inches out of an available 77 column inches (about 12 percent of the space). In total, 35.5
out of 330 total column inches (about 11 percent of the total column inches) of the sample address environmental concerns. Altogether, 8 percent of the sample included articles that address environmental concerns during the 1970s. No photos related to environmental concerns appeared in the sample during the 1970s.

*Reporting throughout the 1980s*

During the 1980s, six articles in the sample address environmental concerns. No articles appeared on the front page. Four articles appeared within the paper’s front matter: One article appeared on page 7 and measured 2.5 column inches out of an available 55 column inches (about 4.5 percent of the space), another article appeared on page 8 and measured 4 column inches out of an available 55 column inches (about 7 percent of the space), and the third and fourth articles appeared on page 18, each measuring 8 column inches out of an available 55 column inches (each about 14.5 percent of the space). Two other articles appeared in the sample: One article appeared on page A-1 and measured 6 column inches out of an available 55 column inches (about 11 percent of the space), and the other article appeared on page D-6 and measured 8 column inches out of an available 77 column inches (about 10 percent of the space). In total, 36.5 out of 352 total column inches (about 10 percent of the total column inches) of the sample address environmental concerns. Altogether, 12 percent of the sample included articles that address environmental concerns during the 1980s. No photos related to environmental concerns appeared in the sample during the 1980s.

*Reporting throughout the 1990s*

During the 1990s, only one article in the sample addresses environmental concerns. This article appeared on page 4 and measured 4 column inches out of an
available 55 column inches (about 7 percent of the space). Altogether, 2 percent of the sample included articles that address environmental concerns during the 1990s. No photos related to environmental concerns appeared in the sample during the 1990s.

Summary of Placement and Length of Articles and Photographs that Address Environmental Concerns

From the sample of 50 articles, only 15 articles explicitly address environmental concerns related to coal mining; in other words, 30 percent of the sample addresses environmental concerns directly. Of the articles that address environmental concerns in the sample, the number of articles printed during the 1960s and the 1970s remained the same at four articles in each decade (about 27 percent each). During the 1980s, the number articles that address environmental concerns in the sample increased to six articles (40 percent). Despite the increase in environmentally related articles in the 1980s, the Athens Messenger printed the fewest number of articles that address environmental concerns in the sample during the 1990s; only one article was printed (about 7 percent). Over time, the number of articles published remained the same during the 1960s and 1970s, increased in the 1980s, and decreased significantly in the 1990s.

Throughout the 1960s to the 1990s, four articles (about 27 percent) that address environmental concerns in the sample were printed on the front page. These front-page articles appeared in only the 1960s and the 1970s but mostly in the mid-1960s. It was also during the 1960s that the only photograph related to environmental concerns in the sample appeared. During the 1980s and the 1990s, most articles that address environmental concerns in the sample were printed in the back matter, though four articles (27 percent) were printed between pages 2 and 18. Therefore, the Athens
Messenger’s reporting on environmental concerns related to coal mining was placed on the most prominent page (the front page) during the 1960s to the 1970s; by the 1980s to the 1990s, reporting on these concerns had been relegated mostly to the paper’s back matter, sections A through D.

In total, 1,056 column inches in the sample were devoted to articles that reported on environmental concerns during the 1960s to the 1990s. Of these articles that address environment concerns, 319 column inches (about 30 percent) were printed during the 1960s; 330 column inches (about 31 percent) were printed during the 1970s; 352 column inches (about 33 percent) were printed during the 1980s; and 55 column inches (about 5 percent) were printed during the 1990s. So, though the Athens Messenger printed a greater number of articles in the 1980s (six articles, or 12 percent of the sample), the amount of space devoted to these articles did not increase from the amount of space devoted during the 1960s and the 1970s. During the 1990s, the paper printed the fewest number of articles (one article, or 2 percent of the sample) and devoted the least amount of space to reporting on environmental concerns.

Although the number of column inches remains comparable throughout the 1960s to the 1980s, other factors, such as the placement of articles in mostly front matter to the placement of articles in mostly back matter and the printing of fewer environmentally related articles, show a change in the Athens Messenger’s reporting on coal mining issues. When the articles in the sample are analyzed not only in terms of column inches, placement, and accompanying photographs but also in terms of their content, a real shift in reporting is revealed; this shift in reporting consisted of articles that addressed non-environmentally related coal mining concerns.
Topics that Reflect Environmental Concerns

Reporting throughout the 1960s

The most prevalent environmental concern reflected in reporting in the 1960s was the negative effects strip mining had on land and water. Several government officials talked about the importance of implementing policies at the national level that would regulate strip mining and begin to restore the damaged land. In a July 11, 1966 article printed from the Washington AP, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall called for a “$250-million basic reclamation effort to repair strip-mined areas in the 12 state region of Appalachia … [because of] the detrimental effect of past coal mining.” Support for Udall’s call to action was reported in another AP article, published on August 8, 1966, in which Sen. Frank J. Lausche, D-Ohio said, “The federal government can no longer close its eyes to a ‘spreading cancerous situation’ – damage to land from strip mining.” The following year, on October 11, 1967, the Athens Messenger printed the last in a series of articles concerning coal mining in Appalachia. The article, “Two Problems Always Have Plagued Strip Mining in Meigs,” described the toll strip mining took on the environment in Meigs County: Streams were being “choked” and “polluted,” some of which would “remain polluted probably forever” because “sulphuric acid might accumulate [in stagnant water] and [cause] flash flooding [to] pour into the creeks and cause heavy fish kills.” The article also stated, however, that despite the severity of the damage, “stream pollution in Meigs County seems to be clearing up” due to reclamation efforts.

Reporting throughout the 1970s

Concerns about strip mining’s effects on the Appalachian environment continued into the early 1970s. On February 19, 1971, the Athens Messenger printed an article from
Another coal mining-related environmental issue reported during this decade was coal fires. The *Athens Messenger* reported on March 1, 1970 that many fires were ignited within coal piles from abandoned mines and have been burning for years. On June 14, 1970, the *Athens Messenger* reported that in New Straitsville, Ohio, “for a generation a number of fires have been feeding on the once vast coal formations” in the area. Additional reporting described the degradation of air and land due to coal fires in Corning, Ohio, which had produced “objectionable” smoke and fumes for several years, causing some residents to relocate.

