Risky business: A pentadic analysis of two West Virginia coal mining disasters

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ABSTRACT:

In just five years West Virginia was rocked with two devastating disasters in the coal mining industry. Despite the disasters, West Virginians could not just walk away from the mines, as they depended on the coal industry for jobs and tax revenue. West Virginia had built a purpose-driven orientation towards the coal industry through a historical and current dependency on coal. However, the two disasters had a chance to alter that dominant orientation. In order to understand how or if the coal orientation was altered, by the disaster or the discourse that followed, a pentadic analysis was completed. The analysis revealed that the coal companies constantly battled a tension between the elements of agency and purpose, while trying to overcome a scene that made safety challenging. In the end, one mining company altered the purpose-driven orientation, as the other reinforced the orientation. As both of the situations offered different orientations towards coal mining, their orientations showed that coal companies can be purpose-driven providers but also a responsible provider, understanding not only that miners need a paycheck, but also safety. In the end, when companies use the purpose-driven orientation, created from the history, present, and future of the West Virginia coal industry, their orientation drives profits and reduces the importance of safety for the coal miners, making coal mining a risky business. However, after just one disaster, despite the mining company’s orientation, the companies become providers to no one.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

West Virginia produces the second largest amount of coal by state, and approximately 50% of America’s coal exports. Coal also generates 98% of West Virginia’s electricity as the coal industry supported over 52 thousand jobs in 2011 while offering twice the mean salary (West Virginia Coal Association, 2011). Coal is a valuable resource to many families and communities in West Virginia.

At the same time, coal mining has a long history as a dangerous, and sometimes deadly, business. In the early 1900’s, coal mining claimed hundreds of lives, with one explosion in Monongah, West Virginia killing over 347. Coal companies struggled to cope with safety issues while still trying to make a profit. Safety regulations and improvements came at a cost and often were avoided (Lewis, Egolf, Fones-Wolf, & Martin, 2009). Change within coal mining regulations often occurred only after a disaster when the federal government or unions demanded safer working conditions for miners.

Yet, despite decades of experience, improved technology, and increased oversight, West Virginia endured two tragic coal mining disasters in just over four years between 2006-2010. The Sago Mine and Upper Big Branch coal mine disasters left 40 miners dead and many family, friends, and communities heartbroken. Each mine disaster raises perennial questions. Are profits more important than safety to the coal industry? How can a coal company justify its business practices to a broader public when it knowingly puts its workers at risk?
The Sago Mine and Upper Big Branch disasters provide a learning moment for scholars who wish to understand the dynamics of the orientation and views of coal in West Virginia. Times of crisis reveal the underlying values and the decision premises of the coal companies. The public, and scholars interested in the inner working of the coal industry, can get a glimpse into the practices of the companies involved. After a crisis, the government, the community, the media, and the coal company attempt to make sense of the situation, answering the central question: “What happened?” A crisis calls into question the orientation used to guide the industry. The companies reveal the key players, the means of which they were acting, and their overall goals. Analysis of that dialogue can bring light to the dynamics of the coal companies’ relationship with West Virginia and its mining communities.

Roderick Hart lays out the purposes of rhetorical criticism as documenting social trends, providing general understandings through case studies, producing meta-knowledge (or criticism of life itself), and finally allowing critics to step outside of themselves to understand the meaning of other’s actions and words (Hart, 1997, p. 24-28). The purpose of this study is to use two cases, the Upper Big Branch Mine disaster and the Sago Mine disaster, to gain knowledge of the dynamics and social trends of the relationship between the coal companies and their publics, revealing and critiquing the tensions that flow from running a business in a hazardous field, such as coalmining.
Hart (1997) also lays out a basic plan for working through a rhetorical criticism, in which the critic should isolate a phenomenon, describe the unique details of that phenomenon, classify the features of the phenomenon, interpret the patterns that emerge, and finally evaluate the phenomenon. In order to help isolate, pattern, and classify the phenomenon, this study will turn to rhetorical criticism in the form of a pentadic analysis to help understand the attributions of motives and actions of the coal organizations following each disaster.

A pentadic analysis of a crisis not only tries to determine what was the purpose of the crisis discourse following the disaster, but also is useful because a crisis breaks open the organization and their communication to be analyzed (Millar & Heath, 2004). A pentadic criticism of a crisis uses the five elements of the pentad, act, agent, purpose, agency, and scene as a “platform” to view the motives of the rhetor and the crisis, as the company usually has to define each element when answering the questions that follow a crisis (Millar & Heath, 2004, p.14). How a rhetor defines each element can help to reveal their motives. David Ling noted in his article “A Pentadic Analysis of Senator Edward Kennedy’s Address to the People of Massachusetts,” that a rhetor’s discourse can be used strategically. Ling claimed, “one may deflect attention from scenic matters by situating the motives of act in the agent” in order to create the “view of the world he would have the audience accept” (Ling, 1970, p.82). The choice of words by a rhetor, analyzed by the pentad, can begin to show the motives of the rhetor and to reveal the rhetor’s orientation. Burke (1984) claimed that orientation is "a bundle of judgments as to how things
were, how they are, and how they may be” (p. 14). In the cases of post-crisis discourse, an organization may try to shift blame from the agent to the scene, act, or purpose, while creating or reshaping an orientation. Because of these choices, a pentadic analysis can help to understand the motives of the rhetors, as well as the orientation that is created or altered. In the case of the Upper Big Branch and Sago Mine disasters, this pentadic analysis will reveal the motives of the coal companies, as well as show how the orientation is altered, changed, or perpetuated after the crisis. This will be exposed through the tension between the purpose of the industry, the agency or the means through which they mine coal, and the scene in which they operate.

In order to accomplish this task, the next chapter explains Burke’s theory of dramatism, including the pentad and orientation and then describes the historical and contemporary “purpose-driven” orientation of the coal industry, observing the current coal discourse within the industry and the communities. After establishing the orientation, Chapters 3 and 4 offer a pentadic analysis of the defense and justifications the respective coal companies offered after each disaster. The final chapter demonstrates the implications of the defenses offered for the contemporary orientation to coalmining in West Virginia.

In the end, West Virginia revealed a purpose-driven orientation within the coal industry, as West Virginia and her citizens depended on coal as a valuable resource. The companies responsible for the disasters differed in the ways they defended and explained the events. After the crisis, the coal companies had to
choose between three alternatives: they will reestablish and reinforce the pre-existing orientation; they will modify the orientation; or they will introduce an alternative orientation to guide future decision and action. However, as mining companies navigate these options, sometimes profits are favored over safety, making coal mining in West Virginia a risky business, keeping the current coal orientation.
CHAPTER 2: Burke and Dramatism

Kenneth Burke stated that dramatism "invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action" (Burke, 1954, p. xxii). A dramatistic approach allows a critic to reveal a rhetor’s orientation, a worldview that guides decision and action. The orientation embeds the rhetor’s motives, and thus analysis of a rhetor’s language offers answers to the questions of “what happened” and “why did it happen” from the rhetor’s perspective. According to Burke, the dramatistic pentad is an analytic tool used to uncover the motive of the rhetors. The purpose of this chapter is to present Burke’s theory of dramatism, the dramatistic pentad as a critical method, to demonstrate its application to the discourse that flows from the coal industry.

A Dramatistic Lens

The method for this paper develops its roots within Burke’s concept of dramatism and symbolic action. Burke defines humans as a “symbol using animal,” claiming that reality is created by the words that we use (Burke, 1966, p. 3). Because humans choose words, and do so very carefully, language is action. According to Burke, action is “the human body in conscious or purposive motion” (Burke, 1954, p. 14). On the other hand, motion is a purposeless, autonomous process that often describes biological behavior that is needed to survive. Because language is action, and not motion, how humans select words reflects how they view reality, reveals their motives, and their explanations of human action (Burke, 1954).
Dramatism is a systematic method of analyzing discourse to reveal motives and understand human behavior (Burke, 1954). Burke believed that life and reality had certain elements, just like a play, and that when humans try to portray reality they use those same elements (Burke, 1954). In regards to action and language selection, humans choose how to portray the elements that both life and drama has within it. Dramatism asks the essential question: "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (Burke, 1954, p. xv).

An orientation, as defined by Burke, is “a bundle of judgments as to how things were, how they are, and how they might be” (Burke, 1984, p. 14). An individual’s language reflects an orientation. Burke claimed, “Men seek for vocabularies that are reflections of reality. To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are selections of reality. And any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a deflection of reality” (Burke, 1954, p. 59). The choices of language show what might be of importance to the rhetor, as well what is less important or not important at all. However, the language people use does not create reality, but rather expresses their interpretation of reality (Burke, 1954). Analysis of linguistic choices reveals how the rhetor is framing reality using terministic screens. A person or society’s terminological preferences “directs the attention into some channels rather than others” (Burke, 1966, p. 45). Through the analysis of discourse, a critic can reveal how groups of people view reality, what is of importance, and why they make the choices they do, either right or wrong (Heath,
Thus, a person’s orientation of reality is reflected through their language choices as they select the terms to describe their experience.

