



WORKING CLASS ACADEMICS CONFERENCE

July 14-15, 2020

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Views From the Summit



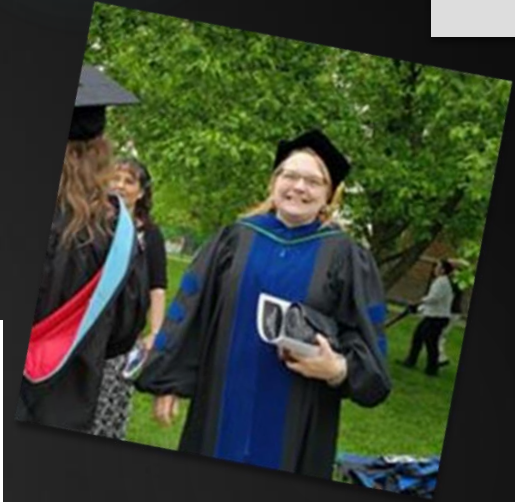
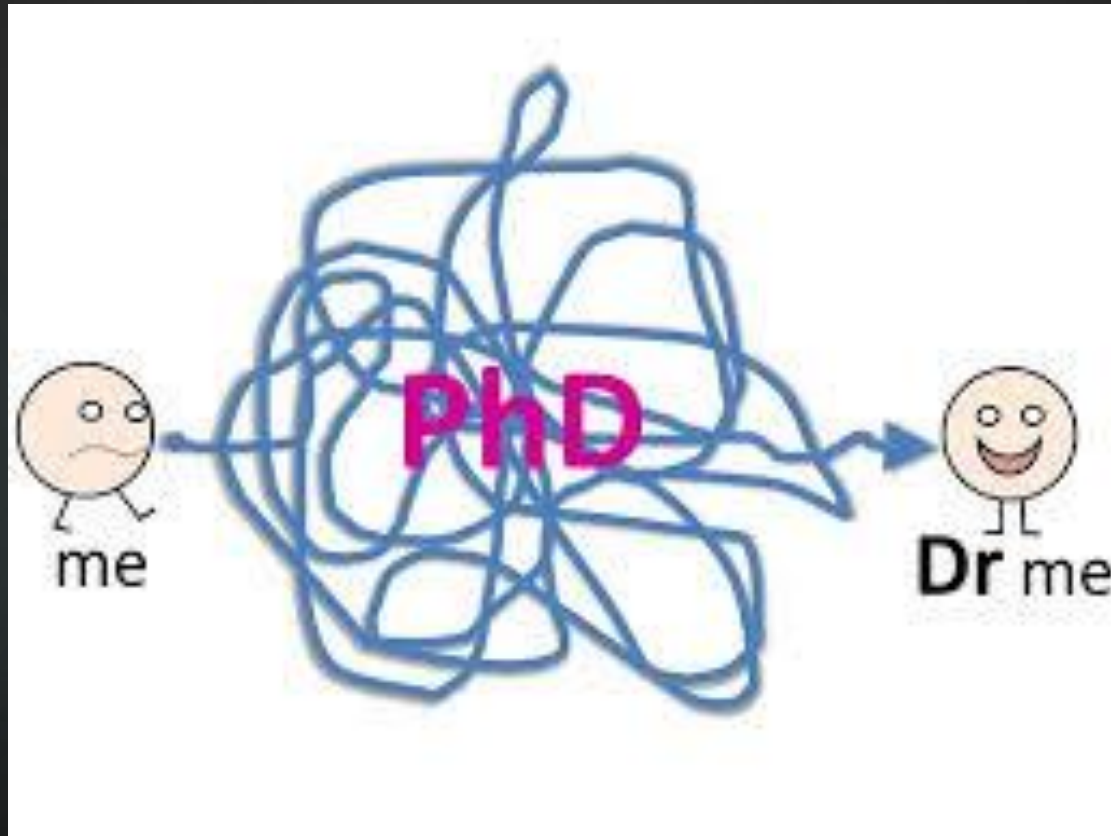
Photo credit : S Alexander

