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Tiivistelmä/Referat – Abstract		
<p>Narrative Analysis is a method which enables individual, storied lives to be examined as study participants reveal themselves through personal recollections and insight. The social world in which these identities are situated is also revealed through the analysis process.</p> <p>In this study, the Narrative Approach is used to understand the values placed on ethnic identity building in relation to the Italian American community in Appalachia, as well as how these identities are performed in a social context. Appalachia is a distinct region running along the Appalachian Mountain chain from Northern Georgia to Southern New York, encompassing over 200,000 square miles. Typically understood as a homogenous, insular community, the significant influence of the Italian American community in the region tests these assertions. This study hopes to discover how Italian American ethnic and Appalachian Regional identities here intersect, overlap, and diverge.</p>		
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Ital-Iachians: Narrative Identity of Italian Americans in the Appalachian Region

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Lisa Chiapputo

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Introduction: An Italian Appalachian or an Appalachian Italian?

Growing up as a third generation Italian-American in the southern Appalachian region of the United States, I often felt a very conscious level of pride revolving around my dual heritage, though I was never quite sure where the roots of that pride resided or why I felt so strongly connected to a pair of cultures I was, in actuality, very far removed from. Each of these identities felt so distinct from one another, built upon by centuries of cultural traditions, histories, and dialectical origins stemming from completely opposite sides of Europe. But here, within me, these identities intersected and played out, and the struggle to understand them and my place in society was one of which I was viscerally aware on a daily basis.

Despite the fact that the Appalachian region is anecdotally thought of as a homogenous, white Anglo-Saxon and extremely Protestant area, the mountainous region which spans down much of the Eastern territory of the United States from New York to Georgia is settled by a complex hybrid of peoples with a diverse variety of histories, experiences, and realities which I will discuss later in the paper. For me, the reality that I grew up with in Northeastern Tennessee was one of conflict and just as difficult to define as the people who settled the land. My father was from a family who lived in the southern Appalachian region for centuries, part of the ubiquitous Scots-Irish clans who heavily populated the area and maintained a strong skepticism of outsiders. Their roots went deep in this region. I grew up close to an area called Wallen's Ridge in Kyle's Ford, Tennessee – land that still bears the name of my paternal 4th great grandfather who settled in an area gifted to him for his service during the American Revolution and where his ancestors continue to live to this day. We had family reunions every year back in the “holler”, a local geographic feature which carves a sharp valley through the mountains nearby and helps to ensure the maintenance of the sometimes insular culture of the area.

My mother, on the other hand, was a “Yankee” transplant from Connecticut who never felt quite in step with the clique-ish nature she perceived in the south. Her own family were relatively recent immigrants to the United States, arriving from the southern Italian commune of Molise in the latter half of the 19th century. In their country of birth, they spoke in a Neapolitan dialect called Il Supinese, most often made their livings as contadini (farmers) and scalpellini (stonemasons), and never migrated far from the land they had worked on for centuries.

In the years and decades directly following the unification of Italy (post 1861), a mass exodus of individuals and families left Sepino, just as they were leaving the rest of the newly united kingdom. My family came over slowly at first; my great-grandfather, Benedetto, found work and then sent for his wife and children, a scenario very common in the immigrant world as a whole. Benedetto and his wife Maria Concetta eventually settled in Hartford, Connecticut along with many other Italians from the same region. The town quickly became an immigrant enclave, with over 63% of residents claiming first or second-generation immigrant status in the 1910 U.S. Federal Census (Baics, 2001). Ethnic neighborhoods sprouted up everywhere with most of the Italians concentrated in the East Wards of the city, and the new residents continued to maintain strong communal connections with the villages they left back home and with their new neighbors who shared similar ethnic backgrounds. To this day, it is still common to find advertisements in Hartford for services located in Sepino, and vice versa. There are local Italian American societies named after Sepino’s patron saint, Santa Cristina, and Italian restaurants bearing the name of its sister city in Italy as well. My mother grew up in this cultural enclave, surrounded by Italian-speaking family members and taking part in the basics of Catholic culture. They celebrated holidays honoring St. Joseph and the Feast of Epiphany and took part in the family reunions common during Easter Monday (Pasquetta). Her exposure to Italian culture and traditions no doubt helped secure her understanding of her identity as an Italian American.

I was raised back and forth between my parents, partially in Central Florida and partially in Tennessee, questioning through my childhood where “home” actually was. Because of the shuffling around in my early years, I grew up without the distinctive

accent prevalent in the Appalachian region, and when I came back to live in Northeast Tennessee permanently in my pre-teen years, I was often met with questions such as, “You ain’t from around here, are ya? You sound educated”. These were not just questions, though, they were insinuations of otherness. They were a constant reminder that, despite having been born and mostly raised in the same town as the individuals asking the question, I was still thought of as an outsider. I had deeply planted familial roots here, but somehow to others I was not rooted deeply enough. I grew up with an Italian last name that no one in this area could ever pronounce correctly and even though there was a frustration with that, there was also a sense of being unique in a positive way. I recall glowing with pride when someone would hear my name and inquire if I were Italian. Sometimes, I felt like a fraud, though. I did not speak Italian, none of my close family were Catholic, and my grandfather was the last generation who had even been to Italy. I lived with the feeling as though I always had one foot in each of my identities, never being quite sure of where I fit in best or if I fit in at all. As I grew older, however, I finally came to an understanding that embracing one identity more so over the other might be the easier path for me. I begged my grandmother to let me go to Catholic school, I struggled to learn the basics of the Italian language, and I studied all I could about my family heritage and genealogical history.

My mother and I finally visited our ancestral village, Sepino, in the region of Campobasso in 2017, as we spent a month exploring and applying for our Italian citizenship, available to us through *jure sanguinis* – the law of descent by blood right. We no longer had close relatives living in Molise, but there was an undeniable sense of familial belonging that overtook me when we made it to the village. I walked through the streets in awe, visited the church where generations of my family were baptized and married, and finally felt as though I was truly surrounded by a culture I understood. After all of these undertakings, I felt closer to being “authentically” Italian than I ever had previously. There continued to exist a lingering doubt in my mind, however, that I would still somehow never be “Italian enough”, even despite having the citizenship of my ancestral home. It was difficult to hear new acquaintances tell my mother, “Oh, Mary, you look so Italian! Lisa, not so much.” I

found pictures on the cemetery headstones in the village with ancestors from over a hundred years ago that shared my mother's name and visage, but there was no one I resembled in the churchyard. I came to understand that even there in my family's village, I still was not sure of my identity, but I was certain I would have to reevaluate who I was and where I fit in, both ethnically and personally.

These struggles with my own identity and finding my place in society made me consider how others with the same regional and ethnic backgrounds may deal with their own identity issues. Are they better able to balance the dual Appalachian and Italian American identities, or are they like me: in a constant search for authenticity and acceptance (self and otherwise) in one of the cultural realms they straddle?

The preceding biographical narrative is an attempt not only to express the underpinnings of my interest in the subject of Italian-America identity formation in Appalachia, but also to situate myself and my experience within the research and express influencing factors for any potential implicit bias that may be found in the research itself or the analysis of the data. The background also serves to convey that each individual will have his or her own set of ethnic experiences and histories which serve to shape their personal, social, and group identities. When interacting with cultures, oftentimes one must keep in mind that members of groups are not confined to the stereotypical homogeneity impressed by outside majority groups. Often, we underestimate the intra-regional diversity of experience found within both Appalachia and Italy, including dialect, diet, cultural heritage, and traditions. Describing my place in the complicated matrix of heritage helps provide a lens with which to view the others participating in this research.

Regions in Context

2.1 — Italian History and Migratory Beginnings

The history of the Italian Republic and its peoples is a long and complex journey. For centuries, Popes, statesmen, military leaders, and outsiders alike have tried to unify the lands into a solitary unit, with little luck of keeping a lasting hold. The regions from the north and south were fiercely independent social and cultural enclaves, wary after constant invasions from the Lombards, the Spanish, and even Napoleon himself. After fiery influencers such as Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi, along with the House of Savoy in the Kingdom of Sardinia, made strong movements to bring the regions together, the country was finally unified on 17 March, 1861 (Signoretta, 2020).

Figure 1 below depicts a map of Italy in the midst of unification. Dates displayed are those of regions' annexations to Sardinia-Piedmont and eventually to the Kingdom of Italy. The unification brought together vastly different regions under the rule of King Victor Emmanuel II.



(Fig.1,Signoretta, 2020).

There were still many struggles after unification. During the same year Victor Emmanuel II of the House of Savoy came into power, the population of Italy was over 26 million, with over 78% of citizens claiming illiteracy and only 30% working in occupations outside of agriculture (Signoretta, 2020). This led to very lean times economically, with many of the poor peasants concentrated in the southern regions. There was little belief at this time that Italy would be able to become economically stable in the short term or would be able to keep up with the progress of other European countries at the time, and this led to fears of collapse if the situation did not improve.

The Kingdom created a centralized government, which did not help to make the situation better, but instead exacerbated the economic imbalance between the northern and southern regions. Unbalanced free trade policies created a damaging environment for manufacturers in the south, corruption plagued businesses and public works projects alike, and poverty and disease were a constant burden for the poor and uneducated in the heavily populated southern regions. This abject poverty led to violence in many rural, southern areas, where peasants saw no marked improvement on their way of life because of the unification, and class warfare often erupted in brutal scenes of violence in which the flag of the former occupiers, the Bourbons, was raised to show their discontent (Ibid).

Much of this was ignored, though, as the rest of the country was focused on finishing the unification of the Italian lands. In 1870, after a final siege saw Pius IX giving up his seat during the Conquest of Rome and turning it over to King Victor Emmanuel II, there was finally a renewed, concerted effort by politicians to get the economy back in check, build up the country's military power in order to protect its unified lands, and to "make Italians" by growing the sense of nationalism that they believed would hold the country together. It was almost too late for these actions, however, and large-scale emigration out of Italy soon began. Migrants made their ways to places such as the United States, South America (including, most notably,

Argentina and Brazil), Canada, the U.K., and Australia in their search for work and a better quality of life.

The emigration numbers of this time period were almost unheard of. What started as a trickle in the 1860s began to explode by the 1880s. In some years, the numbers reached well into the multiple hundreds of thousands, a nearly ten-fold increase from the previous decade. Between the years of 1880 and 1920, over 3 million Italians immigrated to the United States (Ibid). In the beginning of these mass migrations, many of the first to leave Italy were from the industrious north, who saw no opportunities for advancement in small mountain towns with very little work. This trend began to change in later migration near the turn of the nineteenth century, however, as southern Italians began to make up larger and larger shares of those leaving the country.

There was a vast difference during this time in how Italians were viewed in comparison with the other European countries, as they already faced discrimination for their southern way of living, which was thought of as slow and backward. This same discriminatory pattern also informed the mindset concerning the dichotomy between the north and south of Italy. The regions in the north, more Germanic in nature than those in the south, were seen as the high culture of the country. Those in the southern regions were discriminated upon for their perceived low cultured and uncivilized ways (Ibid). These prevailing mindsets were a threat to the national discourse that the newly unified nation of Italy was attempting to curate, however the prejudice surrounding the south's way of life remained a power influencing factor, and this negativity spilled over to new continents when southern Italians migrated out of Italy.

During this time period, the United States was still searching for its national identity while recovering from the Civil War that pitted the Northern States against the Southern, just as Italy attempted to find its singular social and economic voice as well. As a country newly unified as a Kingdom after its own savage internal and external wars for independence, Italy was still in its infancy and learning to come to terms with the plague of injustices and disparities which existed between the

industrious North and the rural South – a somewhat similar plight to that which had been experienced recently by the U.S. Both countries wrestled with the concept of a national identity and what it meant to have disparate parts unified together as a nation. In both cases, there seemed to be a hegemonic ideology of perceived superiority rooted in cultural differences, and possibly in ethnic differences as well.

2.2 — Appalachia as a Distinct Region

There is some scholarly debate on which areas constitute the region of Appalachia, some even going so far as arguing that the delineation of the area is so disparately defined that Appalachia can be considered an invention or social construction, much as identities can be categorized. Cooper, Knotts, and Elders, (2011) posit that the location of Appalachia varies based on “who answers and where the answerer lives”, as place and inclusion can at times be subjective. Indeed, the notion of the area’s constitution has shifted over time and has been debated for many years, although the authoritative voice, the Appalachian Regional Commission, an economic development agency that was established by Congress in 1965, has definitively drawn the map of the region.