According to Burke past experiences, current norms, and what people expect out of the future creates an orientation that guides their decisions and actions. Burke (1984) claimed, "any set of motives is but part of a larger implicit or explicit rationalization regarding human purpose as a whole" (p. 26). Motives are derived and molded from orientation, and humans make decisions, correctly in their mind, due to their orientations. The same types of events that can create an individual or group’s orientation can both lead to good and bad decisions, but the reason for the wrong decisions and actions often arise because orientations only allow us to see a partial view of reality (Burke, 1984). This partial view can lead to trained incapacities, or a “state of affairs whereby one’s very abilities can function as blindnesses” (Burke, 1984, p. 7). This is increasingly important as the trained incapacity leads a person to immediately discount changes and alternate perspectives. Burke (1984) claimed that change to orientation is difficult, as a person holds a “vast network of mutually sustained values and judgments, [which] makes it more difficult to perceive the nature of the reorientation required" (p. 23). Furthermore, humans are usually only prone to step outside their orientation when the status quo has changed, but often that is too late (Burke, 1984).

Orientations are also social products. Because we use language to develop shared understandings of experience, an orientation may guide groups of people with common goals or what Burke calls “shared substance” or “consubstantiality”
Humans become conjoined with others if their interests are alike, creating a shared reality. Groups of people can create shared meaning by having the same experiences, attitudes, and values, creating a group orientation whether in a regional affiliation, an organization, or industry (Burke, 1969).

As Heath (1990) points out, the asbestos industry greatly suffered from not listening to outside sources and constantly ignoring claims that their practice was headed for failure, denying change to the organization and industry. As they tried to portray their product as safe and a benefit to society, they convinced themselves that information to the contrary was inaccurate. In the end, when it was realized that asbestos was extremely harmful, the company was unable to recover. Their orientation to the future of what their industry should be, along with the accompanying terministic screen, ultimately led to the industry’s demise and bankruptcy. Bello’s (1996) work on the political correctness debate in higher education, revealed that orientations and their terministic screens created “highly selective views of reality” (p. 246). Professors who were at the extremes of the political correctness debate used terministic screens to defend their extreme stances, using the terministic screen to focus on some areas while deflecting attention away from other central issues. In this case, Individuals from two extremes, trapped by their terministic screens, could not see the other side of the issue, and may never be able to reach a shared understanding of the situation (Bello, 1996). Orientations, and their inherent terministic screens, shape the way in which
we view the world. Humans reveal those orientations through their linguistic choices.

In the realm of crisis communication, the language used to define a situation can reveal the motives of the organization. How we as humans define situations, acts, and people determine how we interpret, view, and judge reality. Blame and responsibility in a crisis, for instance, are attributed simply by the definition of the situation. A perfect example is the naming of a disaster as an “act of God”, an “accident,” or “sabotage.” If a disaster is an “act of God”, the terminology moves responsibility and accountability out of human hands and to supernatural. In “acts of God”, the persons who were most closely tied to the event are absolved of all responsibility and blame. On the other hand, one could term an event an “accident.” With an “accident,” someone is considered to be at fault. Someone or something is the cause of the “accident.” However, an “accident,” removes intention from the situation. While someone might be the cause, the person is not to blame. Conversely, when naming a crisis as “sabotage,” intentionality is the driving force in the evaluation of the event. There is a person, or persons, who pre-meditated the event. Thus, the blame is greater, especially if the event hurts or damages others or their property. These three terms could be used to describe an event such as a mine disaster. The naming would shape the attributions of blame, and therefore, call for an appropriate response. If the company is held responsible for the disaster, then the public attributions of blame and the expectation of punishment would match the level of responsibility. On the other hand, if the company is found to be less
responsible, then the attributions of blame and the expectations of punishment would be less (Coombs, 2002).

With an “act of God,” an organization might not have to change policies or staff because they did not have control over the event. With an “accident,” there may be some safety changes and regulatory changes, but the “accident” was not caused by negligence or intent to harm. On the other hand, if the event is ruled as industrial “sabotage” there is someone, or some group, to blame. There was intent to neglect what was going on, or intent to harm someone or something. That calls for drastic changes for an organization or company because the blame fell directly on those who were involved.

Thus, if a company can lessen their responsibility, the attributions of blame and resulting punishment is reduced. This shows the importance of communicating and defining a crisis after it occurs. If an organization wants to limit their responsibility and blame the future repercussions for being held accountable, they must offer a compelling explanation of events that places the cause of the crisis outside the company's control.

Word selection and therefore linguistic choices reveal how a company or entity may try to regulate blame and attribution after a crisis. An example of the selection of words regulating blame after a crisis is David Birdsell’s analysis of President Reagan’s explanation of the suicide bombing in Lebanon in 1983 in which 241 Americans were killed. Reagan described Marines who were incapable of knowing the presence of the bomber, a chain link fence as the only barrier to the
base, and a suicidal and insane driver. Birdsell noted that Reagan’s description focused on the aspects that the situation that could not be controlled. The United States was not irresponsible, but instead unknowing and incapable of dealing with the situation (Birdsell, 1987). The way Reagan constructed the reality of the situation demonstrated the desire to portray the Marines as incapable due to the circumstances, lessening the blame on the Marines.

Linguistic choices can also lead to changes in public opinion and opportunities to support new policies. President Johnson used certain words, metaphors, and symbols to define the “War on Poverty” which led to quick passing of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. By using the word “war,” people attributed the qualities of war to the poverty issue. The word “war” led people to believe that the issue of poverty was winnable, and that to win in war total defeat was necessary (Zarefsky, 1986).

The Pentad

The choices humans make to describe an event reveal their motives, including a desire to attract others to their perspective, to not only change public opinion, but also reveal the motives behind their words. Burke calls upon the pentad to help critics understand the linguistic choices that rhetors make. By defining each pentadic element, dramatism can help to give a “panoramic” view of the event and how the pentadic elements interact together (Burke, 1972, p. 23). Determining how and why the rhetor chooses to define each pentadic element reveals the rhetor’s orientation and all it entails.
The pentad is comprised of five elements, act, agent, agency, purpose, and scene. Act considers what took place, agent is the person or organization who executed the act, agency comprises the "means or instruments" used to complete the act, purpose is the reason for the act, and scene is the location or situation in which the act occurred (Burke, 1954, p. xv, 3). Burke noted that these five elements are crucial when thinking critically about a situation, as often “men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself” (Burke, 1954, xv). Thus, any pentadic criticism concerning motives should reveal the answers to those questions (Burke 1954).

Pentadic ratios are important to dramatism because they allow the critic to see the relationships between the pentadic elements. For example, the scene is a “container” to the act, allowing some acts to occur and some acts not to occur (Burke, 1954, p. 3). Furthermore, if one term is featured over the others, it can cause the other elements to “fall away” (Burke, 1954, p. 309). For example, if purpose is the dominant element the elements of scene, act, and agent become far less important (Burke, 1954).

Sonya Foss describes these relationships, or ratios, as “a pairing of two of the key terms that allows a critic to investigate how the first term in the pair affects the second” (Foss, 2004, p. 385). In Grammar of Motives, Burke describes how these relationships may affect other elements. For example, with the scene-act ratio, the
scene shapes the act, as the scene contains the necessary components for the act to occur (1954). Some acts cannot be completed in certain scenes, and certain scenes allow for certain acts, as well as the interpretation of the act. The situation is often controlled by “community conditions, social influences, historical causes, and natural causes” (Hart, 1997, p. 280).

Burke uses democracy as an example of the scene-act ratio in *Grammar of Motives*. In government, the scene-act ratio favors the type of government in which the act has taken place (democracy, dictatorship, monarchy, etc.). However, in the agent-act ratio the agent determines the act, as the agent decides to act despite the type of government (Burke, 1954). For example, a democratic agent performs the democratic act no matter what the situation, or government type, might be (Burke, 1954).

In David Ling’s article on Senator Ted Kennedy’s car crash in which he drove over a bridge and killed a female passenger that was not his wife, Ling noted how Kennedy accentuated the scene in his apology to try to deflect blame. Claiming that the poor driving conditions on that July night led him to drive off a bridge, the scene controlled the act, which was an attempt to lessen the blame for Kennedy. With the dominant term of scene controlling the act and the agent, Kennedy’s motive for the apology was to reduce attributions of blame, reducing his responsibility for the crash and death of a young woman (Ling, 1970).

Another example of a pentadic ratio is the scene-agent, in which the scene controls the ability of the agent. In certain situations, an agent may have more
ability compared to other scenes in which the skills and qualities of an agent may get “dissolved into their backgrounds” (Burke, 1954, p.9). For example, once a politician becomes the president, the scene of the Office of the Presidency creates power and broadens the person’s influence. The scene determines our discussion on the conduct and relations of the agent or agents in the scene (Burke, 1979). There are plenty of questions that these ratios create, from whether the act could happen in a certain scene, or whether an agent was motivated to act differently due to the scene.

Barry Brummett highlights the importance of understanding the pentadic ratios in his article looking at gay rights controversies in the 1970s, as the dominant element of the agent-act ratio reflects the group’s orientation towards political issues involving gay and lesbian Americans. According to Brummett, gay rights activists emphasized the agent-act ratio. Homosexuality was an inborn trait of an individual. Thus their acts were consistent with their identity. By being an inborn trait, homosexuality is equivalent to race or gender and should receive similar protection from discrimination. On the other hand, anti-gay rights activists used an act-agent ratio. They believed that a person chooses homosexual behavior, so the act determines or defines whether the individual, or agent, is homosexual (Brummett, 1979). The subtle differences in the elements of Brummett’s analysis show the importance of understanding each term, as the term that grounds the other pentadic elements is key in determining the motive of the rhetor. More importantly, it highlights how differing orientations shape opinions and evaluations on an issue.
The agency-purpose ratio also captures a common tension. According to Burke, "the agency-purpose ratio is the same as the integral Grammatical relation between means and ends" as many struggle to focus on the means (agency) while trying to obtain an end (purpose) (Burke, 1954, p. 161). Some evaluate an event by the means they use, while others only look at the ends. Thus, the agency-purpose ratio is a tension in many situations and scenarios.