*Reporting throughout the 1980s*

The most widely reported environmental concern throughout the 1980s was reclamation of coal mining sites. Reclamation efforts reignited concerns about strip mining from the 1960s and the 1970s as coal mine operators attempted to return to old mine sites to reclaim the land in an effort to restore the damaged land to a more natural state. In an article printed from the West Virginia AP and published on December 13, 1981, the *Athens Messenger* reported that Interior Secretary James Watt said, “The Reagan Administration plans to give coal operators more leeway in reclaiming strip-mined land.” By the end of the decade, an article published on September 14, 1989 from the Washington AP reported that the federal government’s policy requiring coal producers to pay a reclamation tax would help offset costs to repair some of the damage.
caused by mining practices: “Lawmakers from eastern coal states argued that the nation as a whole benefited [from Appalachian] coal and should pay to erase the damage left behind.” The article also reported that Rep. Nick Rahall, D-W.Va., stated, “Just as we have declared a war on drugs, so must we protect coalfield citizens from the health, safety and environmental hazards they face on a daily basis.”

Reporting throughout the 1990s

During the 1990s, the Athens Messenger published only one article that reflected environmental concerns. Indeed, all that appeared was a letter to the editor on December 23, 1992 that challenged reclamation efforts in Ohio, claiming that “hundreds and hundreds of acres have been stripped and never reclaimed.” According to the letter, because of the lack of reclamation efforts “every stream throughout the area runs blood red with mine acid.”

Summary of Topics that Reflect Environmental Concerns

The Athens Messenger’s reporting from the 1960s to the 1990s reveals that the most prevalent environmental concern regarding coal mining practices addresses the damage that years of coal mining caused Appalachian land and water. Reporting on the damage due to strip mining began in the mid-1960s and continued into the 1970s. Although some articles during these decades reported that environmental degradation was lessening, articles published in the 1980s indicated otherwise. In the reporting on coal mining reclamation efforts in the 1980s, the Athens Messenger indicated that lawmakers made a push for policies at a national level that would regulate strip mining practices and their damage to the land; the reporting in the late 1980s and in a letter to the editor in
early the 1990s reflected concerns that these policies were not yet fully implemented and that environmental degradation continued throughout many mining areas.

The topics that reflected environmental concerns in the Athens Messenger’s reporting from the 1960s to the 1990s did not change throughout these decades. Environmental degradation due to strip mining was reported in each decade. What did change throughout the 1960s to the 1990s was how the reporting covered this issue. From the 1960s to the 1970s, the paper reported on the negative effects of strip mining, but from the 1980s to the 1990s, the paper reported on the need for policy changes that would regulate strip mining practices and would encourage reclamation.

Topics that Reflect Concerns Other Than Environmental

While the analysis of articles that reflect and directly address environmental concerns is a crucial aspect of this study, analysis of articles that reflect concerns other than environmental is also critical in providing a thorough analysis of the Athens Messenger’s reporting from the 1960s to the 1990s. Throughout these decades, reporting on coal mining practices addresses additional concerns such as coal mining accidents, coal mining strikes and layoffs, and coal miners’ health and safety. Sometimes, though, reporting on these other concerns includes connections to environmental concerns. The reporting on concerns other than environmental also articulates readers into various subject positions that either empower or disempower them to act as political subjects on behalf of the environment. What follows is a description of sample of the Athens Messenger’s reporting from the 1960s to the 1990s. Aspects such as miners, mines and mining, mining accidents, mining safety, mining companies, and mining protests, strikes,
and layoffs are described for each decade so that changes in them and patterns in the reporting can be seen over time.

Reporting throughout the 1960s

Miners

In the 1960s, the way in which the *Athens Messenger* reported on miners described miners in the idiom of the “bread and butter” of the Appalachian community. As reported on February 2, 1969, Meigs County, Ohio, residents “believe some of their financial problems will be solved” by miners’ doing their jobs and providing coal for the local community and nation as a whole. Reporting also indicated that in spite of the dangers miners faced doing their jobs, miners risk their lives to keep their community afloat economically.

Mines and Mining

Reporting in this decade indicated that coal mining was economically beneficial; however, reporting also showed mining as a dangerous and deadly occupation, though one that must continue to exist so Appalachians could survive financially. After a mine explosion in Farmington, W.Va., the *Athens Messenger* printed a West Virginia AP article on November 22, 1968 that reported that the wives of the miners involved in the mining accident weighed the dangers of the occupation with its necessity: “The women cry today, and tomorrow other men will go back in the mountain somewhere and someday their women, too, will wait.”

Mining Accidents

Mining accidents throughout the 1960s were often reported in detail. For example, the Farmington, W.Va., explosion in Mountaineer Coal Co.’s No. 9 mine was
described in the AP article as “a relatively strong blast” that sent “flames shooting upward like a flash of lightning” and “blew from the portal a steel plate almost one-half inch thick.” The Athens Messenger also reported information regarding miners trapped because of accidents, though not in as much detail. The causes of the accidents were not reported.

**Mining Safety**

In light of its reporting on mining accidents, the Athens Messenger also reported issues related to mining safety during the 1960s. An article printed from the Washington AP on November 22, 1968 reported that Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall held a conference to “look into ways to prevent mine disasters such as the one which occurred in Farmington, W.Va.” The following year, on January 7, 1969, the Athens Messenger reported that Rep. Ken Hechler, D-W.Va. was “press[ing] for more stringent safety laws” because the US Coal Mine Safety Act, passed in 1953, was not a strict enough law to prevent coal mining-related accidents and deaths.