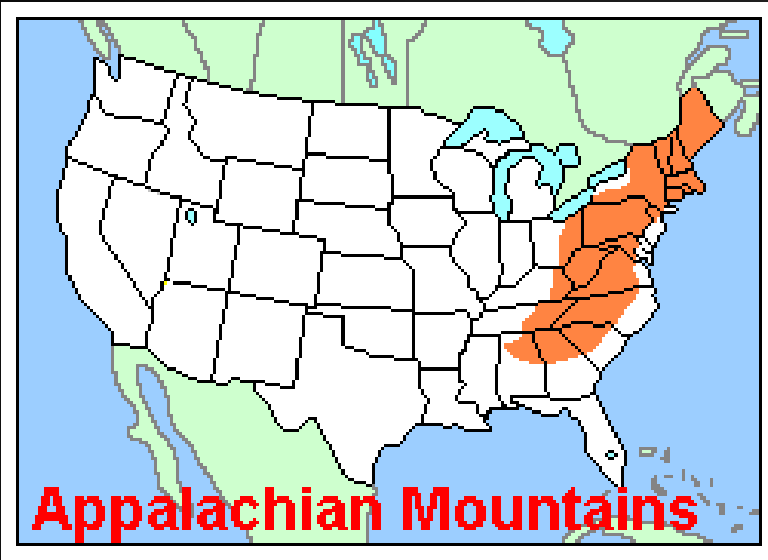
White
Working
Class

Appalachian
Males

And Their
Perceptions
of Academic
Success

This was a DISSERTATION STUDY





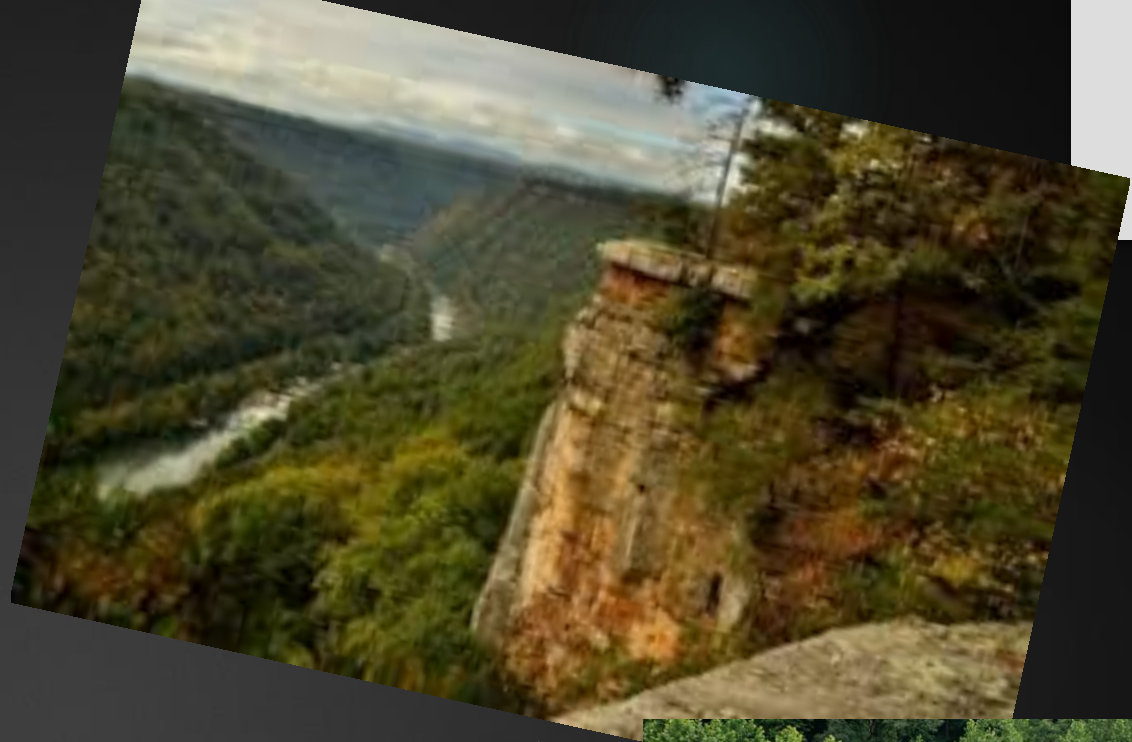
The Appalachian Region is home to more than 25 million people and covers 420 counties and almost 205,000 square miles. (involves 13 states)