The Appalachian Region is an expanse of land that follows the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi, encompassing more than 200,000 square-miles. This diverse region includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The region includes several large cities, especially in the northern sections, but many Appalachians chose to live in smaller, isolated communities where their families may have lived for generations, whether this be by choice or necessity. Indeed, in an area comprising 25 million people, 42% of Appalachians live in rural areas. This is more than double the 20% of rural residents which are found in the U.S. national population of 328 million (<https://www.arc.gov/>).

Figure 2 below illustrates a map of the Appalachian Region of the United States, separated by subregion, state, and county. The Appalachian Region makes up 420 counties across 13 states.

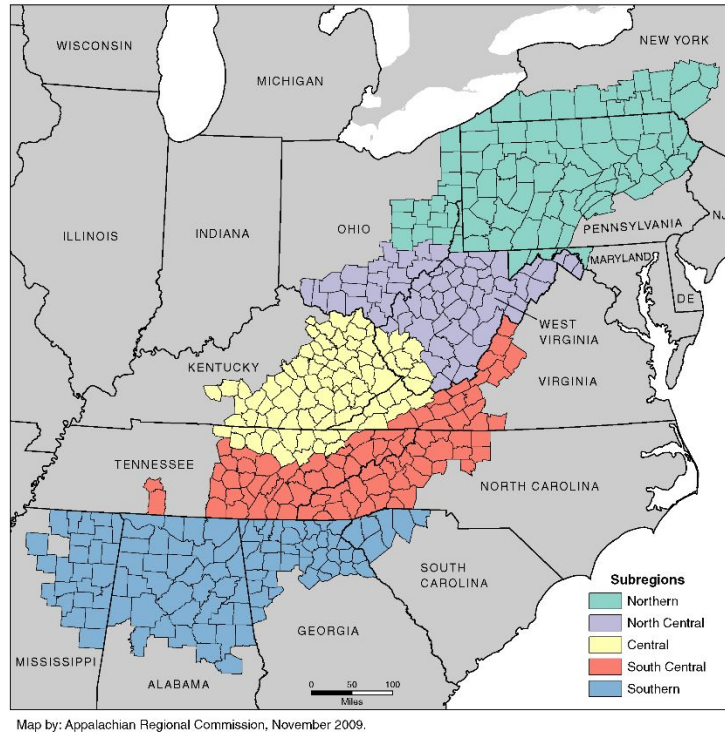


Fig. 2, Appalachian Regional Commission, 2009

Living in these areas, untouched by many of the influences of the outside world, it is possible to retain and preserve their unique identities. In these areas, people predominantly trace their roots back to German, Scots-Irish, Welsh, French, and English ancestry (Drake, 2001).

Obermiller (1977) writes:

“While Appalachians are in no legitimate sense an ethnic group, they are classified by other Americans as something quite similar to an ethnic group and have many of the same problems – economic, social,

and psychological – as members of various ethnic groups. But there is an important difference. Appalachians have none of the obvious distinguishing features of most ethnic groups – no distinguishing race or physical features, no different language or religion. Because of this, Appalachians bear a special stigma. To have none of the marks of an “ethnic” – which serves as an explanation of different attitudes and value emphasis – and yet to be so different...”

This region became recognized distinctly as Appalachia in the late 1800s, as the author William Harney composed a narrative on the area entitled “A Strange Land a Peculiar People” which depicted the area in what some other scholars considered a very critical light (Spiker, 2014). Obermiller (2002) adds to this by retelling the account of Professor George Vincent from the University of Chicago, who in 1989 explored the Appalachian region in Eastern Kentucky on horseback and returned home with a very frank analysis for his students. He considered the region to be curious, and despite the rapidly occurring change beginning to take place, described the social order as one “arrested at a relatively early state of evolution” in a “retarded frontier”.

There has been much effort since that time to remove the stigma from the region which is often described as impoverished, homogenous, isolated, and “backward”, but there are still struggles on this front, as the reality of the region’s strains are made very clear by research data. Though gains have been made over the past five decades and some communities in the region have been able to modernize, the region is still heavily impoverished, with some lacking basic infrastructure such as roads and sewage systems in their communities (<https://www.arc.gov/>). The region also relies strongly on mining, forestry, agriculture, chemical industries, which have contributed to the degradation of the environment in many of the subregions.

Having a distinct identity associated with Appalachia also came to the forefront during the late 1800s, as more outsiders became exposed to the “strange land

and peculiar people in the Southern mountains that could not be understood in terms of contemporary conceptions of America as a unified and homogenous national entity” (Cooper, et al., 2011). It took the slow opening up of the region and having local authors writing personal narratives of their lives in the area for those outside of Appalachia to begin to learn about the distinct characteristics and “homogenous” cultural aspects of the region, and to come to understand and appreciate the unique culture (Ibid). These were narrow perceptions of the culture in Appalachia, however, as the ethnic and social makeup in parts of the region could be just as varied as those outside of the area.

Just as some scholars debate the demarcations of the Appalachian Region, so too do others question what is included in the criteria for membership in such a regionally specific group. Cooper et. al (2011) reference sociologist John Shelton Reed who maintains that it is often the case that membership in these groups comes from individual’s identification more so than it does from the location in which they live. This seems quite in line with the qualifications for membership in ethnic groups, though that comparison between regional and ethnic identity can be debated. Shelton went on to say that regional identity is an important aspect and a “cognitive entity that people use to orient themselves”, but as this identification is also part of social processes, “patterns of regional identity may even change over time” (Ibid). This notion seems to be in opposition to the more ascribed concept of ethnicity, though there is also debate on the fluidity of that characteristic as well.

Regional identity is a strong concept for many in Appalachia, however. An old mountain adage relayed by Obermiller (1977) says that “a feller who loses his roots has to grow claws to hang on”, and this certainly seems to be the prevailing theme in Appalachia. Traditions, heritage, the old ways of living, and the slight distrust of the changes that progress bring are aspects held close to the breast in many parts of the region, and without these cultural markers to ground the inhabitants of the area, many would have less surety in regards to their regional, cultural, and social identities.

2.3 — The Italian Experience in Appalachia

The Italian diaspora that immigrated to the United States in general, and to Appalachia in particular, came from regions across the whole of Italy, carrying with them with distinctive identities, cultures, dialects, and gastronomies. Vellon (2014) wrote about the lack of an “Italian consciousness” which bound the immigrants together, instead seeing them recreate the same pockets of regional affiliation in their new society as were found in their homeland. Italians were relegated for many decades to the fringes of society where they joined other “non-white” immigrant groups, but the struggles of reality in their new land brought about the need for comradery and unity in communities which battled to showcase their value outside of the manual labor for which they were recruited.

Like other minority groups in Appalachia, Italians fought against prejudices and stereotypes which kept them purposefully weakened and subjugated, and often in this struggle for equality, they found a reason to unify. In his recounting of the experiences of minorities in the coal mining industry of the early 20th century, Huber (2006) discusses how mine operators endeavored to pit groups against one another: keeping ethnic groups confined to separate housing quarters, using derogatory naming conventions, and implementing large pay disparities to further alienate them from one another and from the white majority group. These institutions were created in hopes that the recent immigrants would not find common ground and ask for higher wages and better working conditions through unionization. The unintended consequences of actions such as these were the forging of a strengthened Italian identity shared by an ethnic group that realized they had more in common than not and that the only way to gain power and a voice in their new society was to band together to further their positions.

This new resurgence of a unified Italian spirit often carried the term “*Italianità*”, a term which encompasses the feeling of being Italian and embracing the “temperament, customs, art, thought, or sentiment” of proudly belonging to the Italian ethnic group (Temelini, 2020). As first generation Italian Americans embraced their newly unified heritage, strengthened in the light of marginalization, this led many to embrace their ethnic roots rather than assimilate completely during the important first years after their arrival in the United States, or at the very least encouraged a continuing sense of pride and commitment toward their heritage.

During the mass global exodus of individuals and families leaving their home countries in Europe and elsewhere around the world, the count of rural Italian migrants making their way to the United States provided a chance to fill the labor need for the ever burgeoning U.S economy (Richards, 1999). The largest waves of Italian immigrants to come to the United States were predominantly those from southern Italian regions including Campania, Calabria, and Sicily, and they were quickly recruited to fill much needed labor positions throughout the Northeast and to the south in Appalachia. In these first waves of immigration, young males were overly represented as they came by themselves using a network of peer groups to gain footing in the new land before sending for their wives and children. Once families began to take root in the new country, return migration lessened significantly (Barkley, 2011; Fellin, 2014).

Many newly arriving immigrants were met by employment agencies at the ports of entry in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore, and despite not having a command of the English language, they were often quickly offered jobs (Barkey, 2011). In the Appalachian Region, and in West Virginia in particular, this often meant work as “pick and shovel miners” in the coal industry. There, they made less pay than their American born counterparts, but they also earned a reputation for having strong work ethics and pushing to improve their financial situations through their hard work (Ibid). Still other Italians used skills they

brought with them and settled into positions in semi-skilled labor fields such as teamsters representation, carpentry, shoemaking, stonemasonry, or even general labor. In the northern parts of Appalachia which had larger urban centers such as Pittsburgh and Morgantown, the industrial nature of the cities saw Italians working in the prolific glass industry or in other manufacturing positions, on the railroads which fed the industry along the large confluences creating the Ohio River, or working in their own businesses.

It took some time, and “it was not until Italians settled in the United States that they began to fuse the two cultures and experience a dual identity” (Barolini, 1999). They were Italians and American, Italians and Appalachian. Many Italian immigrants left Appalachia eventually in their quest to rise out of the ranks of manual labor, but many more stayed and made significant impacts on the region and its institutions (Barkley, 2011). Their efforts can especially be seen in the strength of the unions which formed with the strong labor-minded will they carried with them from Italy.

Another area which is marked by the impact of the Italian presence in Appalachia is the considerable growth of the Catholic Church in a strict departure for a region well known for numerous versions of Protestantism. Italian church-goers brought the Catholic influence to the festivals and social events in their towns, frequently celebrating the Saints and holidays brought over from the old world traditions. Some of these celebrations eventually morphed into the heritage festivals and ethnic celebrations still found today, especially in the northern areas of the Appalachian Region (Ibid).

3

Previous Research, Theoretical Framework, and Research Questions

3.1 — Previous research on Ethnicity

Ethnic identity, understood as a “particular (assumed) ancestry and origin” based on genetic links, common descent, and bonds of kinship, is often understood and negotiated in terms of other groups, both cultural and ethnic themselves (Liebkind, K., Mähönen, T. A., Varjonen, S., & Jasinskaja-Lahti, I., 2015; Verkuyten, 2005). This group belonging and the sense of self that it brings can be expressed in many ways, either felt or acted upon (Gans, 1979).

The field of social psychology presents ethnic and national identities as social in nature, in an almost mirrored effect of finding self-concept as it is reflected back in from the membership in an ethnic or national group, either imagined or real (Verkuyten, 2005). With this membership comes a “sense of rooted-ness, of belonging, a confidence in ‘knowing your own story’” (Ibid). There is a strong need for an individual to gain a sense of self (Howard, 2000), and often-times, purpose and meaning of the self are realized through group membership.

In previous times, ethnicity was seen as an ascribed characteristic and not a matter of choice, thus it was largely overlooked as an important aspect of self because of its connection to group and role membership (Gans, 1979). It was viewed as “expressive more than functional” or only present to bolster structural opportunity in working class individuals (Ibid). Modern takes on ethnicity and ethnic group membership, however, are more sensitive to the intricacies in the relationship between an individual and their social and cultural spheres (Verkuyten, 2005). An individual’s well-being can be greatly influenced by the

self-image, feeling of group belonging, and sense of sharing values with others that ethnic group membership can bring (Liebkind et al., 2015). Ethnicity is also now seen as a characteristic that is both ascribed by birth and achieved through the meaning it brings to one's identity (Ibid). For many modern Italian Americans without direct connections to the Old World, the idea of their Italian ethnic identity can be something of their creation as a "mythical or imagined community" where they can adhere to what they perceive as authentic ways and old traditions, many of which do not actually still exist in the form in which they once did (Anderson 1983).