**Mining Companies**

While mining companies were named as owning sites of accidents occurring in the 1960s, companies were not reported as being at fault for these accidents. Reporting on mining companies typically focused on which companies planned to open new mines. On September 22, 1967, the Athens Messenger reported that the Mining and Metal Division of Union Carbide had announced that a new mining operation was under construction in Mason County, Ohio, which would “be the third largest underground coal mine in the world,” employing 400 people plans went accordingly. The article also stated that the new mine would be something “Mason County will be proud of.”


Mining Protests, Strikes, and Layoffs

In the 1960s, the Athens Messenger did not report on issues related to mining protests, mining strikes, or mining layoffs.

Reporting throughout the 1970s

Miners

In the 1970s, articles frequently portrayed miners as dedicated workers. By printing articles that reported on generations of miners who returned to the mines in spite of mining accidents, the Athens Messenger’s reporting represented miners as brave and determined workers who felt mining was in their family blood. A January 25, 1970 article reported that men often helped at mines when they were young because their fathers and older brothers also worked in the mines. Additionally, reporting described miners as valuable Appalachian citizens. For instance, in a June 30, 1975 article the Athens Messenger reported that Appalachian coal miners were “good, honest taxpaying citizens who work in the most hazardous occupation in this country,” as described by United Mine Workers of America President Arnold Miller.

Mines and Mining

According to the Athens Messenger’s reporting in the 1970s, the mines were what made mining such a hazardous occupation. In “Spend A Day With A West Virginia Coal Miner: Noise, Cold, Dirt, Darkness,” printed from the Washington Post on February 15, 1971, the paper described mines as a “hostile, alien environment, full of bizarre sights and unsettling sounds.” Mines were also described as dark, “cold,” and “labyrinthian” places that were difficult and dangerous to navigate. However, reporting showed that miners found working in the mines life affirming. For example, the 1971 Washington
Post article quoted miner John Ramsey saying, “I believe every man, every person in the world, wants to try to do something – well, I don’t know just how to say it – but to show he can live or something. I think that’s one thing that you want to prove to yourself that you can go down there [the mines] and live.” The reporting in the 1970s indicated that for the miners, mining became a way of life they were not inclined to abandon, despite its dangers.

**Mining Accidents**

Reporting on coal mining accidents in the 1970s reflected the volatile conditions miners experienced when working in the mines. The 1971 “Spend A Day With A West Virginia Coal Miner” article stated, “The smallest error of man or machine can result in disaster.” Some articles in the 1970s claimed accidents occurred in mines that had numerous health and safety violations. Other articles provided information about mine explosions and the number of lives lost because of these explosions.

**Mining Safety**

Articles reflecting concerns about mining safety issues in the 1970s tended to discuss safety as having improved but not enough. On February 9, 1970, the Athens Messenger printed a Washington Post article that quoted Director of the US Bureau of Mines John F. O’Leary speaking about the need for greater mining safety measures: “At a minimum, modern technology should stop people from being damaged and killed. But that hasn’t happened yet.” A year later, in the “Spend A Day With A West Virginia Coal Miner” article, the paper reported a similar sentiment, stating that “despite all the advances in technology and new safety precautions and standards, mining remains dangerous work.” Five years later, as reported in an article printed June 30, 1975, United
Mine Workers of America President Arnold Miller urged miners to continue to fight for better mining conditions and health benefits even though some improvements had been made. Reporting in this decade also indicated that some mining companies were resistant to new laws that improved the health and safety of miners because adhering to these laws could shut down mining production temporarily at some sites.

**Mining Companies**

Throughout the 1970s, the *Athens Messenger* rarely reported on mining companies. Though mining accidents were reported, typically only the mines involved in the accidents were mentioned, not the individuals and companies that owned them. In only one instance, a mining company was named for its involvement in a mine explosion. On January 27, 1971, the *Athens Messenger* published a Washington AP article, which reported that Hyden, Ky., mine owners Charles and Stanley Finley could face mine safety violations and criminal charges for the Finley Coal Co. mine explosion on December 30, 1970 that killed 38 men.

**Mining Protests, Strikes, and Layoffs**

Reporting in the 1970s described mining protests of strip mining regulations and described mining strikes due to insufficient mining safety measures. On April 9, 1975, the *Athens Messenger* printed a Washington AP article that reported on a 30-mile long truck convoy through Washington, DC, led by Appalachian coal miners “to protest the strip mining legislation before Congress.” Quoting Virginia coal miner Hermell Pennigton, the article reported that the reason for the protest was “that the legislation they’ve got in Congress is going to put us all [the coal miners] out of work.” In its reporting on coal mining strikes, the *Athens Messenger* printed an Ohio AP article on
March 5, 1970 that stated the strikes in eastern Ohio and West Virginia were due to “hazardous conditions caused by violations of safety regulations.”

*Reporting throughout the 1980s*

**Miners**

The *Athens Messenger* limited reporting on miners during the 1980s to death or deathlike references. In articles reporting on mining accidents, miners were referred to as bodies. Some articles talked about miners only in terms of a body count or a death toll; for example, on December 9, 1981, the paper printed a Tennessee AP article that stated, “Volunteers … removed the bodies of 13 coal miners killed by an explosion” in a Whitwell, Tennessee, mine. In articles reporting on mine strikes, miners were also referred to in terms of death. For example, the paper reported on the Southern Ohio Coal Co.’s Meigs Mines 1989 layoffs as an unfortunate event that “lost some good men.” Furthermore, reporting compared informing miners of layoffs to “telling the next of kin about a death.”