Appalachian Regional Commission website



October 8, 2008

West Virginia



***Large concentration
of White poverty*

94.6 % White

~19 % poverty rate

33% associate
degree or higher



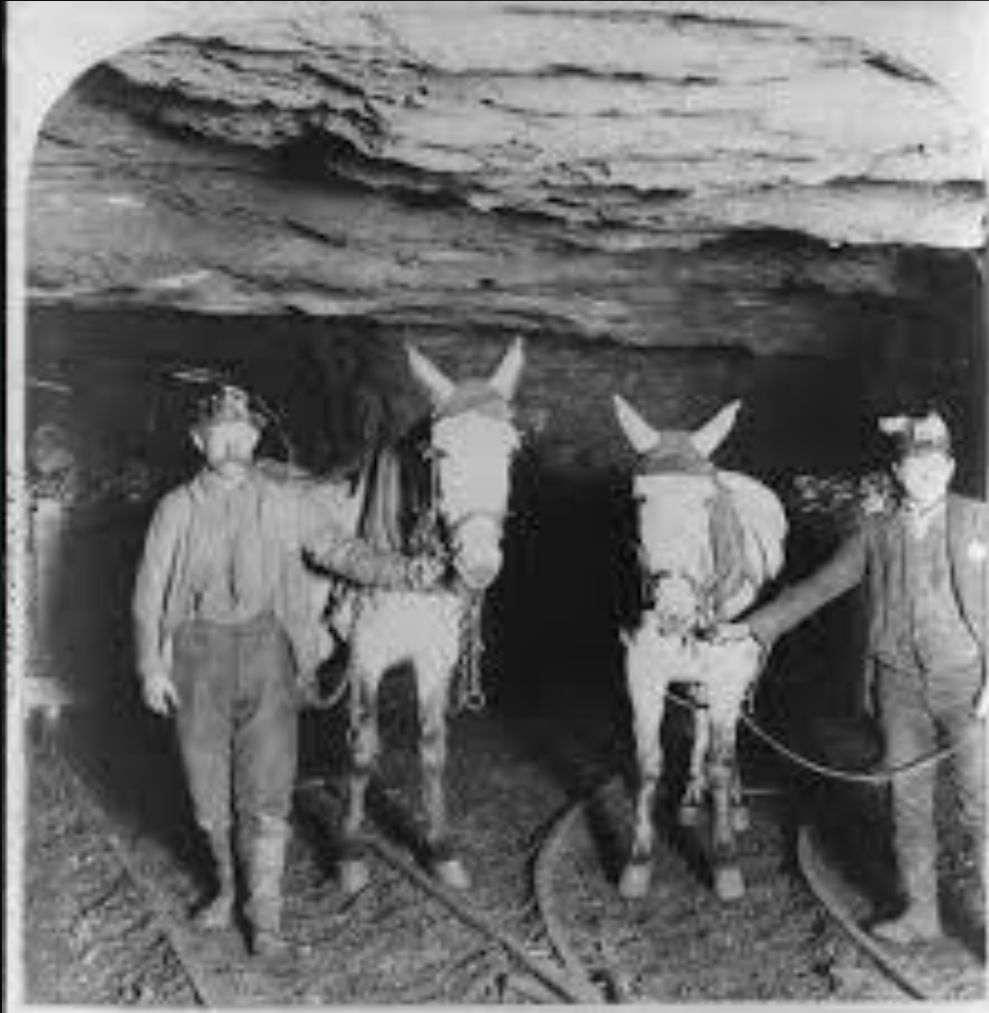
The Myth

A Few Traditional Stereotypes associated with West Virginia and/or White Appalachian Males



The Truth....

West Virginia = “COAL COUNTRY”



West Virginia INDUSTRY

- ▶ 1945 – 150,000 coal miners
- ▶ 1999- just over 17,000 coal miners
- ▶ 2012 – about 21,000 coal miners
- ▶ **2018 - 13,962 employed in coal industry**
- ▶ -----
- ▶ **From 1980s forward 1990s Clean Air Act**

..... ***Shift from Industry to Service Sector***



Return to School (older ones) or Off to College (younger ones)

College Graduation Rates

for 1 year certificate and
Two-year associate degree programs
at
WV Career Technical & Community Colleges
(%)

7-27%



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TRADITIONAL STUDIES

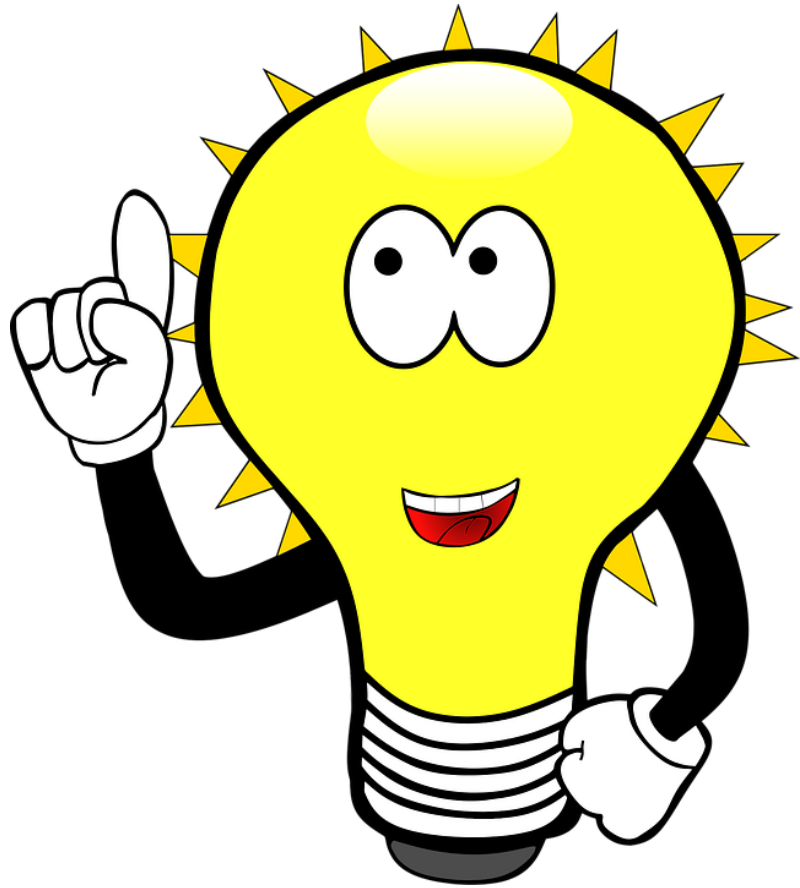
(undertaken to “help” the first generation, working class student)