When it comes to considering the value of ethnicity to future generations of immigrant descendents, Gans (1979) took the particularly harsh view that because upholding traditions and embracing ethnic behavior requires a large time commitment and a great deal of effort, and more recent generations who have acculturated and assimilated want "easy and intermittent ways of expressing their identity", there are no longer many who want the commitment of the cultural practice or group membership that ethnic group membership actually demands. He believes that the "immigrant experience and adjustment in the lives of the first two generations may have been more important than the ethnic experience", while the third generation has the choice to treat their ethnicity as a sort of hobby or a field trip that they can enjoy at their leisure (Gans, 1979). While this narrative may be true for some in assimilated generations of ethnic groups, there are still many more individuals who value the time and energy that performing their ethnic identity takes. It may just be that they were never exposed to the culture and rights of passage the ethnic practice demands the further the generations were removed from the source culture.

3.2 — Ethnic Research in the Italian American Sphere

Outside of a limited amount of narrative research on Appalachia which includes mentions of the Italian American experience, much of the previous research done on this ethnic group concentrates on larger, Northeastern communities in the United States where those of Italian descent make up a larger percentage of the population - places such as Boston, Massachusetts; New York City, New York; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Ferraiuolo, 2006; Bertellini, 2005; Luconi, 2001). There are ethnic enclaves in this region which still practice many of the cultural traditions that were brought from Italy, and it is possible to find sections of these cities where Italian is the only language heard spoken in the streets (Luconi, 2001). Many considered these places, especially New York, to be the “epicenter of Italian immigrant life”, virtually ignoring the impact that Italian American migration had on other parts of the country outside of the Northeast (Vellon, 2006:5).

There is also the common trend of studying individual facets of Italian American life such as the ethnic food, festivals, and religious practices of Italian Americans as performativity, instead of focusing on the narrative identity of the individuals and groups themselves. Ferraiuolo’s (2006:4) research, claims that there should actually be *more* focus on palace and performativity because “though public events centered on religious displays and cultural performances contribute a great deal to the maintenance of a sense of ethnic identity, they have been less studied”, especially in regards to how they relate to the core of identity itself. These performativities are all aspects and outward confirmations of internalized identities – “dramatized demonstrations” of a social and cultural identity that can be researched in relation to the value they hold to individuals on a more personal, micro level. More narrative research needs to be done in order to explore these

personal, storied portraits of what ethnic group membership and ethnic identity mean to the individual.

Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (1999) also bring up a point incredibly relevant to the study of ethnic minority groups in places like Appalachia. When ethnic immigrants believe they will be accepted into the ethnic majority group in their new society (i.e. Italians in the United States, or more specifically Appalachia), but their expectations are not met, the researchers posit that “ethnic migrants’ sense of belonging towards the country where they grew up may rise, whereas the sense of belonging towards the country of ethnic origin may decrease”. This is especially valuable in understanding how ethnicity relates to national identity and feelings about integration and assimilation. These so-called “double minority statuses” bring a new level of challenge to understanding how ethnic migrants create and negotiate their identities and their place in the world around them (Ibid).

3.3 — Whiteness Studies and In the Age of Trump

Many minority ethnic groups who migrated to the United States faced the uphill battle of proving their level of “whiteness” before they were fully embraced by or assimilated into the population. While this was not as large an issue when the first immigrants began coming over from Italy, as their numbers increased and the population immigrating came less and less from the northern, more Germanic region, and southern Italians began coming over in in large numbers, the discrimination became more apparent. These southern Italians were relegated to a racialized “in-between” position, considered to be straddling the line between black and white, and suspicions and prejudices around them began to mount

(Fellin, 2014). Their Catholic religious backgrounds also contributed to some of the distrust, as it was also imported from Europe from previous groups of Catholic immigrants, and the rising numbers of adherents caused alarm and clashed quite strongly with active Protestant cultures found in the U.S., especially in Appalachia (Watson, 2005).

Because of the battles they faced in regards to their ethnicity and religious affiliation, Italians began the arduous journey of shedding outward signs of their ethnic differences and tried to assimilate into the mainstream American lifestyle. A significant factor in this transition was the language shift that took place, as more and more Italians gave up their mother tongues in order to fit in more closely to the generic white ethnic background of the majority population (Ibid). Because this drive to fit into the mainstream and sidestep discrimination, in little more than a century, Italian Americans succeeded in becoming one of the “most assimilated ethnic groups in the United States” (Lisella, 2002).

In the era of Donald J. Trump, a heightened sense of racial unrest and ethnic suspicion has again begun to plague the U.S. There seem to be litmus tests for patriotism, and those who are in ethnic and racial minorities who speak out about injustices based on these factors seem unable to pass this test in the minds of some. Many racialized groups do not have the option of shedding their visible ethnic or racial identities, and are not inclined to do so if they could, so the transition to become accepted completely into the mainstream without prejudice has and will continue to be an uphill battle.

While these issues may no longer be a point of contention for many of the generally assimilated Italian Americans that live in this country, for some of southern Italian descent, there are those who would see their olive skin, dark hair, and strong features and confuse them with those of

Hispanic heritage. Though in the U.S. the ethnic term Hispanic encompasses a large variety of different peoples, many of these groups face the same prejudices and harassment which are turned toward others visibly in the minority ethnic and racial groups. It is a priority in my research to find whether these issues of ethnic discrimination have ever been a problem for my study participants.

3.4 — Implications for the Regional Italian-American Community

An important aspect of much of ethnic identity research is going beyond the personal implications of understanding identity and discovering what this identification means to the cultural health and well-being of society and how it can add to informed decision-making and improve related policies. The expression of group identity has “left traces in historical records... because, as in the case of politics, they have played a key role in the formation and redefinition of the self-perceptions of the minorities in the U.S.” (Luconi, 2001:2).

The impacts of studies such as this may give us insight into how dueling religious backgrounds coexist (Protestantism vs. Catholicism), how Italian-American identity is expressed in a southern vs. northern regional dichotomy, or how urban vs. rural upbringings impact Italian American identity formation (in terms of political affiliation, cultural practices, gastronomy, etc.)

4

Theoretical Framework, Research Questions, and Methods

4.1 Theoretical Framework - Narrative Analysis

This qualitative research uses the ethnographic research method of semi-structured interviewing with analysis based on the narrative approach. Clandinin & Connelly (2000:20) define Narrative Inquiry (Analysis) as a way of understanding experience using a collaborative method between researcher and participants in the study. These interactions take place over time, in a location or series of locations, and in congruence with the surrounding social environment. This narrative structure provides a useful framework when chronicling and analyzing how individuals build their understanding of the world around them along with examining “the intimate link between narrative and modes of self-and other – understanding” (Mills and Gay, 2016). Narrative Analysis also allows us to deconstruct how individuals place themselves in relation to the world they find around them. For this realm of ethnography, which has often suffered from a lack of “linguistically-minded research on stories told by ordinary people in diverse environments”, narrative inquiry of ethnic identity provides a perfect basis to "explore the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted-but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007:42)

Narrative analysis is especially well suited for identity research and autobiographical chronicling as a tool which can zero in on reflexive, personalized accounts of events “in an effort to understand how the individual’s past experiences

impact the present, and potentially, the future.” (Mills and Gay, 2016). Cotterill and Letherby (1993) likened the narrative approach to a collaborative journey of discovery wherein the maps and signs for travel are the data being collected, with an ultimate goal of reaching the “destination”, which is the focus of the study and the clarity brought to the research questions. Humans lead “storied lives” in which they socially construct realities through their interactions and socio-cultural practices as “characters in their own and others’ stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

There are items of which to be cognizant when choosing this qualitative approach to gain perspectives on peoples’ identities, however. The researcher enters the storytelling process and progresses with the inquiry while “still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000:20). As a living entity, the narrative an individual may share can be easily molded unconsciously by the researcher. Because of this, it is important to be reflexive in the interviewing and analysis processes, taking a “hall of mirrors approach” in which the researcher ultimately examines his or her own role in the storytelling and research and how these relationships may affect the interpretation of data (ibid). This is especially relevant when the researcher may share a similar background to the subjects or share intimate knowledge of a situation being studied, as it may be easier to impart implicit bias on the narrative collection or analysis itself if these conditions are present.

4.2 Social Identity Theory

Though not the main theoretical framework for my research on ethnicity, situating ethnic identity narratives in the overall foundation of Social Identity Theory is important in that an individual’s social identity is oftentimes directly linked to the value placed in one’s ethnic identity. (Phinney, J., Horenczyk, G., Liebkind, K., & Vedder, P., 2001) write of self concept as often being derived from identification with a group, as well as in relationship to groups of others, and the shared sense of history and background found in ethnic group membership is an essential component in the

reflexive work of self discovery and understanding. It is important to note that in many studies of multi-ethnic belonging, many individuals who share links with both the minority and majority cultures find they feel more of a connection with the minority identity, although having an “integrated or bicultural identity” is found quite commonly (Ibid). This is an interesting facet to consider in the current research, because although Appalachian heritage is not a competing ethnic identity, membership in the socio-cultural aspect of life in the region can also carry value and emotional significance.

4.3 Research Process and Research Questions

Q1: How does the Italian American ethnic identity relate to the Appalachian regional identity? Where do they intersect or overlap? Where do they diverge?

These two identities are not mutually exclusive. Individuals can express a plethora of traits associated with both backgrounds while still retaining a distinct preference for one or the other. My goal is to determine which aspects of Italian American identity are comorbid with aspects of Appalachian American identity.

Q2: What kind of steps do Italian Americans take to preserve and present their identity?

How individuals feel about their ethnicity is manifested through the way they describe their heritage and through observation of the cultural traditions that they choose to maintain. Performativity and how respondents narrate their own ethnic experiences can provide insight into what is valued in relation to expressing ethnicity and cultivating self image.

4.4 Overview of Data and Methods

To begin, it would be a disservice not to mention the time and context of this study, as both are important factors in the both the material chosen to be studied and

the methods used to collect and analyze the data. As discussed previously, the polarizing, authoritarian leadership in the current administration has undoubtedly given rise to racial unrest, societal conflict, and the resurgence of a white supremacist atmosphere. While discrimination and prejudice are often likely to be called out by an increasing number of individuals from both inside and outside the racial and ethnic communities in which this vitrol is pointed, it is also increasingly likely that these abusive actions will take place in more public arenas, without fear of repercussion from societal or authority figures. Some Italian Americans may not feel they are the victims of any racial or ethnic profiling, while others may feel it is a lived part of their everyday lives. This study hopes to broach these topics in the quest to understand ethnic identity in a regional area which overwhelmingly voted to elect and re-elect President Trump.

As I developed my methodology for this research, news of a novel coronavirus developed into the spread of a global pandemic. While research of many kinds continued uninterrupted, social research was uniquely affected due to the infectious nature of the disease. This led to significant restructuring of my research goals, methods, and availability of interview subjects. This also affected the timeline of my research. Further detailed below are the specific considerations put in place to combat these new challenges.

4.5 “Out” in the Field: Qualitative Interviews in Quarantine

In spring of 2019, I began my search for participants in my study by scouring the Appalachian Region for Italian American social clubs and heritage events which might yield interviews from individuals who took an active role in embracing their cultural and ethnic roots. I understood this method of recruitment had the potential for bias in that I was seeking to engage with people who were visibly active in socialization involving their ethnic roots, but finding community members of the Italian American community, a demographic minority in the region, proved to be rather challenging, as many are removed several generations from their ethnic heritage and may not consider it as part of their lived identity at all.

The largest organization I found in the region was The Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America (OSDIA), a social organization which began in 1905 as a small community of recent immigrants set on preserving a cultural link with the Italian life they left behind as they sought to discuss solutions to the unique issues Italian Americans faced. They decided that working to serve and bolster one another during times of hardship was the best way to band together to surmount the hurdles they faced in their new lives in America. In modern times, the organization remains active and is well known for awarding scholarship assistance to promising young Italian American students, working to form closer cultural ties between the United States and Italy, and endeavoring to preserve Italian American traditions, history, and heritage. The organization is spread across 32 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, and Italy with lodges noticeably prevalent in Appalachia. In West Virginia, the only state located entirely within the region, there are 6 separate lodges comprised of hundreds of active members (<https://www.osia.org/about/who-we-are/>). I wrote to the State President of the Grand Lodge, and through this link I was introduced to my first study participant.