The purpose-agent ratio also demonstrates the benefit of looking at the pentadic ratios. If purpose is the dominant term, the agent is at the service of fulfilling the purpose, and constructs their identity with the purpose in mind (Burke, 1954). On the other hand, if the agent is the dominant term, the purpose is a reflection of reality from the agent's point of view. Thus, it is important to consider all the ratios, noting which pentadic element comes to ground the rest, as it should drive the other elements and should contain the motive (Birdsell, 1987).

Burke points out how strongly one element can affect the others when he describes the dominant element of purpose. He claimed, "the over-stress upon purpose leads readily into an overly pointed consideration of all policies in terms of means and ends alone. That is, the terms scene, act, and agent fall away as we talk simply of purposes and the agencies proper to those purposes" (Burke, 1954, p.309). The dominant element of purpose changes the remaining terms, in order to emphasize the ends. Thus, it is valuable to find the dominant element in order to understand how it affects the entire pentad, and how the rhetor shapes reality.
Furthermore, the finding of the main pentadic term through ratios can help explain a community’s orientation and explain their motives behind a decision. Tonn & Endress demonstrate the impact of a community orientation in their analysis of a Maine manslaughter case. Karen Wood was shot just 134 feet from her back door by a hunter. Most people presented with the case would assume the hunter was guilty for firing his weapon without actual recognition of his target. However, it was her act, not his, that caused her death. The reason for this was the community norms that enveloped the scene in the event. The act of hunting and the longstanding scene of the hunting tradition in Maine created an argument with roots in scene with a victim that didn’t understand and fit in the scene (Wood was from Iowa). Jurors felt the misunderstanding of community norms during hunting season (don’t go for walks in the woods during Maine’s firearm hunting season) led to the tragedy. Wood’s actions violated the scene and led the jury to acquit the hunter who fired the fatal shot (Tonn & Endress, 1993). Community norms led to the decision of the jury, pointing out the importance of understanding a situation as it resides within a community. Understanding the context of the situation reveals how others view the pentadic elements. For example, in an area that lacks jobs, the companies and industries that inhabit that area are often held in high regard, and their actions are forgiven because of their importance. Thus, it is important to understand not only how the pentadic elements relate to each other, but also the contexts and orientations that they occur within.
The Upper Big Branch and Sago Mine disasters were two West Virginia coal mine disasters in less than five years that left 41 miners dead. Yet, within months both mines reopened and miners returned to work. While federal investigators attempted to discover what had happened, the mining companies offered explanations and returned to business as usual. The next chapter describes the historical and rhetorical context essential to an understanding of these two coal companies’ motives.

For the purpose of this thesis, the description of West Virginia’s orientation towards coal and the coal industry will be developed through a history of coal, the current coal campaigns, and public information. However, this orientation had the capacity to change. A change in the current status and living conditions can bring new choices and decisions while “our orientation may be impaired” as the crisis breaks open the normal discourse and many people “may then be more open to a new theory of motivations” (Burke, 1984, p. 22). The Sago Mine disaster and the Upper Big Branch mine disaster opened the door for an adjustment in orientation. Because of the events, a pentadic analysis will be used in order to understand the motives and reasoning of the coal companies as they justified their actions and their current practices in the industry. This dialogue could shape the new orientation that many West Virginians might have about the coal industry, and determine whether it perpetuates, alters, or maintains their previous orientation.
A History of Purpose

Throughout the history of West Virginia, coal has played a central role in the state’s development. From its beginning until today, West Virginia’s citizens and the state have depended on coal for economic growth and security. West Virginians believe that the coal industry provides jobs in areas that would otherwise have little or none. Miners who inhabit the industry are noble for doing a job that is dangerous but necessary for their families, communities, and state to survive. As a result, those within West Virginia protect the industry against threats from outside sources. This orientation shapes the views West Virginians have toward coal, the coal industry, and the government.

West Virginia’s orientation to coal and the coal industry has a long and deep past as the state has had a history of favoring big business over its citizens in order to achieve their main purpose of industrializing the state. This was particularly evident as lawmakers in the late 1800s changed the state’s laws in favor of big business, hoping that West Virginia would quickly become industrialized. Legislators elected judges to the Supreme Court of Appeals who favored industrial uses of land and favored the industry in cases “on the grounds of serving the public good” (Burns, 2007, p. 1). That change immediately revealed that the land and resources in West Virginia were more important than the people who inhabited the state. In fact, after one disaster in Monongah, West Virginia claimed 361 lives, one government official asked how many mules were lost (Lewis et al., 2009). The coal
industry had become more important than the miners as a result of West Virginia
desperately trying to grow industrially as quickly as other states in the region. As
the state still slowly grew industrially despite the emerging coal industry, legislators
pushed many of their resources into the coal industry, hoping that the natural
resources sector might bring the state up the ranks in the nation’s economy. By
doing so they allowed the coal corporations to have significant power to shape the
industry and the state. By the time legislators realized the amount of power the coal
industry controlled, the power was hard to remove (Burns, 2007, p. 2).

One way the coal companies exemplified this power was through the
building of company towns. The areas in which coalmines existed often hard to
reach, creating a challenge for the companies. The miners simply had no place to
live, so the companies built towns so that the miners could live in close proximity to
the coalmine. The areas around the mine often were void of quality roads and were
located in places that were hard to develop due to the mountainous terrain. These
company towns were more than just a place for the miners to rest their heads at
night. The company towns were a unique structure, as “the operator was not only
the miners’ employer, but also filled the roles of landlord, merchant, postmaster,
provider of entertainment and sanitation officer” (Lewis, 1993, p. 299). The
operators of the town existed out of necessity, as coal miners and their families
often depended on them for many reasons. Lewis (1993) goes on to point out,
“operators often provided mining towns with police and fire protection, and
medical, spiritual and educational services” (p. 299). Company towns also issued
“scrip,” or money, only to be used in the company store and in the company town. In turn, as miners paid for doctor visits, rent, and groceries in scrip, coal companies continued to maximize profits (Bell & York, 2010). Since the coal corporations controlled the operators, the coal industry held almost all the power in these towns. If a miner acted out, he could be placed outside the company town and removed from an occupation that he truly needed in a state that didn’t have many jobs outside the coal sector (Burns, 2007).

These company towns created a physical, as well as an economic and social, scene that was designed to serve the purpose of making profit. Burke describes how the scene can act as a container that influences the acts and agents within the scene (Burke, 1954). In the case of West Virginia, the scene of the mountainous towns and poor economy influenced the agents and acts that occurred there. Without living in the company towns, the average person might not find a job, certainly not a job that could compare to the money that coal miners received. However, these towns were structured so that the coal companies had complete and utter control, even though the pay was above average. As Burns (2007) points out, by “ruling these towns with an iron fist, the company rendered the miner (and his family) virtually powerless” inside the coal industry. The coal companies had created a scene where they were in complete control of the miners and the town. They could alter the town, the money system, and other resources in order to create change or, more likely, make more profit. Thus in these towns, the agents had little or no agency.
Because of the poor working conditions, the monetary system, and the nature of the company town, coal companies often had to defend the practices of the company towns to federal government officials. When they did defend their practices, they often turned to the undeveloped land, lack of roads, and mountainous terrain, arguing that coal companies were often the only place that a citizen could really derive income and make ends meet (Blaacker, Woods, & Oliver, 2012). The scene, in the form of terrain and the thick forests, forced the coal companies out of necessity to build and provide these towns, but the purpose remained that the company towns and the miners were there to make a profit and provide a valuable resource to the state (Lewis et al., 2009). Coal was a salvation for those who wanted to live in the state, and the coal companies provided (although sometimes detrimentally) everything for the miners inside the company town. Inside West Virginia, coal was a necessary force for survival, for miners, business owners, and also West Virginia legislators who hoped coal might industrialize the lagging state quickly. However, many outside entities, such as unions and the federal government tried to wrest control from the dangerous industry.

However, coal mining also was dangerous work. The state of mining in West Virginia during the late 1800s through the early 1900s proved dangerous to workers, while companies continued to maximize profits (Bell & York, 2010). While the coal industry paid well even in the early stages of the industry, the coal economy was not completely beneficial to workers. In the early 1900s immigration officials often told immigrants not to head to West Virginia to work in the coal mines because
of the danger (Rakes, 2008). In fact, union officials complained to President Woodrow Wilson that the deaths in the coalmines had exceeded the American deaths in the European War. At the time, it was common to believe that the words “coalmining”, “injury”, and “death” were synonymous (Rakes, 2008 p. 2). In the early days, one Appalachian man recalled that when the words “coalmining,” were uttered, “immediately there comes to mind a picture of a horse-drawn hearse carrying a dead or injured miner” (Densmore, 1977, p. 1). Profit and safety, or purpose and agency, came into tension, as mining companies wanted to make as much profit as possible, miners wanted to earn a solid living, but safety precautions often slowed mining operations and usually cost the companies more money (Lewis et al., 2009). However, the tension was exploited as safety became more and more important.