**Mines and Mining**

In the 1980s, mining was simultaneously reported as being a safer occupation than it was in the past and yet still “one of the nation’s most dangerous occupations,” according to the article “Mining Still Dangerous” printed on December 9, 1981. Although the article stated, “Great strides have been made for safety,” the *Athens Messenger* published more articles related to coal mining explosions, cave-ins, and deaths in the 1980s than in any other decade from the 1960s to the 1990s.
Mining Accidents

Reporting on coal mining accidents in the 1980s indicated ambivalence about the nature of these accidents. In the December 13, 1981 West Virginia AP article “Sudden Death: Disaster No Stranger in Appalachia Coal Fields,” United Mine Workers President Sam Church stated, “We wonder what we can do about [accidents]… We work to train our people, we do everything we can to keep these kinds of things from happening, and yet it seems they happen anyway.” However, in an earlier article printed from the Kentucky AP on December 10, 1981, reporting quoted Church as stating, “There was evidence of unsafe practice by the miners,” though he claimed miners were not to blame “because it’s management’s job to see [that an accident] doesn’t happen.” Additional reporting in this decade claimed, “Many residents of the largely rural region shrug and say simply that it’s God’s will” that mining accidents occur. During this decade, then, mining accidents were attributed to a variety of causes: miners’ unsafe practices, mining companies’ negligence, and acts of God.

Mining Safety

Throughout the 1980s, the number of articles reporting on mining safety concerns increased, especially toward the end of the decade. Although, as early as 1981, the Athens Messenger reported from Washington that Sen. Edward Kennedy asked the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee “to launch a probe of mine safety” because the number of mining-related fatalities had “raised the possibility that effective enforcement of the Mine Safety and Health Act had been severely hampered.” That same year, the paper also reported that the Reagan administration “was considering reduction in the budget of the Mine Safety and Health Administration.”
Mining Companies

In reporting on mining companies during this decade, many companies were identified as owners of mines in which explosions or cave-ins occurred. The *Athens Messenger* reported that the US Mine Safety and Health Administration previously had cited several of these companies, such as Pyro Mining Co., for mine accidents, though the owner of Pyro Mining Co. was not identified in the article. The majority of companies, however, were not identified as being cited for mining accidents. Additionally, reporting on mining companies indicated that many companies were slow to provide their miners with the latest rescue devices, “known as self-contained self-rescuers;” according to a December 13, 1981 West Virginia AP article, “only 3 percent of the nation’s underground coal miners have access” to these up-to-date devices.

Mining Protests, Strikes, and Layoffs

Articles reporting on mining strikes and layoffs tended to appear mostly toward the end of the 1980s. According to an *Athens Messenger* article printed on September 20, 1989, several environmental groups in southeast Ohio supported miners in a strike against Virginia-based Pittston Coal Co. because of its negligent mining practices. Although miners often went on strike because of “financial losses and job risks,” the environmental groups were focused on making “environmental improvements in the mining processes” because “coal companies in southeastern Ohio have not taken steps to lower subsidence and water loss damages” caused by coal mining practices. Two days later, on September 22, 1989, the *Athens Messenger* reported that “Southern Ohio Coal Co.’s Meigs Division has laid off 182 employees” due to a merger. On September 24, 1989, the paper described the layoff announcement as “a dark day,” one that is “like
telling the next of kin about a death,” according to an American Electric Power Co. spokeswoman.

Reporting throughout the 1990s

Miners

Throughout the 1990s, the Athens Messenger talked about miners as helpless victims of mining-related accidents. When mine explosions occurred, miners were typically referred to only in terms of dead bodies. For example, the Virginia AP article on December 10, 1992 stated that “searchers found the bodies of seven men killed in a coal mine explosion” in Norton, Va. Reporting also occasionally spoke of miners in terms of their families grieving because of their untimely deaths.

Mines and Mining

Reporting in the early 1990s described mines as small and narrow traps that could easily be filled with noxious gases at any time. The Athens Messenger printed AP articles that also described mines as prone to human error. For instance, the 1992 Norton, Va., mine explosion was reported as caused by the foreman’s failure to test for methane in the mine.

Mining Accidents

During the 1990s, mining accidents were typically explained in terms of what happened to miners during a mining accident. In the reporting on the 1992 Norton, Va., mine accident, the Virginia AP article described miners as being trapped in “smoke, heat and a dangerous amount of methane gas” before succumbing to death. Reporting indicated that such accidents often caught miners off guard and that many miners “died at their work stations” when the explosion occurred.
Mining Safety

The *Athens Messenger* published little reporting on mining safety in the 1990s. When safety issues were reported, they were mentioned in relation to keeping rescuers safe during mining rescues. The Virginia AP article published on December 8, 1992 reported that the Norton, Va., mine rescue efforts were stopped twice because of hazardous safety conditions for the rescuers.

Mining Companies

During the 1990s, articles identified mining companies as owners of mines that were sites of accidents, but the companies were not cited for the mining accidents. Reporting also reflected tension building between union mining companies and nonunion mining companies. For example, on December 22, 1992 the *Athens Messenger* printed a Pittsburgh AP article that stated, “The [unionized coal mine] operators are looking for ways to be more competitive with the growing nonunion segment of the industry, while the union has said it is seeking security provisions that will slow the rush to non-union production.”

Mining Protests, Strikes, and Layoffs

In the 1990s, the *Athens Messenger* did not report on mining protests, strikes, or layoffs directly; however, the paper published a Pittsburgh AP article on December 22, 1992 that discussed the negotiations made by four Appalachian coal mining companies. These negotiations were about miners’ wages and benefits, including retiree benefits guaranteed by the Coal Industry Retiree Health Benefits Act passed by Congress earlier that year.


Summary of Topics that Reflect Concerns Other Than Environmental

Throughout the 1960s to the 1990s, reporting on several concerns other than environmental did not change. Reporting on mines and mining remained consistent as mines and mining were described as dangerous and deadly during each decade; articles from the 1960s to the 1990s reported on the death toll of miners who had been trapped in mines when the mines either caved-in or exploded. Likewise, reporting on mining companies changed very little throughout the decades considered in this study. Although articles spoke of miners who were killed in mining accidents, these articles rarely reported on companies as being at fault for the accidents and deaths. Reporting throughout the 1960s to the 1990s regularly mentioned individuals and mining companies as the owners of sites of mining accidents, but the Athens Messenger seldom published articles that discussed mining companies in any other capacity.