Figure 3 below denotes the states and provinces of Canada which house active lodges of Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America.



Fig. 3, (<https://www.osia.org/about/who-we-are/>).

Through my connections with this participant, I was also made aware of an annual celebration of Italian American heritage which takes place every Labor Day weekend in Clarksburg, West Virginia, a city in the northern part of the state along the border with Pennsylvania. The festival has been active in the community since 1979, and it was celebrating its 41st year when I attended in 2019 in an attempt to recruit further subjects for my research. Here, I was introduced to a former mayor of Clarksburg, the first Italian American female to hold the office. She was one of the original participants in the inaugural year festivities which includes crowning a Queen Regina Maria, an homage to the Catholic roots found frequently in the ethnic community.

From the mayor, I learned more about the festival which takes an active role in preserving and promoting Italian heritage in the region and contributes to Clarksburg's status as a hold-out in the region as an ethnic enclave intent on preserving Old-world traditions and connections to community. Attending events such as these are especially well-documented in ethnographic research, as place is a very important opportunity to document the performativity of ethnicity, as put forth by social researchers such as Fortier (1999). Fortier's work in *Re-membering Places and the Performance of Belonging* (1999) captured the performativity of ethnicity by exploring the experience of the annual Holy Procession of St. Peter's in London, an event which brings together the Italian community as they practice the cultural rites associated with honoring their Catholic faith. Many of the faith-based rituals which take place may be individual practices or performativity by nature, however they also fulfill the need of expanding the connections within the greater ethnic community and setting it apart as a distinctive group within a large, multi-cultural city.

This same performativity was on display in Clarksburg as Italian Americans created an ethnic space for themselves by performing some essential acts of "Italianness" at their own heritage festival, which seemingly brought their community closer together. These acts included patronizing food vendors selling traditional Italian American food staples including the pepperoni roll, a local delicacy which was

made popular by the Italian coal miners who worked in the area underground and created a portable dish using ingredients with which they were familiar. Local Italian owned businesses organized a parade through the downtown area with individuals in the procession riding by in cars with green, white, and red banners which bore such titles as “Italian Businessman of the Year!”. There were even “Honorary Italian Woman of the Year” awards, for those who were not part of the Italian community, but who supported it. This performance served to separate out and delineate the Italian American culture from the rest of the ethnic groups, while championing the place in society of its own.

The experience of attending the heritage festival persuaded me to research more on the performativity aspects of ethnic identity in addition to taking narrative accounts of ethnic and regional belongings. In the next few months, I worked diligently with the former mayor to make connections with others in the local Italian American community, in the hopes of gaining access to study participants and planning my research strategy. When deciding if individual or group interviews would be the best suited for my topic and material, I considered many factors. I spent time deciding if, with individual sessions, I may be able to gather more sensitive data than in a group setting, where the participant could feel less comfortable sharing private or familial details. In groups, oftentimes bigger personalities can also dominate, and the quieter individuals may have their opinions and insights lost in the shuffle. The opposite can also be true, however, and participants may feel more open to share ideas if they feel they are part of a group who may share some of the same views, or the stories of one person might trigger the memories of the others. Individual interviews may also take longer, both to organize and to carry out, as they would need to have dedicated time to complete and then to transcribe if the data were in oral interview form. Group interviews would also be a productive place in which to study the discourse surrounding identity construction, especially in terms of how minority groups claimmake and negotiate their identities (Sala, Dandy, and Rapley, 2009). I decided on organizing several small group interview sessions along with completing more ethnographic research in the area to study participants using a mixed methods

approach to include narrative inquiry and observation-based ethnography concerned with the performativity of identity.

However, despite our best efforts, I was not able to coordinate the group interviews I had initially foreseen as my data collection method of choice. With the Covid 19 virus beginning to take hold in communities in the Northeast and travel restrictions being implemented in many states, there continued to be barriers for garnering in-person or group interviews, so I began to look at my options for individual interviews conducted from a distance. I considered providing participants with a written set of questions which they could answer while social distancing, but a large drawback for this method was that the interviews could have gotten long and the individuals may have cut themselves short if they felt as though they were taking too much time or if they could not articulate themselves well in writing. I decided on contacting the interviewees via a video conferencing application (in these cases, it was the program Zoom) and recording their interviews both through the program and with a voice recorder on my phone as a backup in case there were any technical glitches.

After deciding on this new method, I set out to explore personal contacts to find participants for these interviews, as my old connections in West Virginia had dried up. I sent out messages on online social messaging sites such as Facebook, both through my personal account, as well as in Italian American language and social group sites. This method of recruitment garnered 5 interview participants from varied regions of Appalachia, which was an extremely crucial element for my study.

In this research, I have changed the names of the study participants to ensure anonymity, however I have included information on their general locations in the Appalachian Region, as well as their generational distance from their Italian-born forebears, as I feel this information is critically important in understanding their connections to their Italian ethnic heritage, as well their relationship to the Appalachian region as a whole.

Individuals Profiled:

Rita Davies, late 60s , Tennessee, 2nd generation

Randy Elliot, early 50s, Pennsylvania, 3rd generation

Salvatore Pascio, early 50s, Tennessee, 1st generation

Michelle Battista, mid 30s, Tennessee, 3rd generation

Frank Valente, early 60s, Pennsylvania, 3rd generation

During the semi-structured interviews which generally lasted an hour and 30 minutes on average, I delivered a multitude of open-ended questions in which participants were free to respond as briefly or as in depth as they felt compelled. While each interview started with an initial roster of questions, the open-ended nature of the wording allowed respondents to guide the conversation via emergent discussion of relevant topics as they arose. The dynamic nature of these lines of questioning allowed exploration of the branching connections present within each subject's relationship with their identity and encouraged them to discuss narrative events and topics which bore relevance to their lives.

Questions began descriptively at first, centered around learning about their personal histories, family background, and understanding their Italian American connections. Respondents were questioned about their cultural and religious practices, their language skills and experiences traveling to Italy, and the type of connections they currently had to their local and ethnic communities. Finally, approaching the core purpose of the discussion, respondents were asked about both their Italian and Appalachian identities, the ways in which these identities were visible in their everyday lives, and how their dual identities intersected and overlapped with one another. We spoke in depth about the social and cultural activities they felt most reflected their ethnic and regional heritage and what it meant to them to maintain their ethnic roots.

After the interviews were complete, many of the participants sent me supplemental material concerning their family history in the region from which they migrated: linguistic, territorial, and genetic maps as well as pictures of their relatives and their trips to Italy. These were additional resources for me to derive meaning in addition to their narrative. In a broad sense of the word, text can be defined as something that we make meaning from, be it transcribed interview text, a written sample, or a pictorial object (McKee, 2003). Therefore, the contents of these items were also analyzed.

My first steps for getting the interview data into form was to make transcriptions of the conversations, verbatim. For this process, I used the Otter.ai transcription service to create a baseline transcription of the audio recordings I downloaded from Zoom, then went through the transcription again to fix any errors the AI had interpreted due to accents, slang, or other issues. One thing I found interesting on first read through was that the AI's translations from the participants who had what would be considered a more "Southern Appalachian accent and dialect" had a far greater number of errors and sections it did not understand than when one of the participants with a Northern Appalachian accent spoke. Even within the region, the variety of accents can be noticeably different.

As I worked transcribing the interviews, I was also completing my first read through of the data. This first reading of the passages was in a literal manner, as I would later go over more finely the details in an interpretive reading of the data set.

To begin working with the transcription on a deeper level, I had to consider my time constraints and which method of analysis would best serve the narratives I had collected. At this juncture, I weighed the difference between two such methods used to analyze various texts - traditional textual analysis (TTA) and computational text analysis (CTA), or topic modelling (Bright and O'Conner, 2007). Each of the main methods of text analysis has positive and negative attributes which they lend to the research being conducted, and given various limitations or boundaries in the data or the research question itself, one method is often more clearly suited to be used for analysis than the other may be.

TTA is most commonly used as a qualitative form of methodology wherein researchers take pieces of data and break them down into categories they have created, based on their research interest and questions (Ibid). This process of categorization of texts can either begin with a Grounded Theory, which is a large, overarching theory using substantial amounts of data to put together a hypothesis and framework even before analysis begins, or the theory can develop organically as texts are studied and connections emerge. I knew I was working with Narrative Theory, so I felt that using TTA, I could begin to parse out themes even as I began my initial read-throughs of the interview transcripts.

Another essential aspect in choosing the best method is considering the size of the textual data that is in need of analysis. Smaller data sets generally are better suited to TTA, where limited amounts of data can still yield highly valuable results. Categories can be organized and meaning can be gleaned from interpretation, even if only one phrase or even a single word falls into these areas of demarcation. Considering that for this research, I had only 5 participant interviews of about an hour and 30 minutes each, TTA seemed as though overall it would be a very good fit as an analysis method in this regard.

TTA is organized in a way such as to have human researchers categorize and interpret meaning from the data which can mean a deep, thorough understanding and breakdown of the textual data (Ibid). This is viewed as one of the most integral, desirable aspects of this kind of analysis. When dealing with narrative recollections and transient concepts such as identity and ethnicity, having the ability to read the data on a micro-level with attention to small details is incredibly valuable in understanding the concepts in their essential forms.

When it comes to social science research which struggles to be as objective as possible in an intrinsically subjective, malleable world, human input and bias will certainly play a role in any interpretation that is done, but if the research plan is solidly laid out and there is discussion about the framework and the way in which the data analysis is approached, then the textual research will be as unbiased as it can be and will hold valuable information.

The human aspect of qualitative research is an integral part of both the TTA and CTA methods, and there are many aspects which appear to be strengthened by the touch of human insight. One such benefit pointed out in Bright and O'Connor (2007) is that researchers and coders may be able to recognize slang words or misspelled words and still include them in the research counts. This is incredibly important as I found on my initial read throughs when dealing with individuals with heavy regional accents or those who use colloquial terms often. A system like CTA may not know how to categorize words they do not recognize and important data could be excluded. Also, CTA is programmed to search for keywords along lines of syntax within language, so if an aspect such as sentence structure is off, the program may also not pick those items up, just as it does with incorrect spelling. Brookes and McEnery (2019) also point out that when we “remove grammatical ‘noise’, we run the risk of removing with it important information that contextualises natural language, creates meaning and resolves lexical ambiguity”. So, by trying to fix the issue, we can sometimes even make the issue worse. Humans also understand connotation on a deeper level than the CTA program may catch, and small nuisances or turns of phrase that mean something to a person reading a text might not be understood in a pre-coded, digital environment.

I found reflexivity and flexibility in my role as a researcher using TTA also helped streamline data and make the connections more clear and concise, as heavy work in the categorization of textual data enabled me to find novel ways to combine categories and find the underpinnings which connected the data with other information that might have seemed to not quite fit previously (Ibid).

A last benefit of using Traditional Textual Analysis is the ability to participate in cooperative, interpretative groups while completing coding, streamlining the research process when it comes to availability of materials and the ability to interact with them. After my transcriptions were complete, I used a copy of the data with all identifying information redacted and shared my thematic coding duties with another researcher to help work on the time-consuming process of coding multiple documents, and this benefit led to fruitful discussion and expanded understanding of some of the major and minor themes presented.

After the first literal read through was conducted, I began to separate out from the narratives any comments that concerned ethnic identity and performativity. Categories quickly began to emerge, and I then grouped together comments with similar themes. As these themes emerged in the transcripts, I began to make a code which showed the connections I was finding between topics and ideas. Several of the comments in the interview transcripts bore no relation to the context of identity, so a focus was put on those comments which explicitly centered on the emotional, social, and cultural aspects of ethnic and regional identity. These themes were then brought together within the Narrative and Social Identity Theory frames and analyzed and discussed further.

Analysis of Themes

5.1 Familial Connections in Italian Americans

Frank: “I am probably more associated with my Italian more so than the Irish side simply because the Italian side was much larger, substantially larger. My father was the youngest of I think eight. My mother was the oldest of four. And small families on their part, large families on my end.”