West Virginia was still the most dangerous state for coal miners during the period of 1907-1912 (“West Virginia’s mine wars,” 2012). In 1907, an explosion in a Monongah, West Virginia mine took 362 lives, the deadliest in the history of the United States. The overall death rate was staggering: 3,242 coal miners perished from mine related accidents in the United States that year (Stover, 1999). The disasters in 1907 raised attention to the real risks and problems within coalmines. New federal legislation, such as the formation of the Bureau of Mines in 1910, was specifically created to reduce mine disasters.

However, change did not come easy in the coal industry, especially in West Virginia. Change in the coal industry was often marked by violent strikes and
horrendous disasters, and was regularly forced by the federal government. Legislation of the coal industry was often written with the blood of coalminers (Channell, 2011). Coal companies were reluctant to change because it was often an “expense to be avoided” (Lewis et al., 2009, p. 255). Due to profit and purpose driving the industry, it seemed that only the federal government and unions forced new regulations and change, not the coal industry. Workers’ safety and conditions were an immense problem that federal legislators and coal unions tried to fix. Managing these changes while still making profits was the crux of the issue for many of the coal companies.

In 1912, many coal unions, especially in the Kanawha coalfields, tried to combat coal policies that were harming coalminers and their families. Miners in West Virginia suffered from lower wages and atrocious conditions far worse than in other areas nearby. On April 18, the miners walked off the Paint Creek Mine, starting one of the most violent mine wars in the nation’s history (“West Virginia’s mine wars,” 2012). As the miners asked for simple assurances such as fair wages in comparison to other local mines, accurate weighing of the mined coal, and alternatives to scrip and the company store, the mine operators demonstrated their power. They forced the miners out of the company owned homes, trying to make them as uncomfortable as possible in villages of tents. Hundreds of mine guards were brought in to try to break the strike, prompting violence. In the end, over 50 people died (not including those who died from starvation and poor conditions), and the Governor of West Virginia instituted martial law. The Paint Creek strike was
the beginning of many other wars in the West Virginia coalfields between unions and the coal industry (“The story of Paint Creek,” 2012).

As shown through the Paint Creek War, the coal operators and owners refused to change their methods of mining and making a profit without a fight. The unions did as much as they could, but often they could not achieve their goals. However, as the public noticed the triple-digit deaths in mine disasters (six disasters of over 80 combined fatalities in West Virginia from 1907-1927) the federal government started to try to reduce these fatalities (“West Virginia mine disasters,” 2012). In 1941, the federal government instituted mine inspections; however, the fines for violations were so small that the mine operator could pay them out of pocket and the mines continued their daily operations. It was not until another coalmine disaster in West Virginia killed dozens of miners that the federal government realized that they had to pass stricter laws and larger fines (Conley, 1960). In 1952, federal coalmining legislation was strengthened in the areas of ventilation, air quality, and mine exits. Also, inspectors were given more power to shut down the mine if problems continued to exist (Conley, 1960). New federal legislation also helped outside of the mines by removing children from the mines and providing fair prices in the company store (Conley, 1960).

Even with strengthened legislation, West Virginia and the coal industry accepted death, injuries and accidents as the price to pay for the booming coal industry. West Virginia was hesitant to agree to new legislation on coal, mainly because they depended on the black rock so much (Vietor, 1980). New federal
legislation reduced mine fatalities, but disasters still occurred in West Virginia. Up until campaigns by the unions, there was no real push by West Virginia to try to decrease mine accidents and improve miner safety. New legislation by the federal government helped, but did little in West Virginia. According to a West Virginia University study, miners were not safer in 1970 than they were ten or twenty years earlier, despite the federal legislation (Rakes, 2008). There was a distinct priority in the coal mining industry in West Virginia, and that was to put the purpose of the coal mining industry above the means by which they mined coal. That purpose was why, even after increased federal legislation, disasters still were happening in the West Virginia coalmines. West Virginia depended on coal too much to have the industry lessened by change proposed by those in the government. This dependency on coal in West Virginia led to resistance to coal mining laws, such as legislation on mountain top removal, compared to other coal mining states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio. People in West Virginia defended coal vehemently as they were afraid that increased legislation would hurt their only true industry (Vietor, 1980).

Thus, the history of the coal industry produced an orientation in which West Virginians relied on the coal industry as a provider. The industry put food on the table and turned on the lights. Life inside the West Virginia coal industry was profitable. The coal industry dominated the miners’ way of life and quality of life. Those who stepped away from the coal industry primarily relied only on subsistence farming, as they could not find work anywhere else (Lewis, 1993). Early in the history of the coal industry, West Virginians quickly learned that life outside
the coal industry was not good, and they worked hard to grow the industry and maintain their lifeline. The state, the industry, and its people were united in pursuit of a common purpose, to capitalize on the economic benefit of coal.

That purpose-driven orientation is still evident today, even though the coal industry has evolved throughout the years. However, the orientation still shows that West Virginians view coal as a resource in a state that provides little economic diversity and must be defended against outside sources that try to change it. West Virginia is still fueled by coal, as “the rich seams of bituminous black have dictated the region’s destiny for many years now” (Barry, 2011, para. 11). The state, currently and presumably in the future, depends on coal, as West Virginia ranks last in their economic future in a study by Forbes, a top business magazine. The ranking reflects West Virginia’s reliance on one industry, coal (Witters, 2012).

Even though the coal industry is in decline in regards to demand and employment opportunities, the coal industry is still palpable to all whom live in the state, even though they may not work in the field (Bell & York, 2010). The coal industries and corporations have joined together to try to maintain a strong bond between coal and the community through the Faces of Coal organization and the Friends of Coal organization, organizations dedicated to portraying how important coal is to West Virginia and her inhabitants (Blaacker, Woods, & Oliver, 2012). One coal supporter on the “Faces of Coal” website claimed that “Coal means everything to me. It is the livelihood of our beautiful state” (“Supporter quotes,” 2013, “Supporters of Coal”). Coal is present in the schools, sporting events, politics, and
even signage and license plates. The coal industry is embedded throughout West Virginia, which helps to cultivate and strengthen the orientation that coal provides for West Virginia.

It is common for West Virginia schoolchildren to visit coal museums and exhibition coal mines and begin to understand the basic underpinnings of the coal industry and how it influenced the area. The Friends of Coal implemented a classroom program that taught about the vital resource of coal in West Virginia and helped illustrate the advantages of the coal industry for the area. The program gave children a workbook on coal as a woman from the Friends of Coal group came to talk to them about the coal industry ("Battle over coal moves into Raleigh classrooms," 2009). According to the Friends of Coal group, in the program “coal is presented in its true form, as a legacy and future industry for the children of West Virginia” ("Coal in the classroom," n.d., para. 2). The program had to stave off attacks from environmentalists and so-called “radicals”, who attacked the program and its one-sided stance on the issue (Hanna, 2009, para. 1). West Virginians felt that coal was valuable and there was nothing wrong with letting their children know about the contributions of coal to the state, even if some of the negative aspects of coal were left out of the discussion. Many critics claimed that those against the program were “unconscionable” to think that the state was not built by coal, and supported by coal, and that all of those who were opposed were “not West Virginians at all, but transplants from another state” (Hanna, 2009, para. 1, 2). The Friends of Coal
educational program shows how early coal is being introduced into young West Virginians lives and how willingly many parents accept it.

The idea that the coal industry is still such a large part of the state is further implemented through other media campaigns and constant visibility. For instance, the Friends of Coal also have sponsored the “Friends of Coal Bowl,” in which the only two Division I football teams in the state, West Virginia University and Marshall University square off on the gridiron. Football at the college and high school levels is a vital part of West Virginia’s culture since the state does not have any pro teams. Six million viewers tuned in for the Friends of Coal Bowl in 2011 and in turn listened as the coaches praised the coal industry (“The Friends of Coal Bowl 2011 in the books,” 2011). Former WVU coach and two time Big East Coach of the Year, Rich Rodriguez, claimed that “Coal is a part of everything good in the Mountain State, so it’s natural that the Friends of Coal would jump in and become a part of this game,” while his predecessor and West Virginia icon, Don Nehlen, echoed his thoughts, claiming that “I believe the West Virginia-Marshall game is great for the state and I’m awfully happy it’s being named the Friends of Coal Bowl because, in my opinion, coal drives the state of West Virginia” (“What they are saying,” 2007, para. 2, 8).

The coal industry and the Friends of Coal group was a large part in many West Virginia citizens’ everyday lives and scenery. Along with media visibility through sporting events, the Friends of Coal group also gives away yard signs, bumper stickers, and license plates. A West Virginia resident can now even apply for a state approved Friends of Coal license plate (“FOC license plate now available!”)
The coal industry is a constant presence for West Virginians as it is part of their schools, communities, and major sporting events, further perpetuating the idea that coal is a vital part of West Virginia.

Finally, the coal industry is also prevalent in the current political atmosphere. The coal industry is a constant force in West Virginia politics, as two of the top three Congressional candidates receiving coal money in the 2012 election were from West Virginia and both won by double digits ("Coal mining: Top recipients," 2013). Former West Virginia Governor and Senator Joe Manchin made waves across the nation in the 2010 special election for deceased Senator Robert C. Byrd’s vacated seat, when he literally shot the Cap and Trade Bill, a piece of legislation that was threatening the coal industry due to carbon emission regulation (Cohen, 2012). The coal industry is a huge political issue and part of the political climate, and might be the number one political issue for West Virginians.