Some reporting on concerns other than environmental, however, did change throughout the 1960s to the 1990s. The biggest change in reporting can be seen in the ways in which the Athens Messenger described coal miners. During the 1960s and the 1970s, miners were reported as being brave and dedicated workers. Starting in the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, reporting shifted to describe miners as the casualties of mining accidents. This shift in reporting was due in large part to the paper no longer describing miners as active men; instead, miners became passive bodies that had to be removed from mines. Reporting on mining accidents also shifted, though not as markedly. During the 1960s, reporting on coal mining accidents focused on the miners’ families and their reactions to the accidents. From the 1970s to the 1990s, reporting
focused less on the miners’ families and more on what was happening within the mines during and after cave-ins, explosions, and other accidents.

Additionally, the amount of reporting on some mining concerns other than environmental during the 1960s to the 1990s changed throughout these decades. Despite the increasing number of articles reporting on mining accidents from the 1960s to the 1980s, the amount of reporting on mining safety did not increase during these decades, especially during the 1980s; in fact, by the 1990s, the reporting on mining safety decreased dramatically.

The reporting that did increase throughout the 1960s to the 1990s was reporting on mining protests, strikes, and layoffs. While there was no reporting on these issues during the 1960s, reporting on these issues steadily increased from the 1970s to the 1990s. Although this increase in reporting on mining protests, strikes, and layoffs had the potential to reflect the objectives of the modern environmental movement and EJM, in these decades, the reporting tended not to reflect these objectives. Although reporting on one strike during the 1980s stated that the strike was supported by environmentalists, on the whole, instead of reporting on protests and strikes due to environmental concerns, the Athens Messenger’s reported on protests and strikes due to financial reasons and job losses. Additionally, the paper reported on mining layoffs that were also due to economic concerns rather than environmental concerns. The reporting indicated that layoffs were an extremely painful experience for miners and their families. In fact, some reporting on layoffs compared telling a miner about a layoff to telling families about a mining-related death.
Language Used to Report Environmental Concerns and to Report Concerns Other Than Environmental

So far, this study has considered the space and placement of articles and the content of the reporting of the Athens Messenger from the 1960s to the 1990s. Another important consideration is the language used in the reporting. Analysis at the sentence level provides insights into the specific language choices the paper made in reporting on environmental concerns and other coal mining-related concerns. What follows is a description of the sample of the Athens Messenger’s reporting from the 1960s to the 1990s. Linguistic choices including subject, verb, and voice are described for each decade so that changes in them and patterns in the reporting can be seen over time.

Environmental Concerns

Reporting throughout the 1960s

The subjects and verbs used throughout the reporting of the 1960s rarely addressed explicit environmental concerns regarding coal mining practices. Most verbs spoke more broadly about environmental concerns; for example, problems “plague” strip mining and companies should “repair” environmental damage. Other verbs projected concerns into the future. For example, lawmakers “will look” into ways of solving environmental degradation and action “should be taken” to stop damage to the environment. The Athens Messenger’s reporting used passive voice to discuss the environmental impact coal mining had on Appalachian land and water. For instance, degradation “was caused” by a variety of mining practices. In other words, the use of passive voice de-emphasized who was causing the damage to the environment.
Reporting throughout the 1970s

In the reporting during the 1970s, most verbs reflected how laws and policies were received and implemented throughout the coal mining community. These verbs typically included vague linking verbs, such as laws “are being” introduced and some laws “are being” resisted by coal companies. The use of linking verbs often created passive sentences in the reporting on environmental concerns during this decade. Again, who was causing environmental degradation was de-emphasized by this phrasing.

Reporting throughout the 1980s

The majority of the verbs used throughout the 1980s were action verbs that described how lawmakers were reacting to and working toward improving coal mining’s relationship with the environment. Lawmakers “examined” strip mining sites, “argued” for stricter laws for coal companies, and “worked” for environmental improvements. Other verbs showed the prescribed action lawmakers should take to help the environment; for example, the government “should permit” strip mining bans and officials “should protect” citizens from the environmental hazards caused by coal mining. Throughout the 1980s, most of the reporting used active voice to discuss lawmakers’ plans to lessen the environmental damage caused by coal mining; in this decade, lawmakers were reported as actively seeking ways to improve coal mining practices. Importantly, lawmakers were rarely reported as actually implementing any policies to protect the environment.

Reporting throughout the 1990s

Because the 1990s had such little reporting on environmental concerns, there were few subjects and verbs used to discuss these concerns. The headline of a letter to the
editor stated, “Instead of honor, coal company deserves shame” (emphasis added), and within the letter other action verbs were used to describe the environmental effects of coal mining, such as a stream that “runs” blood red because of acid mine drainage. In this letter, the writer used active voice to argue that more action needs to be taken to improve the areas of the environment that have been damaged by coal mining practices.

Concerns Other Than Environmental

Reporting throughout the 1960s

During the 1960s, subjects and verbs used in reporting other coal mining-related concerns tended to refer to mining accidents or to how miners’ families were coping with loss in the wake of accidents. Mining accidents were described as explosions that “blew” from within the mines and as flames “shooting” upward from the mines. Mining families were described as people who “refuse” to give up hope, as people who “reassure” one another that their loved ones will survive, and as people who “express” their sympathies regarding the accidents by helping other mining families in any way they can. In this decade, reporting employed the active voice to talk about mines and how these mines acted during accidents as well as to talk about the reactions of miners’ families after mining accidents.

Reporting throughout the 1970s

In reporting during the 1970s, subjects were often the mines themselves, and verbs indicated the mines were the agents that caused mining catastrophes; for example, an explosion “killed” 38 miners and a cave-in “buried” miners, while other mining accidents “trapped” miners in the mines. Other verbs used in this decade referred to the miners’ actions during protests and strikes. Coal miners “protest” strip mining bans and
“claim” new legislation would cause an unfair loss of jobs. Additionally, in light of a potential strike, United Mine Workers of America President Arnold Miller “urged” miners to seek more benefits for themselves. Active voice was used most frequently to describe the mines during and after accidents in the reporting throughout the 1970s. Active voice also was employed when discussing the actions miners planned to take during protests and strikes.