Randy: “ And you know, I'm also basically a second generation American and so those ties, those, those ties to Italy at the time of my growth as a young person, I think could become kind of frayed. I didn't have as much of a connection as I had with my grandparents when they were gone. I didn't have much of a connection. My mother who I guess is first generation depending on how you count it, she grew up very much as an American when my grandparents....and they really believed in assimilation. They had to be Americans, especially my grandfather who came to this country and it, for him, it was a source of pride. And they assimilated. They wouldn't speak Italian, they only spoke Italian when they didn't want me to understand what they were saying. That was the case with my mom and the uncle, and in a lot of ways our family was different. It wasn't this prototypical big, close Italian family. We have tons of relatives, you know, around the table. Their families, they were small.”

Strength of familial connections for both Frank and Randy played a large role in developing the portions of their ethnic identities to which they felt most connected. Despite this similarity, some of the influencing factors for each individual's connections to his familially bound ethnic connection seemed to be in opposition to one another. Frank feels that the large size of his Italian family and being surrounded by the cultural influence it carried with it while he was growing up drew him closer to

his Italian roots than his Irish. Randy, on the other hand, describes feeling connected to his Italian roots very strongly despite his atypically small family size (in Italian tradition. Randy was even faced with the challenge of having Italian grandparents who, while playing a significant role in his value making and upbringing, actively discouraged much of the Italian heritage cultural reproduction that often informs ethnic identity formation.

Randy discusses his family's focus on assimilation as a path to prosperity and the ways in which they limited his exposure to a culture he felt drawn to because of his strong familial connection to his grandparents. Though this mindset seemed to equate exposure to the language and culture to something that might eventually hinder him, Randy nevertheless maintained curiosity about his ethnic background throughout his life. Randy's grandmother's reluctance to discuss the home country is an interesting aspect, as is the grandparents' decision to assimilate as fully as possible when they came to America, both linguistically and otherwise. This erosion of the use of the native Italian or dialect spoken by first generation immigrants is well documented and quite common for Italian Americans, especially amongst those who felt their ethnicity invited prejudice or suspicion. For other families, assimilating meant to them that they would be giving their children a chance for as much success in their new country as possible. Many of the other respondents in this study discussed their intentional efforts made to maintain ethnic ties and traditions in their own families, while coming from an immediate family background which did little to actively maintain these aspects of heritage. Randy adds his input on this sentiment below:

Randy: "As my kids have gotten older, I've wanted to reconnect them, you know, with that heritage, and part of it is just learning more about my family. I didn't know, even as close as I was to my grandparents. You know, most of the time I was with them. I wouldn't ask the right questions, you know, kids just don't do that. And as they got older, my grandma wasn't always willing to share details. She just kind of kept things close to the chest."

Randy (On his son's academic choices): "He's working independently because he chose to pursue a trade after high school. And so he's working in heating and air conditioning. He really enjoys it, and it took me a while to get used to the idea because one of the things I always learned from my Italian grandparents is going to college or getting an education. There was never a question. It was just, you know, where I was going to go. He chose, you know, he chose not to pursue that path, which is fine, it works for him. The other three are probably college bound. They're interested in learning different things. But they don't want to really learn the language, they already have to learn a language now. Which of course, In ---- County Schools, they do not offer Italian. They didn't even offer it unfortunately, in Pittsburgh when I was in ninth grade there. Yeah, they're gonna study Spanish, I think. But we've been, I've been trying different things to connect them to the culture, you know, I talk using a little bit of Italian, every now and then. We will make different Italian dishes from time to time. I talk about what's going on in the country, because as a dual citizen I've been able to vote. And so I'll, you know, throw out things like the constitutional referendum that they just had."

Randy now takes more effort to cultivate an Italian identity within his children than he received from his own family as a child, as sharing the cultural traditions and knowledge of their ethnic roots seems vastly important to him. Many of his personal values are reflected in the lessons he learned from his grandparents. His focus on higher education stems from the values of his family, those which he associates with their Italian culture itself. Randy also discusses pressing on with the strong work ethic that his grandparents instilled in him, which is a trait commonly noted when referencing the Italian American community that settled in the region (Barkey,2011) Like Randy's son, many chose to work in skilled (and sometimes unskilled trades out of necessity), and were able to sizeably improve their economic and social statuses because of these endeavors.

Randy: “My grandfather was probably the person most important to me in my life. I mean, I still miss my grandfather, you know, I'll think about him and I'll still tear up years after he passed away, I was really close to him. And I remember I mean, he had very good English, but he obviously had an accent. And I just remember his stories about, you know, growing up and picking... you know, mushrooms, and going and harvesting chestnuts and talking about his mother, who he loved very much. And that story of him in Italy, and parts of dual citizenship, for me, is embracing that aspect of my heritage. I just, I love my grandfather, and, you know, to...you know, in some small way, just, you know, honor the culture, you know, from where he came in. So that's, that's part of it. Because I really identified with my Italian grandparents, and especially my grandfather.”

Randy's motivating factor for much of his interest in becoming engaged with his ethnic heritage obviously stems from the close relationship he had with his Italian grandfather and the desire to maintain part of his grandfather's legacy even after he has passed away. Randy seems to take great pride in the effort he put in to gain Italian citizenship, and he shows how much he values the authentication of his identity by making sure he is an actively involved citizen in his ancestral homeland. His desire to participate in his civic duty of voting and learn about the current issues the country faces furthers the importance of this engagement with his heritage. He attempts to keep his children abreast of these same things, versed in their ethnic cuisine, and aware of the Italian language. His efforts impress the importance in reproduction of culture and the familial connection to traditions. As is typical in later ethnically assimilated generations, his children do not seem to share the same level of enthusiasm for engaging in the ethnic tradition. They seem most engaged in the gastronomic side of the cultural connection, and this will most likely constitute the largest part of their connection to their Italian ethnicity, as it is the most readily available aspect of their ancestors' culture found within the Appalachian Region.

Michelle: “And then you also look at it like in this area, people kind of were like, what are they doing? You know, because it's not an everyday thing. When our family comes in to visit, we're all like, on the side of the road, like we meet them halfway.

We're all hugging and like kissing each other on the cheek, and people are like, what the hell's going on? It's just the thing that we've always done, you know?"

Michelle's family performs the traditional greetings and signs of affection stereotypical to Italians, and she specifically remarks on how these behaviors stand out in the region. She seems to take pride in the fact that these acts set her and her family apart, and she mentions that it is something that they've always done, presumably as a sociocultural performative tradition passed down along generations.

Randy: "And then yeah, and through my genealogy process, in my research, I've actually met relatives all over the world, which has brought like a whole new dimension of understanding Italian culture."

Randy: I would absolutely love to retire there. I love it. When I stepped into Decollatura, My grandfather's hometown for the first time, that's when I felt a connection. It was weird. It was like, wow, this is home. And I know, and I'm biasing myself because I you know, I looked at, you know, street maps on Google before going there. So I kind of know what, like, I knew of what my grandfather's church looked like, but nothing compared to what I got. Like, this is like home.

Familial connections and the ancestral homeland have been a large part of Randy's personal journey of ethnic understanding and his identity within the Italian community, be it in America or in Italy. He makes a concerted effort to draw meaning and purpose from his interactions with his family and his ancestral homeland. These connections he is forging seem to have a strong purpose in his overall identity construction, as his ties to his Italian grandparents and the meaning he found in those relationships were foundational in his understanding of self from an early age. Moving to his family's ancestral village will be another layer of the authenticity of Italian ethnicity that he seeks.

5.2 In-group Membership, Shared Origins and History

Salvatore (On meeting a fellow Italian American) : “And we were, we kind of started talking . Well, he was born in Italy. And one of his parents was Italian. One parent was from the US, but Italian. And he knew Italian. He spoke Italian, and we just met in the parking lot. But I mean, it was kind of neat, because he's from the same place. He's from Milan. I mean, it was just, it was just a really neat kind of thing. Yeah, yeah. I mean, when you start talking to people, it's, it's kind of interesting, you know, you're in airports or whatever. And you're, you know, you start... You're sitting next to someone, and, you know, if they strike up a conversation or whatever, and you notice their name, you know, it's something to it. It's something that generates a conversation.”

Salvatore seems to find the sense of comradery found in interactions with other Italians to be a satisfying part of the endeavour. He describes himself later in the interview as a person who is “not the most social”, but the connections he is able to make with others based on their shared ethnic roots and experiences seem to be very valuable to him. Being able to use his mother tongue and communicate with an individual hailing from the same region in Italy is a surprise enjoyment that he has predominantly found outside of the Appalachian area. Performing parts of ethnic heritage, such as using language and interacting with others who might have similar bases of knowledge in which to connect is an important aspect in reinforcing ethnic identity and fulfilling socio-cultural needs.

Michelle: “I would just like to kind of trace the roots. I know doing the “Battista” family history, there was even kind of like a royalty involved. And I would like to dig more into that. They're in like the boot, the heel of Italy. There's a town called the Battista. And I would really like to go there, like ‘Hey, I'm a Battista!’.”

Salvatore: “Well, I didn't like history until we ran the DNA test. And I got all this stuff back. And I'm like, How in the hell did this happen to? You? You know, and then having been there and seen it, and then understanding the history, it makes a lot more sense why things are the way they are. Yeah. But I think it's really cool. I mean, I can read history all the time. I mean, it's, it's really interesting.”

Both Salvatore and Michelle found renewed interest in their ethnic heritage and the histories surrounding their ancestral homelands after they took DNA tests and received information on their genetic backgrounds. They seem to feel that understanding their genetic and migratory histories can help inform them about their roots, heritage, and the connections which still remain in Italy, as well as identity and cultural issues that exist today.

(In response to the questions “What does being Italian American in Appalachia mean to you? Do you feel like it makes you stand apart, or is it just another part of your identity? Or is it anything special to you being specifically Italian American? Or Appalachian?”)

Rita: Well, actually, I see myself as both, you know, because I want to keep the Italian heritage, because that was my mother. Okay. And then my dad was American. So you know, I want to keep that heritage for him, you know. So I'm the same myself both ways.....But I'm just me, you know, I don't really say hey, I'm the assignment, whatever, I'm just me, you know.

Michelle: “Um, it kind of drifts away, more being like the Appalachian side more than the Italian side, it seems.”

Rita: “Well, I kinda like it. Kind of like that I am. But really, as far as thinking any different about the other, like I said, I'm just me, I don't really go there (to Italy). You know, I'm proud to be an Italian, and I'm proud to be an American and you know, and I'm so thankful now that I can actually see my family and got to meet my family and I wished I could have done it when my mother was living, but that didn't happen.”

Randy: “I can, I can be proud, I don't have to force on other people. But I can be proud of my heritage and I like my family to be proud of my heritage, too. But I'm also proud to be an American. But you know, at the same time talking about being ethnocentric, I try not to be ethnocentric.”

Randy: “And you know, I'm also a basically a second generation American and those ties, those ties to Italy over the time of my growth as a young person, I think have become kind of frayed. I didn't have as much of a connection as I had with my grandparents when they were gone. I didn't have much of a connection.”

Salvatore: “I mean, it's just, I don't think about it that much. Yeah, because it's just, it seems like it's just such a part of you. Yeah, it just kind of is, right? I mean, just you... just you're raised a certain way, and you're around certain things, you don't you don't really think of it as being, you know, different.”

Both Rita and Michelle have a sense of pride revolving around having ethnically Italian backgrounds, in Rita's case because it represents familial connection

and respect. However, they both also feel that the Appalcahian heritage is a large part of what makes up their personal identities as the “lived” identity. This is a common theme, as assimilation has been especially strong for Italians in the United States, and possibly even more so when the individuals live in a predominately white, Protestant area such as southern Appalachia where both of these ladies were born and raised. Although Randy feels like his connections to his Italian heritage have waned since the death of his grandparents, he also makes strong efforts to rekindle the ethnic belonging in new ways. Randy feels impassioned by his Italian ethnic identity and inclusion and wants to share his pride outwardly without running into the issue of having his positive feelings and personal pride be understood as feeling ethnically superior. He also feels this same pride in being an American, which can also be seen as ethnocentric if not acted on in a culturally responsive way. Though the line between ethnic pride and ethnocentrism and supremacy is not incredibly fine, many choose to err on the side of caution in a time when people are sensitive to the issues of prejudice and minority oppression.