For example, during the 2012 Democratic presidential primaries, incumbent President Obama barely received half the votes in a seemingly uncontested race. Instead of voting for President Obama, 42% of West Virginian Democrats voted for Keith Russell Judd, an inmate in a federal prison in Texas (Tapper, 2012). The vote showed contempt for Obama’s coal policies, what many called a “war on coal.” Detractors noted the increased legislation on emissions from power plants that hurt the coal industry, as well as the fines that coal plants would incur if they violated the new legislation on emissions. West Virginians were not happy with Obama’s stance, and gave a vote of no confidence (Hastings, 2012). Furthermore, Mitt Romney
received more campaign money from the coal industry than any other candidate in the 2012 election and won West Virginia by over 25 points ("Coal Mining: Top recipients," 2013).

While the coal industry’s backing can help a candidate win, lack of support from the coal industry can also cause them to lose. Longstanding Senator Jay Rockefeller retired before reelection in 2014. Pundits stated his reelection was doomed, as the coal industry was seeking revenge for his anti-coal and pro-climate change stances on several issues (Silverstein, 2012). Furthermore, while Democrats outnumber Republicans in the Mountain State two to one, Republican presidential candidates have won the state in all of the last three elections, and won by double digits in the last two (Cohen, 2012). Ever since Presidential candidate and former Vice President Al Gore began his campaign in 2000 to stop mountaintop removal of coal, the Democratic Party has had an extremely difficult time winning over voters. In fact, most Democratic Party candidates from West Virginia running for national and gubernatorial offices did not attend the Democratic National Convention for fear of associating with the coal policies that Democrats and Obama were pushing (Hamby & Kilough, 2012). Clearly, coal plays a large part in West Virginia politics, and voting decisions are made on which candidate will better serve the coal industry. As a result, the dependence on coal as an economic savior for West Virginia and her citizens is considerably strengthened.

In sum, the coal industry is a constant presence for West Virginians, further perpetuating the idea that coal is a vital part of the state. Coal becomes a part of
West Virginian’s everyday life, and part of the state’s identity. However, coal most penetrates the lives of West Virginians through the benefits the coal industry provides for much of the state.

The Modern Coal Orientation

A dependency on coal. Coal is a large industry for the state, and according to some West Virginians, “if you take coal out of the county, you might as well turn the lights off” (Censky, 2011, para. 23). The coal industry’s main purpose is to make a profit and create energy for the state and nation. By doing so, they give jobs to the people of West Virginia, jobs that are essential for many. When looking at the discourse coming from the miners and coal organizations, West Virginia and coal are in a relationship that cannot end, especially when you consider it as a means of providing West Virginia with at least one industry. As the executive director of the Friends of Coal claimed, “If we don’t mine coal, our coal mining families and communities will suffer. West Virginia’s people will suffer. It is as simple as that,” pointing out the serious problems that could occur if the coal industry was to falter at some point (“Friends of Coal Bowl,” para. 4). As one supporter mentioned on the “Faces of Coal” website, “If they take the coal mines away, they would take food from my babies” (“Supporter Quotes,” 2013, “Supporters of Coal”). West Virginians need the coal industry to provide for them, just like a mother needs to provide for her children.

However, not just the coal industry depends on coal; other industries within West Virginia utilize the resource as well. According to one Wyoming county
financial report, “Coal is a vital link in the economic activity of Wyoming County,” explained Commissioner Silas Mullins. “The county government, board of education, and businesses as well as private citizens depend on coal for their income. As goes coal, so goes our county in many aspects” (Brooks, 2013). A woman in coal country stated, “Going into the coal mines here, that is the way little boys’ dreams come true. I remember growing up, the rich people were the doctors, the lawyers and the coal miners” (Smith, 2012, para. 17). The coal industry provides valuable resources to the citizens of West Virginia. However, the scene of the West Virginia economy raises the value of the jobs that the coal industry produces, as West Virginia suffers from a lack of other resources and industries.

The dynamic between the economic scene of West Virginia and the purpose of the coal industry puts the purpose of coal mining in high regard for many West Virginians. What many miners fear, “if they fear anything, is that... the operators will close the mine down” (“Your views: Readers speak,” 2010, para. 2). If the mines close down, the many miners have to leave the state were born and raised in, as well as loved. Forbes, a leading source in reliable business information, ranks the state as follows in various categories:

- West Virginia ranks last in economic confidence (Jones, 2012).
- West Virginia ranks last in the percentage of people thriving (Morales, 2012).
- West Virginia ranks 48th in economic wellbeing (Mendes, 2009).
- West Virginia ranks last on a poll estimating each state’s economic future (Witters, 2012).
Thus, the seams of coal determine where the jobs are and usually what the local industries will be, as the state’s other industries are very poor. With the lack of other industries, and limited possibility for new industries, it should be no surprise to anyone in West Virginia that “coal rules” and that “the rich seams of bituminous black have dictated the region’s destiny for many years now” (Barry, 2011, para. 11). A perfect example is McDowell County, once home to over 100,000 inhabitants ready to mine coal in the county nicknamed the nation’s coal bin. The county now has less than a quarter of those inhabitants and the population has dropped 18% in the last decade (Spencer, 2010). The county’s “mecca,” Welch, has some of the most saddening statistics about a small town that one can imagine. With 27.7 percent of households living on less than $10,000 per year and 75 percent of families with kids under five in poverty, Welch is one of the poorest towns in the state, and possibly the nation (Spencer, 2010). As McDowell County shows, the scene of West Virginia reinforces and determines the purpose of the coal industry, which is providing an industry to an area that has no other. Without coal, many towns and counties plunge into poverty. There is nowhere else for West Virginians to turn within the region, as the economic scene of the state lends itself to a single industry economy.

All in all, the biggest difference between the West Virginia coal mining industry and other mining industries is the lack of economic diversity. Even when miners lost their jobs in the early coal boom, they turned to subsistence farming because there were no other jobs in the area (Lewis, 1993). Thus, coal mining serves a purpose, to provide for the citizens of the state when nothing else can. Today,
miners still feel that same pressure, as one miner after a coal disaster claimed, “There are other jobs in the area, but as a means to support our families, pay college tuitions, put food on the table, pay for insurance and have some of the luxuries of life? You can't work any other job and have those around here” (Smith, 2010, p. 2). An unemployed miner, looking for a mining job in the area, echoed the same philosophy, claiming “I’ve got a lot of bills I need to pay off... Nine- and 10-dollar an hour jobs just don’t do it” (Ginsberg, 2006, para. 1).

However these depictions of the coal industry reveal that coalmining is viewed as a means to put food on the table and allow West Virginians to stay in the state. Without coal being present in West Virginia, miners claim they have nowhere to turn to feed their families and earn money to pay for their kids to go to college. As Burke points out, the scene holds the necessary means for the act to occur and some acts not to occur (Burke, 1954). The scene of coal has determined many of the acts in the state, especially in regards to how the state has been developed, and those in West Virginia claim they depend on coal to influence acts to further develop and maintain the West Virginia economy.

According to many, coal is literally the engine that keeps West Virginia running. “Coal production is the heart and soul of West Virginia [emphasis in original],” a use of language that highlights the idea that coal is what keeps the rest of the state going (“Supporter Quotes,” 2013, “Supporters of Coal”). This perpetuates the orientation that coal “is the life-blood,” where the coal gives life to the citizens that are connected to the industry (“Supporter Quotes,” 2013, “Supporters of Coal”).
But coal becomes the “life-blood” and the “heart”, the most important part of the human anatomy, because of the scene. There is nowhere else to turn. Coal provides for an area that would be lifeless without the black rock, just like a body would be lifeless without blood and a heart. Without the lifeline of coal, how could someone provide for their families in a state that is void of other opportunities? The scene does help to exemplify a dependence on the coal industry that really solidifies the orientation that is so prevalent in West Virginia, which is that coal creates jobs for the state and her inhabitants, highlighting the importance of the pentadic element of purpose.

**Protecting the purpose.** In the purpose-driven orientation of West Virginia, there is a barrier that creates a tension between insiders and outsiders. Those who oppose the coal industry and their practices are often not from the area (Hanna, 2009). Those who grew up in coal country accept the importance of coal to the state; those who view the industry and state from the outside cannot understand the importance of coal. As an example of this dynamic, when changes and challenges against the coal industry come up, West Virginians are quick to protect their jobs, pointing out that they “don’t understand why any human being wants to try to take the job of another human being particularly in today’s economy” especially when it seems as if there are no other well paying jobs to be had (Lilly, 2009, para. 12). The belief is that only those inside the state understand the importance of coal and the valuable resources coal provides.
The insider versus outsider viewpoint is not just for those directly linked and working within the coal industry, but also those who represent the state in the United States Congress and in the West Virginia legislature. The West Virginia House Majority Leader, Brent Boggs, remarked that proposed federal coal policies would hurt the state in lost tax revenue. He claimed, “If we don’t have that revenue, we’ll be in a world of hurt in West Virginia. This is not a partisan issue. It’s a West Virginia issue” (“WV lawmakers unite,” 2010, para. 6). West Virginians are rallied together to protect and preserve the coal industry. In evaluating the “New Direction for Energy Independence, National Security, and Consumer Protection Act,” United States House of Representative member Shelley Moore Capito stated, ”There is a saying in West Virginia that ‘coal keeps the lights on.’ Unfortunately, this legislation effectively turns out the lights on our country’s energy supply” as coal was not even mentioned as a future source to help with rising energy costs (“Rep. Capito: No new energy plan,” 2007, para. 3). Both leaders explicitly link West Virginia and coal. To protect West Virginia, one must also protect coal, and thus protecting coal and West Virginia becomes a conjoined act. Most of the citizens, legislators, and coal corporations inside West Virginia join together to help strengthen the industry, trying to prevent an attack from the outside from hurting the coal industry and the people who depend on coal. However, while many of the agents defend the industry, others must actually do the work of mining coal.