- ▶ focused on FAILURE
- ▶ sought to identify only BARRIERS
- ▶ utilized DEFICIT IDEOLOGY (“something missing” “fixing’ the student)

**participants in these studies were mainly those who were unsuccessful*



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My Study ~ **A DIFFERENT APPROACH**

Use APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
Interview Participants who FINISHED
Identify SUPPORTS

and....

What if we asked how THEY defined
“academic success”

topics reviewed

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

(Theoretical Framework)

- ▶ Bourdieu – Cultural Capital
- ▶ Bernstein – Linguistic Codes

* Gramsci * Freire

Other Literature Examined

- ▶ Social Class in the US – Mobility
- ▶ Class Consciousness – Material Culture
- ▶ Social Stratification in US Educ
- ▶ Psychological Capital /Self Efficacy
- ▶ Working Class Identity Formation
- ▶ The Working Class & Education
- ▶ Whiteness – Boundary Theory/Otherness
- ▶ Appalachia – Cultural Traits
- ▶ West Virginia – Industry

Nature of the study/ Ideas being explored

- ▶ How education functions as a mechanism for social reproduction
- ▶ Access - Shift in higher education's attitude from "not welcome" to "y'all come" from about 1940s (post WWII/GI Bill) to 1970s (federal financial aid programs) to present practices (such as "open enrollment" institutions)
- ▶ Access - Problems that still existed : structural/systemic inequities
- ▶ Question: change/leave "roots" behind in order to succeed ??



Research Questions

- ▶ Definition of Success
- ▶ Perceptions of Past/Present Academic Success
- ▶ Aspects of Lives that Contributed *Positively* to their Academic Success



THE 8 MEN

Silas *

Mid 40s/family
AA Business

Ethan*

Late 30s/family
AA Criminal Justice

Dan*

Early 30s/family
AA pre-engineering

Paul

Early 40s/family
BS Public Admin

Ben

Early 30s/family
BA computer
forensics

Peter

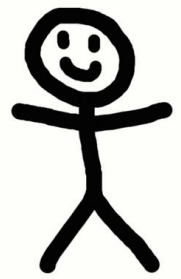
23/single
MEd

John

Mid 40s/family
MEd Higher Ed

David*

Mid 40s/family
MA



The Findings

DEFINITIONS

- ▶ Definitions of “success” were rooted in the ability to practically use of the skills obtained, doing one’s personal best, even if not recognized for it, and proficiency at completing what was required to obtain a credential reflected cultural capital associated most often associated with those of the working class: skills and abilities associated with the production of labor.

****value was placed on the practical application of skills**

- ▶ Importance of these perceptions:

- 1) illustrate historic tie between the working class and the production of labor
- 2) reflect the class distinction between the working and middle class with regard to valuing school knowledge

“practice is more important than theory” (Willis)

The Findings....cont'

PERCEPTIONS OF PAST AND PRESENT ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

Psychological Capital and Self-Efficacy - closely related to cultural capital, psychological capital extends beyond that of what one “is” to what it is one can “become”

Working Class in Transition- - with deindustrialization, “school” is only game it town; acceptable expectation in order for good employment

Devaluation of High School – high school vocational tracts historically where the working class was made in US system

The Findings ... cont'

CONTRIBUTORS TO THEIR SUCCESS

Job Security & Economics

Family Support

Self-Reliance

Military Service* (for those who served)


Others:

Love of Learning (transformative change)

Spousal Interdependence

New Expectations (evolution of working class thought)

Personal Values (many derived from Appalachian culture)



“I’m working on my master’s (degree) now, but I hope I don’t become one of those overeducated people who can’t do the job; I know a few of those.....”

Peter, age 23, who took great pride in being the first of his grandparents' 63 grandchildren to earn a college degree

Thank you!

► *West Virginia Wild Ramp*