For Salvatore who was born in Italy, the Italian aspect of his identity is such a part of his every day lived experience that it does not feel like something he has to work to maintain or achieve as some of the other study participants have mentioned in relation to their Italian ethnic identity and sense of authenticity. This notion does coincide with the Gans theory presented earlier which posits that “the immigrant experience and adjustment in the lives of the first two generations may have been more important than the ethnic experience.” Salvatore’s everyday life is not spent questioning and working to maintain his identity, but rather works in the background as more immediate aspects of survival and social inclusion are focused upon.

Randy (On family traditions):“But other than that, it wasn't so much Italian as it was Americana by that time. And I think that was partially by my grandparents’ design, They really wanted to become Americans. And my grandmother, she was Italian. She was born in Pittsburgh. And for her, she had always been an American, nothing else. She never set foot in Italy.

Despite the fact that ethnically, Randy's grandmother was part of the Italian community, she largely ignored this aspect of her identity in order to further assimilate into the American cultural landscape. She did not share with her grandson the personal drive for connection to the community and did not work to reproduce any significant ethnic aspect of heritage in her own family. This rejection of ethnic labels and cultural adherence does ring true to the theory that while ethnicity has ascribed characteristics, there is also a voluntary, achieved aspect to it as well. Identity itself can be fluid, and for some, this means suppressing or disregarding certain parts of their identity which they feel are not important to them. This can be very true with ethnicity, as individuals work to distance themselves from certain aspects of their culture.

5.3 Cultural Traditions and Social Groups - Importance of Socialization and Maintaining Connections

Rita (On talking with Italian family members on a regular basis): "I'm sorry to say I don't. I really don't. But I do, you know, get on Facebook and see what my family is doing as far as what they put on Facebook. I like to keep the pictures and stuff, I really enjoy that. I don't get on and talk or anything like that. But my daughters do, they talk to them. But I just hadn't really done any of that, No."

Despite the fact that Rita does not actively seek out closer familial connections with relatives back in Italy through social media, she spoke at length about meeting the family members the first time she visited Italy and had a great deal of positive comments about the culture she was able to experience with them on her trip. She seems to value the ties she had with her mother and the cultural traditions she learned from her more than continuing to deepen the relationships with distant relatives. However, it is apparent that these ties do mean a good deal to her as she keeps the

pictures that her extended family post on social media, which highlights the importance of Rita feels in chronicling their lives.

Randy: “For all the things I love about ---city---, there just isn't really anything in terms of things connecting me to the Italian American culture. So you know what I use? I use technology. You know, remember Facebook groups. I'm a part of some, you know, close to people in Pittsburgh. I've got a little group of friends here. I can study Italian politics and read Italian, and order books in Italian. So it's like I'm in my own little Italian American enclave In ----- County. Yeah. So again, for all the great things you know, ----city----, ---- County are, it's just not a strong area for Italian Americans. And so in order to keep that connection, and you know how to build that connection for my kids. There really isn't a community way to do it here. So it's going to be all up to me.”

Randy's modern effort to connect to other Italian Americans impresses the need for comradeship and a connection to an ethnic community he holds valuable. Facebook and other social media services provide a platform in which Randy and others can preserve their heritage digitally without concern over geographic regions. Randy's identity formation is spurred by his desire to conserve the final vestiges of Italian culture within his city's area, so he may be encouraged to hold onto parts of his heritage out of a sense of responsibility and the desire to pass this cultural knowledge to his children. He is also connecting to other Italian Americans close to his former home in northern Appalachia, evidence of the strong regional ties and connections an individual can have in relation to regional heritage and shared spheres of ethnic understanding.

Salvatore:”Right. I don't think in our area. I know there were a lot of Italians in West Virginia for coal mining. We knew some families from the church, right. And their family was from West Virginia, but his granddad or someone came over to work in

coal mining. You know, I don't know, there's like I said, there's not too many people in the south, you know, of Italian descent. But if you go...the further north you go I think there's a lot more.”

As the only interviewee who grew up in the United States as an Italian born in Italy and whose family migrated recently in comparison to the other participants, it seemed as though Salvatore was the least familiar with the large amount of Italian migrants who did settle in Appalachia. The participants who were further away from their Italian roots generationally seemed to be more aware of the longer history and impact Italian Americans had in the region, though this may be because they had the time to develop multi-generational relationships with other Italians in the areas in which they lived. Salvatore also highlights the Catholic Church as a place where valuable social connections are made with other Italian Americans in the area, despite what he sees as a scarcity in the region of those sharing his ethnic background.

Randy: “So I, you know, I look back and I see, you know, Italian American friends of mine back there, you know, they go to bocce tournaments, so they're a part of Italian American clubs, and things like that. And even back in grad school, a friend of mine, at the time, she was Italian American, she was from Youngstown, Ohio, she was very much ingrained in that culture of wanting to speak Italian and being a member of one of those clubs. And it was just...so it was of some interest when I was growing up, but not a huge interest. Now, ironically, in my state of life now where I am now, I'm not you know, worried about, you know, getting married or you know, finding a job or whatever, I would be much more into that now, if I was in Pittsburgh.

Frank: “We belong to the Italian Sons and Daughters of America. You know, basically like the Moose Club, but it was more of a dinner club. You know, that's where you went for dinner. It wasn't much more than that, dinner and drinking. Basically, they were more social clubs than anything else. It was just a place for people to meet. I belonged to another one that was a part of what's called the Willock

Social Club. But these were, you know, these were social clubs that weren't really, you didn't know that there was an Italian part to it, is I guess what I'm saying. They were so Americanized by my age.”

Despite the fact that many of the Italian heritage clubs are more socially orientated than heritage centered in actuality, participating in them indicates a clear desire to socialize with others of the same ethnic background with whom one would presumably have something in common because of their shared roots. The Italian Sons and Daughter of America is one of the oldest and most widespread social and philanthropic organizations in the United States, and being part of this group means that there was an obvious desire to seek out others in a social setting who shared the same ethnic background. There seems to be some disappointment when Frank speaks about the fact that the clubs were Americanized and are not as closely affiliated with ethnic heritage as he would have enjoyed. Randy emphasizes the fact that joining a social group such as the ones his friend was a part of would be incredibly valuable to him culturally in current times, however he notes that if he were back in Pittsburgh this would be something he could pursue, as there are no large Italian heritage groups present in the local southern Appalachian area.

Frank (On Family Ties to the Mafia): “I had a cousin go to jail. For, yes, for that. We called them the rackets. Okay, wasn't the mafia. It was the rackets. And everybody was so proud of him because he didn't name names. Yes, he was a good guy cuz he didn't name names. And, um, so yeah, I worked in a grocery store. And I had one cousin come in. Again, all my cousins were much older than me. And one came in, in a black suit, black shirt, white tie. And it's like, can you broadcast this anymore? But now I know, I never had any contact with anyone directly, saying, you know, we, you are part of the family. You know, that never ever happened to me. But I knew it was part of a family. You just sort of didn't talk about it. I don't think my family was highly involved in it whatsoever.”

The Mafia followed Italian immigrants to the United States in the same way as many other cultural institutions. Members tended to maintain their social connections with others in the homeland and resumed their illegal activities in similar capacities once they found themselves settled. The highly honor-bound nature of the Mafia created the idyllic image of stoic mafiosos defiant in the face of the law that some in Frank's family seemed to admire. There seems to be a clear juxtaposition between the pride and shame of being involved with such an organization. However, there is something to be said for the cultural and ethnically centered aspects of being part of an organization such as the mafia. A trust was built between members first and foremost on shared ethnic backgrounds, and then went on to include the loyalty and service expected to be given to the "family".

5.4 Religion

Rita: "On the Italian side, you know, they were Catholics, of course, but my mom explained a lot of that to me, but I'm a Freewill Baptist. So I go with the Appalachian side of it, you know, and I, you know, I don't say that hers is wrong, or you know. But basically, she said to her the only description she said that she felt like she actually went to Free Will Baptists. In later years, she said they did recognize Mary. And we don't, I mean, we recognize her, but we don't put her on par with God, you know. So that was one thing she said was different. But she said Mary was, was his mother. So why wouldn't they recognize her? Well, you know, valid point, you know, but, and she is recognized, but she's not put in the same category as the lord is."

Rita identifies as a Protestant, aligned opposite the largely Catholic heritage of her family. While many immigrants retain the religion of their homeland, a method of assimilation is to integrate into the dominant faith of the region they now call home. In southern Appalachia especially, anti-Catholic sentiment, or at least a distrust for the religion remains to this day. On forms found in the region which inquire about religion, the Catholic faith is often listed as separate from the option of "Christian",

for instance, so there is almost a sense of “othering” that takes place in regards to those who follow Catholicism in the region. Rita’s choice to align with her Appalachian father’s religion may speak to the paternal relationship or the side of the family she more deeply relates to, however.

Frank (On Pennsylvania Appalachia) “It's Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, with Alabama in between. You know, it really is pretty much like that. When you get into the smaller communities, you don't know that you're not, you're starting to see the same Appalachia, but a little bit different, more of a Catholic Appalachia than a Baptist, is what I guess you're going to find. You're going to find the church festivals, you know, instead of, instead of the revivals, the church, the Catholic churches are going to be very central in most of these communities. But other than that, it's, I would say, it's all basically the same thing. That's my experience with that part of Appalachian in this part.”

Frank: “ I grew up in a suburban church. Okay, um, most of the Italian churches are gone in Pittsburgh. It was like each region, at a church, different church on the counter, you know, on a different corner. That was particularly true with the south side of Pittsburgh, where the Eastern Europeans settled, you would have the Czech church here, the Slovak church here, the Serbian church here, you know, they’d be on the same corner but they're all big Catholic churches. But I guess the Catholic Church basically couldn't support these churches anymore, which I think caused a lot of problems because you know, which one's gonna win? I guess the church where my mother grew up, you know, I drove by it a couple years ago. You know, that it has an Irish saint on it, but it's no longer an Irish saint name. But the Irish saint is still plastered on the side of the building. I guess they won't take St. Lawrence off the building, but it's not St. Lawrence church anymore. I guess simply because the community changed enough that there's not enough Irish in that community anymore.”

Randy: “Now, on the other hand, you've got churches and Catholic churches that are, you know, closing by the droves, but there's still a presence of Italian Americans who still have their traditions, they still go to Mass. Maybe they don't go multiple times a week, like our cousins in Italy, but they still go. And so they still have - they still practice family traditions around Christmas, Seven Fishes, maybe they do other things as well. So there, I think there are small things that become part of a family's culture. Um, we still have that taking place, but other aspects of the culture just because of the degrees of assimilation at this point, they become more and more frayed.”

For Frank and Randy both who grew up in and around the Pittsburgh area, they saw the inter-ethnic conflict found in urban communities manifested in the shifting landscape of churches across the city. As each ethnic enclave built their own Catholic church, competition was undoubtedly fierce for local converts and their tithes. The association of specific ethnic saints with specific churches served almost as a flag hoisted above the steeple. As Frank mentions, interest in the church seems to have waned and the official body of the church can no longer support the volume of competition previously present in the region. This consolidation of religious authority provides an interesting struggle for ethnic dominance in each church's sphere of influence. Randy attributes some of this decline to the assimilation of ethnic groups in the area which results in forgoing some of the more strict attendance expectations for Catholic Mass as found in earlier generations of Catholic adherents.

Frank's own attendance in Catholic church marks the faith as an important foundation in the Italian American ethnic identity, even in Appalachia. He marks the distinction between north and south further by discussing the greater adherence to Protestantism in southern Appalachia. He mentions how Catholic mass is replaced in the south with revivals, a series of Christian religious services held to inspire active members of a church body to gain new converts. While southern Appalachia has very few Catholic churches in comparison to the northern areas of the region, many Italians in the local areas still frequent the church as a place to express their faith, perform

their ethnic identity roles, and socialize with others who share their religious backgrounds and heritage.

Frank(On Religious Violence): “They left there because of the Klan. Basically, the Catholic priest in town was killed. So that's when they decided they had to get out of there. After being there that long they knew that they had to get out of there.”

Ethnic and religious dominance came to a head during the Klan's reign of terror over Catholics in the Appalachian South. Protestant/Catholic conflict has a history too long to discuss in full within this work, but animosity between the faiths was not lost on the journey to the new world. The Klu Klux Klan was aligned with white, conservative, Protestants who violently opposed many outgroups within the United States including African Americans, Catholics, members of the LGBTQ community, and any not seen as part of the majority. In Frank's family history, it seems that the terrorist actions of the Klan worked to force them to flee. This was obviously a sore point for Frank as he considered the loss of connection to a place with generations of cultural heritage to senseless violence as a tragic personal loss.