**The miners.** Just as the outsiders must be stopped from limiting the industry’s production through environmental and industrial legislation, the people in the state
must continue to preserve and advance the purpose. A key group, coalminers, continues the longstanding history of coal in West Virginia’s economy and the country. This group drives the production in the mines day in and day out. They perform a job that stakes a claim in powering the nation and the state and is considered a valuable job for many of the coalminers in West Virginia, as they claim that it is “an honor and a privilege to be a coal miner” as miners become a “West Virginia superhero” to many in the state (Smith, 2010, p. 2, “Your view: Readers speak,” 2005, para. 4). “Superheroes” usually have extraordinary skills and the ability to change the scene and dominate and control any acts that may occur. The West Virginia “Superheroes” become heroic in their support of the coal industry.

These coalminers, while performing a dangerous act, are mining a valuable resource for the communities and families of those in West Virginia. It is not a glamorous job, but one that has to be done for the state, the miners, and their families to succeed. Thus, miners do their job and are happy about the salary they are receiving, while stating that, “Dying in a coal mine is a brave and courageous consequence accepted by dedicated coal miners” (“Your Views: Readers Speak”, 2010, para. 2). Coal gives life and it takes life. Coal miners understand that by working in the mines they face danger, health problems, and most likely a shortened lifespan. However, the miners mine coal because it gives them everything they need, despite its dangers. In this purpose-driven orientation that the coal industry has created, miners have to mine coal for as long as it is there, for mining coal and the coal industry has become one of the only resources for the West Virginia way of life.
When understanding the importance of the coal industry, these coal miners truly transform into “superheroes” as they do the dirty, and dangerous, work in order for the state to survive. They put purpose in front of possible dangers in order to maintain the coal industry in the state, while receiving a solid paycheck within the context of the West Virginia economy. Thus, their purpose of making money and providing for their families, despite the risks, truly defines them.

The West Virginia orientation towards coal emphasizes the dependency on the coal industry to create jobs and an industry in a state that struggles economically. The history of the coal industry shows how the industry’s purpose was to grow the state industrially, and that coal companies and legislators put the purpose of the state’s development ahead of safety. The coal industry was given free reign and significant power in order to develop the state’s industrial economy while also providing West Virginia citizens with job opportunities in a state that had very few. In essence, the coal companies, the miners, and the state government needed each other. The coal industry needed the miners to do the hard labor, the state needed the coal industry for revenue and industrialization, and the miners needed the check to keep food on the table and clothes on their families. The industry needed the state’s support politically to avoid regulation and external control. Coal was seen as an element of survival for all of those inside the state.

This orientation was built on coal’s necessity for the West Virginia economy. West Virginia depends tremendously on the coal industry and has fought harder to defend it compared to any other state (Vietor, 1980). Part of the motivation came
from the constraints and opportunities in the natural environment. Coal was abundant in the mountainous terrain; the scene limited access and prevented industrialization. Because of that scene, the coal industry became the main and lone industry in the state. The tremendous amount of current coal influence in the everyday lives of West Virginians, coupled with the dependence on coal with the economy, leads to this unique and continued orientation.

It is truly a purpose driven orientation, as those who are in the state, due to the dependence on coal, have to make decisions that emphasize the purpose of the coal industry to make a profit and create energy all while providing valuable jobs and tax money to the state and her citizens. This focus on purpose creates terministic screens and trained incapacities: disregarding the environmental and health dangers of coal, denying the shrinking nature of the coal industry in West Virginia, and diminishing the reality of an explosion or mining accident claiming lives. In the case of West Virginia and the coal mining industry, the terministic screens justify the means used to gain ends, focusing only on the purpose. Not even knowing that they are forgetting the means, or agency, within the coal industry, these terministic screens lend those within the coal industry to trained incapacities.

**Building trained incapacities.** Burke claimed that trained incapacities can occur without knowledge and can create blindness to a situation or decision (Burke, 1984). One area in which those in the coal industry have turned a blind eye is the state of the industry. The coal industry is currently in decline in West Virginia due to multiple reasons, from increased regulation to the increasing use of natural gas for
power. Bell & York (2010) demonstrate that the industry has declined in numbers of workers for decades due to mechanization and technology. Yet, West Virginians still support the coal industry. Blaacker et al. (2012) pointed out that even as the coal industry declines, support for the industry remains the same. West Virginians, unable to move past the historical dependence on coal, want to see the state’s future embedded in coal, just like the past. Burke claimed that orientations are founded in “how things were, how they are, and how they may be” (Burke, 1984, p.14). Thus, West Virginians have created trained incapacities, attributing the decline in the coal mining industry to the “outsiders” in government, the Environmental Protection Agency, and those who oppose the coal industry, hoping that the coal industry would sustain itself throughout the future decades if outside influence could be deterred (Plautz, 2012).

These screens also hide the danger that lies within mining the coal and burning the coal for energy. While the reality is that coal mining can lead to a variety of health problems (such as black lung) and the chances of an accident in the mine are evident, the miners still accept the dangers. They know that the jobs the coal industry creates puts food on the table, so they choose not to think about the dangers associated. When asked why the miners continually go down into the mines with all the dangers associated, one woman who had family members working in the mines claimed, "It’s West Virginia. They sacrifice whatever they need to do to support their families" (Smith, 2010, p. 1). The purpose of making a living and supporting a family was more important than the dangers and, thus, the dangers
were muted. The miners are more worried about the coal industry shutting down than the coal industry diminishing their health and ultimately taking away their lives (“Your views: Readers Speak,” 2010). The ends hide the dangerous means of mining coal, allowing the purpose to dominate the agency of coal mining. Instead of viewing the job as a risk and danger, they believe that it is an “honor and a privilege” to be a coal miner, shifting the focus from danger to an honor to be one of the chosen few that power this state and nation (Smith, 2010, p. 2). The purpose justifies the dangers of coal for the miners and creates and perpetuates an orientation that protects the benefits that the coal industry provides for West Virginia.

Although these orientations and trained incapacities seem set in place, Burke points out that orientations and, thus, trained incapacities, are open for modification when met with a change to the living conditions or status quo (Burke, 1984). If there ever was an event (or series of events) to change the status of the coal industry, the Upper Big Branch mine disaster and the Sago mine disaster might be it. Both brought into question the practices of the coal industry and how the coal companies might have contributed to each mine disaster, disasters that combined to kill 41 miners. The orientation towards coal could have changed, but in order to note the possible shift, their needs to be analysis of the crisis discourse from the companies. The pentad provides a “platform” for analyzing the discourse and finding the motives of the company during their crisis discourse (Millar & Heath, 2004, p. 14). A crisis breaks open the organization and allows for an analysis of discourse through which companies answer questions and defend their practices (Millar & Heath,
2004). In addition, a crisis exposes the orientation as those within the industry, the community, and the nation seek to answer the question, “What happened?”
CHAPTER 4: The Sago Mine Disaster

On January 2, 2006, at 6:31 a.m. an explosion occurred at the Sago Mine in West Virginia. The explosion, caused by a buildup of methane gas and a lightning strike, left a dozen miners stranded in the mine. Despite rescue efforts throughout the next two days, only one miner survived. The timeline for the events that occurred during and after the explosion are described below, as the course of events were thoroughly developed throughout the Mine Safety and Health Administration's public hearing on the explosion (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a).

The Sago Mine Disaster Timeline

The Sago Mine was owned and operated by the International Coal Group, a company that had just taken over the mine in 2005, just a year before the disaster. The International Coal Group headed over the Wolf Run Mining subsidiary that operated the mine in accordance with the International Coal Group. The International Coal Group, had mines in several states surrounding West Virginia, including Kentucky and Maryland at the time.

The Sago Mine, however, was problematic. In May, 2005, before the mining operations got underway at Sago, the International Coal Group sat down with the Mine Safety and Health Administration to discuss what needed to happen at the mine to make it safe (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a). Sago was a troubled mine, well over the national average for time lost. In the previous year, the Mine Safety and Health Administration issued 208 citations at Sago, 98 of them serious and substantial violations, and those included 20 for roof falls, 14 for power
wire insulation, and three for ventilation problems (Clayton, 2006). However, the Mine Safety and Health Administration inspector who was responsible for the mine noted that in the fourth quarter of 2005, the mine violations were cut in half, and that in his opinion, “the mine had improved in the fourth quarter” and that the International Coal Group was “very cooperative and making an excellent attempt to reduce violations” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 157). However, just two days into 2006, disaster again struck in a West Virginia coal mine.

The morning of January 2, 2006, began as a normal day underground at the Sago Mine, located just outside of Buckhannon, WV. Aboveground, an unusual winter lightning storm crossed the mountains. At 6:31 a.m., an underground explosion shocked two groups of miners entering the mine. One group was able to escape through an exit. No one could reach the other group by radio.

The mine superintendent went underground with three other mine officials and moved toward the area where they believed the miners were trapped. Above ground, around 7:00 a.m. the mine dispatcher began to contact numerous state and federal officials and rescue personnel. Around 8:00 a.m., the Federal Mine Safety and Health Administration received word of the events and implemented an emergency mine order, preventing further entry into the mine. Officials began monitoring the air at the mouth of the mine and noted significant levels of carbon dioxide present. Deeper inside the mine, the superintendent and the other International Coal Group employees struggled to dissipate oxygen and reduce carbon dioxide with their machinery. The group decided that the best course of action was to go back out of
the mine and consult with the mine rescue teams around 10:30 a.m. (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a).