**Reporting throughout the 1980s**

In the 1980s, subjects and verbs used in reporting almost exclusively explained the rescue efforts of volunteers after mining accidents. In this decade, rescue volunteers would “maintain” contact with trapped miners and “dig” in the mines to try to reach these trapped men. Volunteers also “removed” bodies or “brought” the bodies of coal miners out of mines. When discussing the mines during and after accidents, reporting relied on active voice. However, when relaying information about the conditions of miners involved in these accidents, the reporting used passive voice; for example, the bodies of miners “were found” by volunteers.

**Reporting throughout the 1990s**

Throughout the 1990s, the *Athens Messenger*’s reporting used action verbs to refer to the steps taken by rescue volunteers to save trapped miners and the steps taken by trapped miners to save themselves. Reporting stated that rescuers “drill” a ventilation hole for trapped men and “get” to those men as soon as possible. Verbs used in reporting that referred to miners’ actions were similar to the following: A miner “crawled” to safety after a mine explosion. In the 1990s, the reporting employed active voice to refer not only
to the actions of volunteer rescuers but also to the actions of trapped miners during and after a mining accident.

*Summary of Language Used to Report Environmental Concerns and to Report Concerns Other Than Environmental*

The subjects and verbs used in reporting on environmental concerns changed throughout the 1960s to the 1990s. During the 1960s, verb choices tended to be weak linking verbs, and these verbs were used to describe the environmental impact coal mining had on Appalachian land and water. However, during the 1980s reporting used strong action verbs to describe lawmakers’ actions as they encouraged environmental policy development.

The voice used in reporting on environmental concerns throughout the 1960s to the 1990s also changed, shifting from mostly passive voice to mostly active voice. The reporting of the 1960s and the 1970s relied heavily on passive voice to refer to environmental concerns regarding coal mining practices, while the reporting of the 1980s and the 1990s employed active voice. During the 1980s to the 1990s, active voice was used primarily to discuss mining protests, strikes, and layoffs, though these were events that rarely related to environmental concerns in any explicit way. Instead of describing coal miners as being active *inside* the mines, where their practices (underground coal mining, strip mining, etc.) caused the most environmental degradation, the *Athens Messenger*’s reporting described miners as being active *outside* the mines, where their practices (strikes and protests due to economic reasons) had the least impact on the environment.
On the other hand, the subjects and verbs used in reporting on concerns other than environmental did not change much throughout the 1960s to the 1990s. The majority of subjects and verbs used in reporting throughout these decades were strong action verbs, which described the ways mines behaved during mine explosions, as well as the ways in which volunteer rescuers took action during and after these mining accidents.

Although there were a few minor shifts, the use of voice in reporting on concerns other than environmental throughout the 1960s to the 1990s also changed very little. Reporting during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1990s employed active voice to discuss what happened to coal miners trapped during mining accidents. The reporting during the 1980s, however, used passive voice to talk about the conditions of miners trapped in mines due to coal mining accidents. Furthermore, the *Athens Messenger* employed the active voice to discuss miners’ plans for protests and strikes. Again, these protests and strikes were related to concerns primarily about job loss rather than environmental degradation.

Over the course of the 1960s to the 1990s, the language used to report on environmental concerns shifted from weak linking verbs to strong action verbs and from passive voice to active voice. On the whole, the language used to report on concerns other than environmental did not shift; throughout these decades the reporting employed strong action verbs and used active voice. As the decades progressed from the 1960s to the 1990s, the subjects used in reporting environmental and other coal-mining related concerns created disembodied subjects, especially in the reporting on the miners. By the 1980s, miners were no longer described as active workers but were instead described as passive bodies, which did not put them in a position to take political action on behalf of
mining safety or the environment. Furthermore, the reporting on mining accidents throughout the 1960s to the 1990s used the mines as the subjects of the articles; likewise, this type of reporting created disembodied subjects and distanced the miners and, more importantly, the readers, from actively taking any sort of political action on behalf of environmental concerns.
CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed a sample of 50 articles published in the *Athens Messenger* from the 1960s to the 1990s. Of this sample, only 15 articles (or 30 percent) explicitly addressed environmental concerns. Only four of these articles appeared on the front page, the paper’s most prominent page. The majority of these articles reported on strip mining’s negative effects on the environment. This environmental concern was especially prevalent in reporting during the 1960s and the 1970s. By the 1980s, concerns of reclaiming mine sites had become more common in the *Athens Messenger*’s reporting, and one letter to the editor in the 1990s claimed that reclamation efforts had failed to lessen the environmental degradation caused by Appalachian coal mining practices.

Throughout the 1960s to the 1990s, reporting on other coal mining-related concerns offset reporting on environmental concerns. Articles printed in the *Athens Messenger* also focused on miners, mines and mining, mining accidents, mining safety, mining companies, and mining protests, strikes, and layoffs. During the 1960s and the 1970s, coal miners were described as dedicated workers who provided economically for the Appalachian community; by the 1980s and the 1990s, however, miners were
described as bodies that needed to be removed from mines after mining accidents. With the conditions during and after mining accidents discussed consistently throughout the decades as dark and volatile, reporting on mining safety reflected concerns about the lack of enforcement of mining regulations. The reporting rarely identified mining companies as responsible for these accidents. In addition, concerns regarding mining protests, strikes, and layoffs were reported in terms of their economic effects on the Appalachian community. The Athens Messenger published hardly any reporting on mining protests due to mining practices’ negative effects on the environment.

Given the increased public awareness of environmental threats and environmental policy changes at the national level during the 1960s to the 1990s, it was reasonable to expect that the majority of reporting on coal mining throughout the 1960s to the 1990s would reflect environmental concerns regarding coal mining practices. Because the modern environmental movement and EJM were growing and gaining support at the national level during these decades, it was also reasonable to expect that these movements would affect reporting at the local level. However, this study shows that although the Athens Messenger did report on environmental concerns, it reported on these concerns in ways that did not encourage readers to take political action on behalf of the environment. Furthermore, these concerns were often overshadowed by other concerns such as mining accidents and mining safety.