Michelle: “We were heavily into like the Catholicism by going to church and going to the masses and everything. But since then, I've kind of drifted away from that. I do find that like, family is a big thing. I always like to keep them close. And I know that Italians tend to do that. And family is a big part of their everyday life. We always try to do like a dinner. But it's not like orthodox, you know, like, they would do it every day. I've heard stories of my great grandparents, every Sunday, the whole family would come over to their house, he would cut the young ones' hair, and then they would have a big dinner and kind of, they had a statue of Mary in their yard. And they would kind of do like a little church thing at their house. And I would love to have been a part of that. I would love to have met them, but I never got the chance to.”

Michelle seems to have developed some amount of guilt for her inability to maintain the religious traditions that preceded her, indicating the importance of these

traditions in her idea of ethnic authenticity. The comment “Italians tend to do that” indicates that she feels pressure to perform the activities and rituals associated with Italians, and more importantly that she classifies herself as an Italian who is successful in this area of ethnic performativity and cultural adherence. The personal nature of the family religion is interesting here, as it is a departure from traditional Italian tradition associated with the Catholic Church. Instead of taking the family one and all to the nearest mass, they organized their own form of worship by combining cultural and familial traditions. There still notably include tokens from the Catholic faith (the statue of the Virgin Mary), but the religion is followed in a personal and smaller fashion.

Rita: “But when I went there, when we went to Rome and stuff, they have very much respect. You know, I mean, we don't do that way here. I mean, sure we believe in the Lord and we respect - Well, people should far as that goes, but I think ...Nobody fears God anymore as far as that goes. They was more reverent. You know, it was more... I don't know how to explain it. But I just saw a lot of respect there. When we went through the cathedrals and all that stuff. That here a lot of times, we don't have.”

Here, Rita points out a noticeable difference in the ethnic performativity in religious contexts found in Italy as opposed to Appalachia. Protestant churches in southern Appalachia tend to be held in smaller, humble buildings with limited congregants, much in opposition to the larger Catholic Basilicas found throughout Rome. Despite drawing individuals of equal faith, cultural tradition may play a large role in the differences in religious performativity between Italy and Appalachia.

5.5 What's in a name? Ethnic Pride in Names

(In response to the question of whether or not the participants immediately notice when acquaintances carry an Italian name)

Salvatore: “Yes, for sure. I do notice their names, yeah.

(And do you feel any kind of connection to them because of that?)

Salvatore: “You can always strike up a conversation. Right? So I mean, it depends on what part of the country like in the northeast, well, I mean, it's not that big a deal, right? Because it's like, the Salvatore part might be different, but the last name is kind of like... there's a lot of Italian last names. Or even California, but usually, you know, you can start talking to people and they'll, you know, they'll tell you, you know, yeah, my great great grandparents came over, my grandparents came over. Yeah. When you grow up with the name Salvatore Pascio in East Tennessee, you're gonna talk about that some because yeah, you're gonna get....that's not gonna go unnoticed, right?”

Randy: “When I see somebody like with an Italian name, immediately, you know, it piques my curiosity.”

Both Salvatore and Randy feel that a visible indicator like an ethnically Italian last name is something that creates the opportunity for connection, conversation, and comradery. Even when the other individual is not Italian him or herself, there is still the opportunity to share parts of the pride held in having the Italian ethnicity. Though Italian names are not very common in southern Appalachia, they are more prevalent in the northern parts of the region and further up the northern coast. In places where Italian names are more common, sharing one in common might not be an instant conversation starter as it may be in the south. Salvatore experienced having such a ethnically apparent name as something that made him stand out in particular while growing up in Northeast Tennessee.

Randy: “You know, I wish I had the Italian last name. You know, I feel much closer to the Pascios. I didn't grow up with the Elliots.And to be honest, yeah, maybe it's

jealousy. I feel envious that my first cousins in Wisconsin, you know, get to have the Pascio name, get to have the Italian name. You know, my grandmother's family have the Pascio name. Because I feel much more Italian, feel more connected. Now I'm legally an Italian, but I've got this you know generic Irish name.”

Randy again ties his ethnic identity and authenticity as a member of the group to his connection with his Italian family heritage, this time through his surname. He feels that his Irish last name does not capture a significant and important part of his personal and social identity. Even as he takes other steps toward authenticity, such as gaining his Italian citizenship, he still feels as though his recognition as an Italian, both internally and externally, have not been fully realized or satisfied.

5.6 Food

Rita : “Lasagna? Lasagna? Spaghetti? My mother, you know, made it for seven of us and a lot of times, you never know. Uh, well, I guess she just could come up with everything. She would make peas and spaghetti, now those were delicious. She made garbanzo beans with spaghetti. That was great. She made potatoes and macaronis together. And she also made, let me think now. Of course she made spaghetti. I probably told you that. But it was like soup beans. If you had soup beans, and you had some leftovers, she would put those with spaghetti and that's really great. I mean, she knew how to do it. We would have different foods, you know? Yeah, I would say it usually involved pasta though.”

At Rita’s family table, her mother would take traditional Italian food and blend it with local fare in order to make ends meet. The use of pasta preserved both the family’s budget and cultural heritage, and the combination of traditional meals like spaghetti with potatoes and beans reflected the local subsistence agriculture that many

still enjoy in the region. Soup beans is a colloquial term that some may know as pinto beans. Endemic to Southern Appalachia, soup beans were and continue to be a staple for many, usually served alongside cornbread and onion. It is considered to be a dish that arose out of poverty as the ingredients are inexpensive and plentiful in the region. The resourceful fusion of traditional dishes with local affordable options demonstrates the creativity in which new immigrants to Appalachia employ to survive. The culture surrounding soup beans serves as a litmus test for potential outsiders as well, as the methods of preparation, garnish, and serving all act as telltale signs that one is or is not local.

Frank: “I don't know much about my father at all. He died when I was very young. But um, I was sort of raised by a mother in the Italian side of the family. So they made sure that you know, I understood the foods, you know? Eating octopus, eating squid is nothing to me, you know. It will probably turn off a lot of people but you know, that's food. It's good food if you eat it.”

Frank experienced intentional efforts by his family to keep their distinct food culture and to continue the traditional offerings of an Italian table. The consumption of octopus and squid is quite rare among many ethnic groups within the United States, but the transfer of Italian cuisine was actively maintained in the form of these rare delicacies. In order to gain access to these kinds of specialty ethnic foods, one would have to have community connections to know where to get the products which might often need to be imported. To young families, squid and octopus could prove to be quite expensive, so taking steps to ensure it was introduced to his palette shows the high priority of food in their identity as a family. Cultivating a traditional taste within their children offered a way to preserve their heritage long after they are gone. Ochs and Shohet (2006) write about mealtimes as an “important site for the reproduction of culture, the shaping of identity, taste, relationships and affirmation of social order”, as ethnic food and the process and ritual of taking meals exposes individuals to traditions, social understandings, and cultural awarenesses which are “carried through life and signal identity and continuity with the past.” (Fellin, 2014).

5.7 Language

(Does your daughter seem like she's interested in the culture and the history of your heritage?)

Salvatore: “Not at all. (laughs) I just don't think thatI mean she's....maybe later she'll she'll have more interest, but right now she doesn't.

(Do you speak some Italian to her, you said?)

Salvatore: “ I tried to when she was little, but she didn't want to. (imitates daughter) ‘No Dad, I want to speak English!’ So you just kind of gave up.”

Michelle: “I purchased, back when cassettes were a thing, an Italian tape to learn. I mean, I've always been interested.”

Frank: “They gave me a book when I was a kid. They gave me a book. Okay, I want to tell you ‘Here, read this’. I was probably learning to read Pinocchio in Italian.”

Randy: “Part of this I really enjoy, it's a mixture of a family and research and it's personal, challenging, connecting my kids to a culture. And since then, and I suppose how you found me, I've been trying to learn how to speak Italian, which has been very, very difficult. I can carry on some basic conversations, I can probably read a little better than I can comprehend. I can speak it a little, but it's difficult for me to process spoken Italian. It's just I've been doing it for a few years. I've tried different methods, but it's a challenge for me to master.”

Each of the participants have made it evident that a language shift and the step away from using their ancestral mother tongue has happened in their lives and is continuing to take place with their children, who are becoming more and more separated from the language and the culture as time goes by. Some, like Randy, chose to take an active role in keeping the linguistic and cultural traditions alive, while others like Salvatore take a more relaxed, nuanced approach with his own children. Michelle is interested in cultivating this part of her ethnic heritage, while Rita is more hands off and has chosen not to pursue the linguistic part of their ethnic roots and let it become an almost invisible facet in her everyday lived identity.

These statements also situate Italian language learning as a desired aspect of ethnic authenticity and a prized challenge to pursue. Randy seems to feel there is incredible personal value in speaking the family's ancestral language, and he tries to use this to connect his own children to their ethnic heritage. The concept that it is a challenge for him goes back to the lack of exposure he had to the language as a child when his grandparents chose not to speak to him in Italian as they made efforts to assimilate him and themselves, and language loss in later generations of Italian Americans is quite a common finding.

5.8 Contemporary Sentiments on Ethnicity

Frank: "I think more and more people are just becoming Americans. I think you're gonna see the families keep tradition, like Night of Seven fishes. You know, things like that won't go away. The first communions? I don't, you know, I think those have even faded since I was a kid. First Communion was a big thing. I don't think it is anymore. You know, it's just part of growing up now. I think, in some ways, that's a shame, but I just think that's the way the world now is. Everything is so blended. You

know, there's not that identity anymore. People losing that identity. Yeah. Don't care about that identity, as well. You know, which is sad in a way, but possibly good in a way. I don't know.”

The disappearance of traditions and culture is seen as bittersweet in Frank’s interview as he weighs the benefits of integration with the preservation of cultural heritage. Ethnic identity and the uniqueness that differences in the traditions around those identities bring seem to be something that Maiké values very much. He does seem to believe that there are some cultural traditions which will remain in their distilled forms, such as the religious and gastronomic tradition of the Feast of Seven Fishes. This is possible because even individuals may assimilate ethnically, some of the cultural carryovers which revolve around more permanent structures such as food and religion may continue on.

Salvatore: “You know, when I went to elementary school and high school and ,you know, middle school, I was the only Italian kid in the class which is, you know, usually good, but sometimes maybe not. I mean, you're going to draw attention in one way or the other, because everybody else was from here. But here, you know, you have to fit in with everybody around you. And so you just start learning about things that, you know, you live in Tennessee, you're going to go fishing, you're going to go hunting, you're going to go do stuff outdoors, you're going to go hike and do stuff, I mean, you're not going to do things that you would do somewhere else. And the cool thing was that the kind of things that we do in Tennessee are the kind of things that people do back in Italy, in the area where my parents are from, where I'm from, because it's in the mountains, and they do a lot of outdoorsy stuff. It's not super crowded. It's not you know, like, it's not a big city environment, the big city's an hour away, which is a lot further than, you know, Tennessee is a lot further away from. ---city--- is not big compared to Milan. Milan's like a couple million people. It's just a whole different thing. But in some ways it's not, it's pretty similar.”

The commonalities that Salvatore finds with his Italian region inspire him to embrace Appalachia and the regional heritage it brings. The outdoor activities and geographic aspects found near his home are quite similar to his homeland, and this made the transition for him and the embrace of the culture much more possible than if his family settled in a completely unfamiliar terrain. He speaks about the need to fit in with those around him, and as a first generation Italian American, this integration or assimilation into the local culture seems to be very important to him.

Salvatore: “I think as people, the longer they're here, we become more American and less whatever we were before. I think there's some efforts lately, you know, people are trying to, you know, hang on to their heritage and things like that, which is cool. But I think in general, you know, people are going to lose the language. I can just see that happening with my daughter because I don't speak Italian enough to her to get her to learn it. I think it just kind of you just kind of drift towards everybody. You kind of melt together which is kind of the US. That's the whole point of the US right? I mean, you don't want everyone to have their own identity. That's what causes a lot of problems.”