The Barbour County Mine Rescue Team arrived onsite at approximately 10:40 a.m. but waited until state and federal authorities gave them authorization to go into the mine. Multiple mine rescue teams arrived throughout the day. Rescue teams used bulldozers and mining equipment to drill bore holes to measure the carbon dioxide in the mine.

Many of the friends and families of the trapped miners began assembling at the Sago Baptist Church around 1:00 p.m. as the church was only a short distance from the mine. The International Coal Group set up a command center at around that time. Multiple officials from the International Coal Group, federal officials from the Mine Safety and Health Administration, and state mine officials comprised the command center where decisions and communications were made throughout the timeline of the disaster (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a; Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b).

Finally, at 5:51 p.m., the first mine rescue team entered the mine as carbon dioxide levels were reducing. They were able to go 9,400 feet into the mine before they met problems with an energized carbon dioxide monitor. They exited the mine and waited until they received readings from the boreholes to determine the amount of carbon dioxide in the mine. At 3:47 a.m. the next day the boreholes penetrated the mine. The readings came back with bad news; there were 1,300 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the mine, almost four times greater than the
normal level of 350 parts per million (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a). Chief Executive Officer of the International Coal Group and spokesperson for the organization throughout the disaster, Ben Hatfield, reported this information to the general public at 7:45 a.m. on January 3.

The mine teams re-entered the mine at 6:20 a.m., almost a full 24 hours after the explosion occurred. It was not until 4:21 p.m. that they reached the section where they expected the miners were trapped. At 5:18 p.m. a miner was found dead inside the mine. The miner, Terry Helms, was one of the two fire bosses on staff at the time. As the fire boss, he was responsible for checking to make sure the mine was safe to operate in, making sure the air quality was safe for the miners. The rescue teams advanced further into the section, and at 11:46 p.m., they reported they had found all 12 miners, alive.

Somehow this information was overheard and was relayed to the Sago Baptist Church and the families. Bells began to play at the church in celebration. Families began to rejoice.

Back at the mine, as rescue teams and the trapped miners reached the surface at 12:30 a.m. on January 4, those waiting above ground at the mine learned the earlier information was incorrect. Eleven miners were dead while one, Randall McCloy Jr., was still alive. He received immediate medical attention. Hatfield asked the state troopers to relay the correct information to the clergy at the church where the families were gathering. Outrage and tears ensued as many families believed that their husbands, fathers, brothers, friends, and neighbors were alive. Hatfield
issued an official statement just after 3:00 a.m. confirming the eleven miners were
dead and McCloy was the lone survivor.

The following morning Hatfield clarified what happened in the mine disaster
and rescue, to the best of his knowledge, at a press conference for the media.
Hatfield explained that the miscommunication happened between the rescue teams
and the command center, but that the information leaked from the command center
as many of those in the command center called their loved ones to tell them the
perceived good news. He expressed his grief and sorrow, all while repeatedly
explaining what went wrong on the communication front.

However, the days, months, and years that followed were marked by
controversy. Not only were there questions as to what caused the explosion in the
mine, but also, and more importantly, why did the miners not survive and why were
the emergency oxygen apparatuses not working. The lone survivor, Randal McCloy,
Jr., wrote a letter to the families of the miners who lost their lives detailing what
happened as they waited for rescue. In that letter he outlined how they tried to
section off the mine to preserve oxygen, pounded on the mine so rescue teams could
find them, and prayed throughout the hours they were trapped. More importantly,
he claimed that four of the emergency oxygen apparatuses that the trapped miners
were carrying with them had failed (“Text of mine survivor Randal McCloy's letter,”
2006). His letter began to shed light on what really happened at the Sago mine.

Responding quickly to the failure of the rescue, the West Virginia legislature
passed SB.247, a bill that required an emergency response system as well as
increased oxygen supplies underground, as well as communication equipment and tracking devices in coalmines. The legislation required a change in practice to make sure that if miners survived the initial explosion, they had a greater chance to get out of the mine alive. The bill passed the same day it was brought to the floor, with no hesitation, and Governor Joe Manchin signed the bill into law on January 27, only approximately three weeks after the disaster.

As discussion continued on ways the disaster and communication problems could have been prevented, the International Coal Group responded through press releases and at the Mine Safety and Health Administration’s public hearing on the Sago disaster, which took place just a few miles away from the mine at West Virginia Wesleyan College. International Coal Group released their initial findings about the cause of the disaster through a press release on March 14, detailing that they believed that lightning caused the explosion, and that mining could begin to resume as the problems with the mine, such as replacing old seals with new ventilation, had been corrected (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a). They released the information to reassure miners that it was safe come back to work at Sago. Mining resumed at Sago on March 16, 2006.

The International Coal Group continued to support their findings released in March at the hearings that took place two months later. The public hearing, which took place from May 2-4, 2006, was unique as, “Historically, investigations of mine disasters in the United States have never involved the families of the victims,” but in this case it did (Mine Safety and Administration, 2006a, p. 9). Officials from the
International Coal Group, the Mine Safety and Health Administration, and investigators of the disaster spoke and answered questions from the United Mine Workers President Cecil Roberts, state legislators, families of the victims, mining officials, and mining experts. The three-day affair was long and tiresome, with many entities harshly questioning the International Coal Group and their findings; some even had to be called down and asked to move on (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 848). The hearing ended with the families of the miners giving a statement on their loved ones who had passed and detailing their unanswered questions and promoting legislation they deemed still necessary.

The ongoing and long investigations of the explosion came from multiple areas. Multiple agencies, such as the Mine Safety and Health Administration, the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Senate (twice), the House of Representatives continued to investigate the Sago disaster. The International Coal Group hired an independent group to investigate the events leading up to, during, and after the Sago mine disaster. While there were multiple theories as to what caused the explosion, it was found that lightning was the cause. Multiple investigations pointed to a lightning strike that ignited the methane, which was unusual for January in West Virginia (Ward, 2011a). The Mine Safety and Health Administration confirmed through their investigations that lightning was the most probable ignition source. They also found that the use of foam Omega seals instead of concrete might have increased the magnitude of the disaster, as well as improper methane monitoring
In June 2006, federal legislation finally passed as a result of the Sago disaster. The Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response Act (MINER) passed in three short weeks after being brought to the floor of the Senate. The MINER act required increased emergency preparedness in coal mines including extra oxygen and increased tracking and communication technology, increased availability of mine rescue teams, more stringent regulations on sealing abandoned mine areas, and increased fines for repeat and habitual violations ("Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response Act of 2006," 2011).

In 2007, the Sago Mine closed permanently. The International Coal Group claimed a low yield of coal in the mine, high production costs, and the low price on coal made Sago an unprofitable mine (Ward, 2007). The dozen of wrongful death lawsuits brought forth by the families continued for five years, with all the victims suing except for Martin Toler Jr.’s estate, finally culminating in a judge-approved settlement. The lawsuit was set to be tried late in November 2011, but was settled before the initial hearings (Ward, 2011b). Finally, in June 2011, the International Coal Group was sold. Arch Coal purchased International Coal Group for 3.4 billion dollars and quickly moved up to the second largest metallurgical coal producer in the United States (Nicholson, 2011).

In the aftermath of the Sago Mine disaster most questions revolved around how the explosion happened, how rescue attempts failed to get to the miners
quickly enough to save them, and how the false information was leaked about the
trapped miners. The final question looked to the future, and how could have the
disaster been prevented? The answers to all of these questions reveal how the mine
company's orientation to coal mining, formulated their position on the explosion
and directed the episodes that transpired after the initial explosion.

The Sago Mine Disaster Analysis

After the disaster, Hatfield portrayed the events as a “tragic accident” (Mine
Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 192, p. 300). The scene, which was
created by an unusual lightning storm, and the conditions within the mine helped to
create not only the explosion but also the problems that occurred after, such as the
miscommunication between the command center and the rescue teams. However, it
was not until the scene became “unusual” that it limited the power of the agents and
altered the acts. The agency of the International Coal Group, or their means to mine
coal safely, was effective in a normal scene. However, because of the possibility of
the unusual conditions, the International Coal Group adapted their means to
respond and survive the unusual scenic elements in the future.

Scene. No one argued that the scene at the Sago Mine disaster was typical for
a West Virginia winter day. Hatfield and others at the International Coal Group
portrayed the scene as unusual, starting with the weather outside the mine that
morning. It is extremely unusual for a lightning storm to hit West Virginia in the
middle of winter, but on that day a storm came through with extremely powerful
lightning strikes, “three times the normal strength” (Mine Safety and Health
Administration, 2006a, p. 685). Prior to the storm, the mine operated normally.

According to Hatfield, “we believe that the hours and days before the explosion contained no specific warnings” inside the mine (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006c, p. 1245). This was only the first part of the disaster in what Hatfield and others described as a troubling scene.

Hatfield and other International Coal Group officials also described the rescue and command center as extremely stressful and a “chaotic scene” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 645). While the miners were trapped, the command center was hectic as people funneled in and out of the center, trying to lend a hand and transmit new information. As Hatfield explained, the “command center is not a group of people sitting down. It’s really --- really taking control of everything that’s there,” which provided a lot of stress and traffic for those in the command center (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 611).