Throughout the 1960s to the 1990s, reporting on environmental concerns about coal mining practices competed with reporting on mining accidents and mining safety issues. Interestingly, the decade in which the most reporting on environmental concerns occurred was the 1980s. Although at the national level the Reagan Administration was
unsympathetic of the concerns of the environmental movement and EJM, at the local level the reporting reflected concerns about the need to make mining practices safer for the environment. Although this type of reporting suggests that at the local level, the government and the *Athens Messenger* reflected the movements’ mission to improve environmental conditions, the reporting did not indicate that the local government actually took political action on behalf of the environment. Therefore, the *Athens Messenger*’s reporting did not particularly empower its readers to take political action on behalf of the environment either, as those who did hold the power to enact change (the local government) were not taking strides to do so. In other words, those in power were too inactive and too far removed from the readers to encourage the readers to act as agents of environmental change on their own.

Had environmental concerns been the main focus of the *Athens Messenger*’s coverage of coal mining practices throughout the 1960s to the 1990s, readers may have been poised to take political action on the environment’s behalf. Instead, the newspaper focused on the need to make mining practice safer for coal miners, which drew readers’ attention away from environmental concerns. In places where reporting was expected to reflect concerns about underground coal fires, acid mine drainage, forest destruction from strip mining, and land damage due to mountaintop removal, these concerns were overshadowed by reporting on concerns about mine explosions and miners’ health and safety.

By the mid-1990s, reporting on coal mining had almost completely shifted away from discussing environmental concerns to discussing these other non-environmental coal mining concerns. Not only did this shift allow reporting on coal mining accidents to
take precedence over reporting on environmental concerns, but it also challenged the importance of the environmental movement and EJM’s actions to undo the damage brought about by such practices as coal mining. Although the movements helped to enact numerous policy changes at the national level that would affect how coal mining interacted with the environment, the *Athens Messenger* reported very little on how these changes would be implemented at the local level. This lack of reporting on these concerns certainly did not reflect the changes in policies and attitudes regarding environmental issues at the national level.

Furthermore, the language of the *Athens Messenger* suggests that the environmental movement and EJM had little impact on the reporting on coal mining practices in the Appalachian community. Throughout the 1960s to the 1990s, the paper used relatively weak and vague verbs to discuss environmental concerns as well as passive voice to describe the effects coal mining had on the environment. The paper’s linguistic choices indicate that damage to the environment was not severe enough to warrant the community’s immediate attention; the use of passive voice in particular implies that environmental degradation simply occurs, rather than happens as a result of actions taken or not taken by the coal mining industry. In other words, the *Athens Messenger*’s rhetoric indicates that environmental concerns did not encourage community members to take any immediate action to rectify coal mining’s negative impact on the environment.

Bringing Foucault’s insights into this study reveals that there is not a grand narrative at work here; the modern environmental movement and EJM’s progress toward creating environmental policies and the movements’ rhetoric at the national level is not
reflected at the local level. So, although the movements’ environmental discourses are historically situated and are made up by external influences, such government officials and activists speaking out on behalf of under-privileged communities, during the 30-year span of this study, the movements appeared to have little impact on the reporting at the local level, in particular the reporting in the Appalachian coal mining community newspaper the *Athens Messenger*.

Not surprisingly, then, the *Athens Messenger*’s reporting did not encourage its readers to take political action on behalf of environmental concerns. Borrowing Foucault’s notion of subject positions, this study identified the subject positions the paper articulated -- coal miners, coal miners’ families, and coal mining community members. These subject positions were articulated in various ways that shaped how the readers were to relate to and act toward coal mining practices and their effects on the environment. Over time, the readers were positioned as observers of forces much larger them themselves. By the end of the period of years this study analyzed, coal miners had been constructed as bodies, coal miners’ families as mourners, and coal mining community members as recipients of the economic fruits coal mining provided. This study shows that throughout the 1960s to the 1990s, these subject positions became increasingly disempowering for readers to act as political agents for environmental change.

The relationships between the subject positions of coal miners and coal mining community members and between coal miners and coal miners’ families especially did not encourage readers to act as political subjects on behalf of the environment. Throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, coal miners were represented as brave,
life-affirming workers who were in control of their choices to be miners and their actions as miners. In this subject position, readers were able to view miners as actively engaged members of the Appalachian community. This view articulated readers into the subject position of coal mining community members. As coal mining community members, readers were prone to feel a connection with the coal miners. Coal miners were men devoted to their work. They provided not only for their families but also for their community by keeping the community as economically secure as possible. By creating a sense of dependence on coal miners, the articulation of the subject position of coal mining community members made readers less likely to speak out against the environmental degradation the miners were causing. Readers would not likely seek environmental policies that would alter the ways in which mining practices were carried out and that may negatively affect the livelihood of the miners -- and therefore the community itself.

The *Athens Messenger* re-articulated coal miners and coal miners’ families in the 1980s to the 1990s. During these decades, the subject position of coal miners shifted in focus from miners as active agents in coal mining practices to miners as passive victims of coal mining practices. From the 1980s to the 1990s, the miners were constructed as victims of coal mining accidents and were represented as dead bodies. This shift discouraged readers from taking political action on behalf of the environment because their attention was drawn to the health and safety of the miners, not to the protection of the environment. This shift in representation also changed how readers were articulated into another subject position, namely that of coal miners’ families. The subject position of coal miners’ families was disempowering for readers because it also focused readers’
attention away from environmental concerns as it encouraged readers to consider miners’ safety more than the environment. Readers would be emphatic to the unsettling aftermath of mining accidents. The readers’ empathy would make them unlikely to hold the miners, who were still trapped underground or just killed in mining accidents, responsible for the environmental degradation their mining practices caused. Empathetic to grieving coal miners’ families, readers would not be inclined to encourage policies to improve coal mining’s impact on the environment; instead, readers would be more inclined to encourage policies to improve coal miners’ health and safety.