Salvatore's discussion of modern ethnic relations raises some interesting questions. His remark about the construction of unique identity being a problem could be interpreted in a negative context, but it is also possible that he sees assimilation into the melting pot as a positive part of the United States' makeup. Like Randy's family, assimilation is the goal of many immigrants. The ability to successfully integrate into a new land is a source of pride for some, despite the loss of personal history. Salvatore sees ethnic integration as an inevitability, rather than a force to be fought or embraced. This could be influenced by his unique status as a first-generation Italian American, so it could be possible that the pressures of integration are more powerful and harder to resist than for some who have already experienced some assimilation and are now comfortable with their identity status.

Randy: “So many Italians have immigrated to America and have assimilated you know, as Americans. But it's hard to see any, like major accomplishment, whether it's in education or infrastructure and bridge building, or healthcare. And you always see these Italian names all the time. And so to that degree, you know, Italian American say came here, in large numbers, when they did, they served as cheap labor, but a lot of them realize the American dream and reach the pinnacle of American society. And to a greater or lesser degrees, they have kept in touch with Italy, and, you know, with families and culture there, although, you know, the idea of America is and, you know, some people might quibble with this in today's times, you know, I won't go down that road. But you've got, you've got people who are just becoming successful Americans.

Here, Randy speaks to the continued assimilation of Italians into American culture, but not without recognizing the individual and societal contributions that many Italian Americans have made in the region and in the country as a whole. He discusses the continued connection between Italian Americans and those back in Italy, both in a cultural and familial sense.

Salvatore (On ethnicity in Italy): There are no real....there's no like *real* Italians. They're all...everybody that's there came from somewhere else.

Salvatore's construction of the Italian ethnic identity based on place of birth is interesting considering the idea that ethnicity is believed by many to be a created or imagined set of criteria to denote group belonging and is often fluid in nature and only has meaning because we impart meaning on it.

5.9 Marginalization and Discrimination

Salvatore: I mean, I'll just put it out there like some of the kids picked on me. Of course because you know, you're telling about, you know, stories and you sound funny and all these kinds of things. So, I mean, I get it. Kids nowadays are, you know, the same as back then. I see with my daughter, she's 13. They're mean, and they pick on each other. I mean, that's just teenage kids. It's something you just have to get over. I mean, you can't dwell on it. I mean, a lot amongst everybody else was cool. There's always a few people that are going to not be cool. That's just kind of how it is.

Randy: “We could just like slam each other with ethnic jokes. It was all in great fun. You know, nobody was ever offended. We just laughed and laughed and laughed. You know, that was a different time, though.”

Both Salvatore and Randy addressed the forms of discrimination they experienced throughout their childhoods, but they seemed to interpret them in different ways. Because the Italian ethnic identity was not the only aspect of identity important to Randy as a child, he was able to absorb the stereotypical jokes and made them his own, rather than letting them affect him in any resonating way. For Salvatore, however, this was not as easy. As a first generation Italian American who had immigrated at a young age, his ethnic identity may have constituted a larger part of his world view, especially with parents who may have been experiencing their own version of “othering” in the community. He was not as able to let the comments roll off his back so easily, but he came to terms with the idea that other children can oftentimes be cruel and are not shy about pointing out and making fun of any differences they see in others. For Salvatore, his first language is Italian and his name is noticeably different from many in this area, and these characteristics provided perfect fuel for other children to grasp hold of.

Rita: “They sent us to church. And I remember them going to church and taking us. But someone said something at one of the churches about mom's culture and about her being Catholic or whatever. And he never went back because, you know, that really upset him because, you know, that was his wife. I mean, you know, so that he didn't go to church for a long time. My uncle was a preacher. And really and truly, that bothered me for a long time that he didn't go back.”

For Rita, her experience with the discrimination geared toward her mother was something that deeply affected her and her father. Because the comments made toward her mother were both culturally disparaging and religiously insensitive, they had a lasting negative effect on her family. Even though her father attended Baptist church, Rita's mother joined him there in good faith despite her Catholic views. It was made clear that others in the church community had prejudices against her because of her ethnicity, cultural differences, and her religious practices which did not fit in with the majority white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture in the region. Despite the fact that African Americans and other minority groups have been steadily moving into the area for decades, this kind of ethnic discrimination and othering is unfortunately still found often in the southern Appalachian Region and speaks to the insular nature of the majority population in the area.

6

Concluding Chapter: Rethinking Italian American Identities in the Appalachian Context

6.1 Summary of Findings

Many of the concepts explored within this research aligned very closely with ethnic identity research conducted with other populations in other areas despite some of the unique characteristics found in the region. Family connections, language traditions, and gastronomic heritage were the most readily spoken about and the most accessible concepts. Marginalizations and discrimination were either downplayed or unexperienced in great measure, and more contentious areas such as religion were more often spoken about in broader terms instead of capturing the full experience of what it means to be an adherent to a minority faith in the region. Politics were avoided almost in entirety, which was not entirely unexpected in such a politically charged time and in a very conservative region.

It was clear early on in the study that there is still ongoing debate on what constitutes the Appalachian Region. Though the definitive expert in the matter the Appalachian Regional Commission makes clear that the representative area follows the Appalachian Mountain chain from northern Georgia all the way up to the southern parts of New York, many of the stereotype which surround the region are based on the rural southern subregion, which is much more insular in many aspects than the corresponding northern regions. This did seem to play a large role in how my participants viewed themselves, their community ties, their access to ethnically relevant cultural activities, and their connections to both the Italian ethnicity and the Appalachian Region as a whole. Individuals from the northern regions consistently seemed to have more knowledge about Italian American heritage

and cultural practice than did those in the south, as well as having more contact with other members of the Italian American community.

All but one of my participants were 2nd to 4th generation Italian Americans, with only one participant born in Italy and transplanting to America at a very young age. Family connections served as an indicator for many of the participants' feelings of connection to the ethnic background and regional identities. When the interviewees were asked to speak a little bit about their background, they almost always began with their familial connections to Italy and worked their way up to the present generation. Self concept is not created in a vacuum, and it is clear that family membership and the values instilled in them, ethnic or otherwise, played a large role in helping expose individuals to concepts used to create their identities and build meaning.

All of the participants took some form of pride based on their ethnic background and connections to other members within the culture. These connections seemed to be valuable to them as they used these relationships to help create, understand, and maintain their ethnic identities. These connections could be within heritage-based social groups, church organizations, or with new acquaintances met over shared interest in Italian culture or in the shared ethnic background itself.

It was also very clear that previous research which debated on whether or not Appalachians should be considered their own ethnic group has some very interesting points. Appalachian identity does indeed have many similarities to an ethnic group identity. This salient concept is incredibly important when considering the group cohesion and cultural institutions which are present in the area. Again, while the groups in the region are not homogeneous racially or by country of initial origin, settlers have been in these areas for hundreds of years, and this has developed a regional uniqueness

not found outside Appalachia. However, it should be again noted that northern, central, and southern Appalachia have decidedly different cultural characteristics, and if the region were to be framed in an ethnic perspective, it may be more helpful to classify the region into these 3 separate areas.

As far as language is concerned, there were also many similarities found with previous research on the matter. First generation Italian Americans who came to the United States often did not speak English fluently, or even the “high” Italian language of their home country. Instead, they came to their new country using dialect brought from the various regions of their origins as their everyday means of communication. First generation migrants typically spoke in their native tongue to their children, while the second generation children were already beginning the assimilation process and would often prefer to speak English outside of the home. By the time the third generation was being raised, they were often monolingual English speakers who had lost the connection to their Italian language heritage (Fellin, 2014). When discussing what on the outside may seem to be “weak language loyalty”, it often seemed to observers that the language shift and loss happened exceptionally fast. For a population that came to the United States without a strong national identity in place, made apparent by the many different dialects spoken, it may have been an easy choice to begin giving up their mother tongues in exchange for English. These sentiments, coupled with the “discrimination, pressure to assimilate, exogamous marriages, and lack of institutional support” may have been an accelerant for a process that tends to naturally occur over longer periods of time (ibid).

Much of the research on language loss through assimilation and shift also held special relevance in the experience of my interviewees. Every one that I interviewed with the exception of the first generation Italian American had not been exposed to enough of the language to achieve fluency. One important difference from the research however, was that many of the 3rd

generation Italian Americans felt a loss at not being exposed to the language and felt a resurging desire to learn to speak it. The majority said they had made efforts to learn some of the language, as it was a connection to the past and their heritage, but also as a way to open doors and make connections in the modern world, especially in relation to travel, familial ties, and socializational accessibility.

Identity was also expressed through food choices, which were a very common aspect to study. While some of the participants maintained a close cultural tie to their Italian roots through their food choices and meal taking practices, still others showed strong signs of the blending of ethnic and regional culture practices in the common dishes they created. For the participants who expressed more assimilation into the regional Appalachian culture, their food also reflected this. Italian dishes were mixed with common Appalachian staples, and a new fusion cooking was born that mirrored the cultural changes which were taking place.

Contemporary sentiment about the state of the Italian American ethnic group held both optimistic and pessimistic viewpoints. Many of the interviewees felt that the Italian ethnic groups are on the decline, as more and more people give up some of their cultural tradition in order to assimilate into mainstream America, a process that has been happening for decades. They spoke about traditions and the language disappearing, though many were personally trying to ensure that they kept the language alive in their own lives.

The overarching theme apparent during this research is that there is no singular Italian American identity in Appalachia, as it is a sociocultural, fluid, lived aspect comprised of understandings specific to time, place, and circumstance. Each participant had a vastly different ethnic experience and connection to their identity, some embracing the Italian aspects more and

some the Appalachian, but often finding them overlapping in surprising and interesting ways.

6.2 Limitations, Future Research, and Concluding Remarks

Limitations

The research conducted in this paper had many externally imposed limitations due to the Covid-19 virus. My ability to make contacts, conduct group interviews or individual interviews in person, complete ethnographic fieldwork, or even visit the local library to do background research on the subjects severely constrained my choices in how I could conduct my reach, who I could retain as a participant, and how I would then analyze my data. My reference group was much smaller than I would have preferred, as I could only recruit 5 individuals for my interviews when I felt that at least a dozen from varying parts of Appalachia would represent the best sample size for my study. I was able to interview individuals from various parts of Appalachia, despite this barrier, which I felt was what enabled this study to have a balanced voice in its field of concentration.

Another limitation of the study was time. It would be more beneficial to analyze the data over an extended period in order to complete several readings of the interview information and find small nuances that might have been missed in first read-throughs. However, due to more time being utilized to find participants than intended, along with earlier than expected completion deadlines, the amount of time in which I had to collect the data and complete my analysis was limited. In part, due to the on-going pandemic, this limitation could not be mitigated. Any future study on this topic will enjoy the benefit of having less outside interference to affect the research and more time in order to process the data thoroughly.

Future Research

Future research focused on controversial topics such as the impact of ethnicity on religion and political leanings in Appalachia would be incredibly an incredibly beneficial addition to the body of research. In my study, these topics were broached, but there was a marked aversion to speaking too in depth about any “hot button” issues that might be divisive. This was especially apparent when speaking about political views, as questions were glossed over or spoken about in brevity. These areas would be especially important in understanding how a fully assimilated ethnic group such as Italian Americans living in the conservative region of Appalachia might consider the struggles for equality that other visibly non-white ethnic groups in the area face.

Another area important to study would be my originally intended ethnographic angle on ethnicity, which included studying the performance of ethnic identity and how place plays a role in it. Many of these studies have been conducted with Italian Americans in larger, populous northern cities such as New York and Philadelphia, but there seems to be a gap in this kind of research taking place in the Appalachian Region.

I also believe it would benefit future studies to conduct research on Appalachia in respect to it’s northern, central, and southern regions, as it became very apparent during the course of this study that the intra-Appalachia Region carried distinctive differences in social, cultural, ethnic and racial, and economic areas. Considering the region as a whole during the current research was beneficial in that it clearly illuminated these differences, however.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this study, I have found many unique ways in which Italian Americans in Appalachia express their ethnic identities, be it through creating interesting fusions of food, the process of finding novel ways of cultural connection

with others as a minority in a region, and the inspiringly small and impressively large ways of showing ethnic pride. More than anything else, I realized that to be Italian American in Appalachia does not make you any one “thing”. There are an infinite variety of experiences which shape individuals, and even those aspects which we have in common are approached with lifetimes of experience and personal meaning, and the result is that there is no definitive “Italian Appalachian identity”, but rather a shared sense of history and pride that connects us all despite our differences.

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