This is not to say that encouraging health and safety regulations is an unimportant action to be encouraged by the Athens Messenger’s reporting throughout the 1960s to the 1990s; on the contrary, emphasis on miners’ safety is extremely valuable to the miners and to the community. However, by articulating readers into subject positions that created camaraderie and empathy with coal miners and encouraged concerns about their health and safety, the Athens Messenger’s reporting did not reflect the concerns of the modern environmental movement and EJM as was expected at the onset of this study. Overall, the reporting suggested a greater concern for the health of miners rather than a concern for the health of the environment, including the need to lessen the negative toll coal mining practices took on Appalachian air, land, and water. Furthermore, by frequently publishing articles about other non-environmental coal mining issues, the paper actually drew attention away from the movements’ intentions to improve environmental conditions throughout the US, particularly in areas of the nation that were populated by under-represented groups such as Appalachian coal mining community members.

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Although the paper’s Appalachian coal mining community would stand to benefit from the movements’ increase in environmental awareness and policy implementation at the national level throughout the 1960s to the 1990s, the *Athens Messenger*’s reporting during these years indicated that at the local level, readers were neither encouraged nor even enabled to become political agents of environmental change. While the paper’s articulation of the coal miners subject position had the potential to enable readers to act on behalf of the environment, it in fact encouraged readers to act on behalf of the very coal mining practices that damaged Appalachian air, land, and water. As coal miners, readers were given agency to protest and strike against mining practices; this agency, however, was used to speak out against mining health and safety issues, and more frequently, against financial distress and job losses. Taking political action on behalf of these issues was not only important but also necessary to improve the lives of miners throughout Appalachia. However, this political action would not likely benefit the environment, as coal miners and readers were enabled to use their agency, power, and voice to demand fair treatment for themselves rather than for the environment.

Despite an increasing awareness at the national level regarding environmental concerns from the 1960s to the 1990s, reporting on coal mining’s impact on the environment and other coal-mining related issues in the *Athens Messenger* during these decades did not reflect that broader change in awareness. Even more, rhetorical strategies employed in the reporting during these decades indicate that readers were not likely to be empowered and therefore not likely to take political action on behalf of environmental concerns regarding coal mining practices. On the contrary, readers were actually
disempowered to take political action on behalf of the environmental concerns that were affecting their coal mining community and their lives.

**Implications**

The importance of studies that examine rhetorical history at the local level is two-fold. First, analyzing discourse at the local level provides insights into the kind of language that a community has used to communicate its various political and socioeconomic concerns. Closely analyzing the ways in which a community discusses these concerns reveals changes and patterns in language that suggest how the community has adapted its discourse over time to better reflect the community’s needs. Second, analyzing rhetorical history at the local level reveals whether or to what extent a community’s discourse reflects the broader discussions of political and socioeconomic concerns occurring at the national level. Examining language at the local level for instances that reflect larger discourses provides a better understanding of why some political movements might not have (or are slow to have) an effect on certain regions and communities. This understanding is important so that adjustments to larger, national discourses can be made in order for these discourses to better serve smaller communities, particularly communities comprised of minorities and individuals who have little power and voice to protest their political and socioeconomic disadvantages.

With this study to work from, additional research could explore why the discourse of the modern environmental movement and the environmental justice movement did not have the impact on local reporting that was expected. One highly suggestive conclusion for the lack of impact on discourse at the local level is that the reporting of the *Athens Messenger* discouraged attention to environmental concerns. Because the paper’s
reporting focused on other coal mining-related concerns such as mining accidents and mining safety, the reporting diverted the community’s attention from the types of environmental concerns in which the movements were invested. However, further research would likely uncover additional factors such as possible political affiliations, economic interests, etc. Furthermore, additional research could explore in more depth the tensions in reporting on supporting changes to improve human health and economics and on supporting changes to improve the environment.
NOTES

1. Although originating in the 1960s, “the roots of the modern environmental movement can be traced to attempts in nineteenth-century Europe and North America to expose the costs of environmental negligence, notably disease, as well as widespread air and water pollution” (“Environmental Movement”).

2. Henry Caudill’s Night Comes to the Cumberlands (1963) describes “the devastation of eastern Kentucky by the coal industry as a human and an environmental catastrophe; the book helped spark not only a concern for regional poverty but also the long struggle leading to the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977” (“Environmental Movement”).

3. One year into his presidency, “President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 12898 in the Oval Office on February 11, 1994. The groundbreaking order directed federal agencies to identify and address disproportionately high adverse health or environmental effects of their policies or programs on low-income people and people of color” (Skelton and Miller).

4. The US Forest Service estimates that “more than 2 billion tons of coal has been produced from underground coal mines in Ohio since 1800.” Other Appalachian states show similar, if not higher, numbers.

5. Leading up to and throughout WWII, the Appalachian Bituminous Coal Region produced an estimated “two-thirds of the nation’s coal” (Murphy and Spittal 624).

6. The characteristics of Foucault’s insights are based on Barbara Biesecker’s discussion of Foucault in “Michel Foucault and the Question of Rhetoric.”

7. Foucault’s notion of “I-slots” comes from The Archaeology of Knowledge.

8. The Athens Messenger became a daily publication in 1904 with an estimated circulation of 10,000 to 12,000. Its circulation serves Athens County, Meigs County, Vinton County, Hocking County, Perry County, Morgan County, and Washington County (“About”), all in southeastern Ohio, though its readership extends throughout Appalachia.

9. Ohio University-affiliated organizations working to improve environmental conditions in Appalachia include the Institute for Local Government Administration and Rural Development (ILGARD) and the Consortium for Energy, Economics and the Environment (CE3) among others.

10. Column inches are measured by counting the number of columns an article occupies and multiplying that number by the number of inches the article occupies on a page. Column inches for an article are then compared to the total number of column inches of the entire page on which the article is printed.
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