Furthermore, those who were staying in the command center had to deal with the situation, creating a scene where they were emotionally and physically tired ( Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a). Hatfield and others pointed out that this might have led to the miscommunication that twelve miners were alive, but the confusion was so great among the many people traversing in and out that Hatfield doubted that the issue for the miscommunication “will ever be resolved with certainty” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006c, p. 1243).

Furthermore, why didn’t Hatfield and other International Coal Group officials come to the church where everyone was gathered to deliver the unfortunate but
correct news to those who were waiting so desperately? Hatfield pointed out that it was almost impossible to get to the church to deliver the news in a timely manner, as “to actually leave the command center and drive over there through that huge crowd of people that had gathered would have consumed about an hour” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 443; “News conference with ICG officials,” 2006).

The scene of the disaster had created communication problems in multiple ways once the disaster had struck. The weather, unusual for a West Virginia winter, created the disaster. The command center was hectic and chaotic as many people tried to help in the rescue efforts. The possibility of getting to the miners’ families quickly to deliver information was slim. The scene caused a problem for the International Coal Group and all those who were involved in the disaster.

**Agency.** According to the International Coal Group, the agency, or the means through which coalmining operates, also played a factor in the explosion. Hatfield, at the public hearing in May at West Virginia Wesleyan College, mentioned that he felt not enough was being done legislatively in the fields of seals, oxygen rescue apparatuses, and tracking devices, and that in “hindsight there are lots of things that can be done different to make not only the Sago Mine safer but all coal mines safer. And that’s part of the reason we’re having these hearings today” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 886). Hatfield stated, “I believe the Sago incident clearly demonstrates that the old rule, old rules of sealed areas and how we manage sealed areas have failed us” when it comes to using the Omega blocks for a coalmine
seal, something that was found to have helped create the explosion (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 735). In regards to the oxygen respirators, Hatfield pointed out that, “the industry hasn’t really stepped up there in more than ten years, so I think there is probably a better animal out there” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 846). Furthermore, Hatfield pointed out the usefulness of having tracking devices on the miners, but noted that the industry is not quite “yet to the point where we can rely on them” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 847).

Hatfield and the International Coal Group made multiple recommendations to advance the quality of the ways in which they mine coal and noted that they were open to new strategies and technology. The International Coal Group stated, “As the Company has previously stated on several occasions, it supports the provision of additional caches of self-contained self-rescuers (SCSR) underground, improved SCSR design, technology advancements in underground communications and an enhancement of the mine rescue process,” making progress on advancing the safety that is present while mining coal (“ICG response to McAteer report,” 2007, para. 1). Furthermore, the International Coal Group posited that “the Company will continue to cooperate with those efforts in a diligent search for answers that will help make coal mines safer in the future” (“ICG response to McAteer report,” 2007, para. 5). The standards of the International Coal Group and West Virginia mining corporations reduced the chances of the miners surviving in the aftermath of a
disaster. If the technology standards had been raised, the miners might have made it out of the mine alive.

The International Coal Group immediately promoted the higher safety standards in their mines and in the Sago Mine, as they included a “ventilation plan and, with MSHA and the state’s concurrence, eliminated the seal area so that that area is being vented to the surface and does no longer pose a risk,” and Hatfield also mentioned that “I’m not sure that there will ever be another seal at Sago” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 929, 908). The International Coal Group felt that the means by which coal was being mined could be improved in the areas of safety, communication, and technology. The International Coal Group was focused on improving their agency.

In regards to communication, the International Coal Group also wanted to make sure that the miners and families of the miner’s knew of their findings as soon as possible. Hatfield declared, “We vowed in early January that we would keep our employees and the families of those who perished informed as to what we learned about the cause of the accident. Furthermore, we felt the moral obligation to inform our employees of what we knew and why we believed it was safe to restart the Sago Mine” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006c, p. 1240). The International Coal Group was trying to advance the safety measures and the means of mining, despite the challenges.

**Purpose.** One item that was particularly challenging for the International Coal Group and the Sago Mine was the fact that the mine was not creating a profit. In fact,
Hatfield testified that he believed that the mine struggled to make a profit before it fell into his hands. He claimed, “One can only assume that if the mine wasn’t cost effective, they couldn’t make any money there, and they closed it” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 434). At the time, the International Coal Group was struggling to make a profit and was operating in the red, but still “employed 148 workers” and contracted out for work as well (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 201). However, the goal was to get back in the black, a goal Hatfield thought he could achieve stating that “it continues to lose money. But we believe that it can be made a profitable mine” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 434). Thus, making a profit was a primary purpose of the company. However, there were obstacles to profit, including the disaster.

Because one purpose of a company is to make a profit, the International Coal Group had to expedite some of the processes that occur after a fatal accident in the mine. The International Coal Group took flak at the hearings because they released some of their findings only three months after the disaster, before any other agency, such as the Mine Health and Safety Administration and the United Mine Workers Association. Hatfield defended his company by noting that companies have different timelines, and goals, than government organizations and that “waiting was simply not an option” as families, friends, and fellow employees needed to know “those initial findings because it was simply unacceptable to send our miners back to work without comment or explanation” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 57).
The International Coal Group had a purpose to make money, or at least break even, which led them to the quick turnaround on their investigations.

**Agents.** As with many crises, the International Coal Group pushed one person forward to be the spokesperson for the disaster. In the case of Sago, this man was Ben Hatfield, Chief Executive Officer of the International Coal Group. Hatfield fielded questions throughout the press conferences in the immediate aftermath while also taking the lead role in the public hearings. Hatfield, by becoming the spokesperson, had become the main voice for the International Coal Group.

Granted, there were other actors in the drama that played out after the mine disaster. The workers who were in charge that morning spoke about the events at the hearing. The United Mine Workers of America and their President Cecil Roberts asked tough questions and overstepped bounds in the public hearing trying to find answers, while the chair asked him for “germaneness” and just to ask questions, as Roberts even stated that the “Chairman has reminded me three times now” to stay on track and to ask questions (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 884, 908).

The miners often get glossed over throughout the context of the disaster, mainly because they were so helpless miles inside the mine. They were portrayed to have been “well-trained miners that did exactly what they believed was the right thing to do and exactly in compliance with their training” according to Hatfield (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 875). As one miner who testified at the hearing stated, “West Virginia is home of the best trained miners in the world
today. And for anyone to question [the] training of the Two Left crew, it's unacceptable. These men did what they [were] trained to do. They donned their SCSRs, they went down, tried to escape, went up the intake and barricaded [themselves] all while in the blind. So these men were trained quite well (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 73). Hatfield goes on to claim, “We can also state quite affirmatively that the miners lost at Sago appeared to do everything in accordance with their training” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006c, p. 1244). The miners did everything they could to survive; however, it was not enough to overcome the situation.

Looking back, no one played a bigger role than Hatfield. Hatfield was the main voice of the International Coal Group in this disaster, as he frequently had to answer questions, explain procedures, and answer to the victim’s families. He was representing a company that had hurt the lives of many. However, Hatfield portrayed himself and the others who were in the command center in an interesting light. In fact, he even claimed that he “wasn’t even smart enough to tell you exactly what the right answer was” regarding oxygen supplies (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 845). He also pointed out that those in the command center wanted to receive good news, and they worked as hard as they could to bring the miners out alive. The vice president of the International Coal Group pointed out that those in the command center “[wanted] to convey good news,” including Hatfield (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 229). According to one mine official, “everyone in the mine office was fully committed physically and...
emotionally... to the rescue effort” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 226). Hatfield even pointed out that after the disaster, reliving the tragedy through the pictures “makes me feel all the more determined to learn something from this accident so that no one ever has to go through this again” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 956-957). Hatfield wanted to make sure everyone knew that he and others gave it all they could to save the miners, get information out to the people, and continue to learn from the disaster. However, there were other factors at play that hurt the agent’s power and capabilities and affected the act.

**Act.** The acts that occurred leading up to the explosion in the mine were claimed to have been (except for the unusual lightning storm above ground), an example of an average day in the mine. One of the fire bosses that morning, Fred Jamison, claimed to have found no abnormal conditions in the mine that morning when questioned at the hearing (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 342). The other fire boss who died in the explosion, Terry Helms, had recorded the same findings as Jamison (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a). Furthermore, it should be noted that in the hearings there was hardly any mention of how dangerous coal mining is, or the risks that occur deep underground on a normal day. However, the dangers did change, the risks grew, and the acts were therefore altered once the explosion occurred.

Within hours of the explosion, the risk of going into the mine grew exponentially. Rescue teams were held back from entering the mine until the
situation cleared up, which was a tough situation to be in. Hatfield stated, “I know they were doing everything they could do to get to the miners as fast as they could without risking the lives of the mine rescue teams or doing something that would cause ill effect to the miners” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006c, p. 1141). In the end, the risk increased once the act changed the scene as those above ground contemplated the terrible conundrum of “risking the lives of a mine rescue team and saving the lives of its employees, friends and family” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 853-854).

Analysis of the terms. While the scene became a major part of the explosion and, in turn, the deaths of twelve men, it was not until the scene displayed unusual characteristics that the scene affected the agents and their acts. Once the unusual scene created the accident, risks were elevated. Miners did all they could so that rescuers could find them and created barriers so that they could survive until the rescue teams got there. However, not even their vast training, knowledge, and experience in the mine was enough to help. Miners lacked the agency necessary to overcome the unnatural scene. Their attempts did not go unnoticed, though. There are multiple statements of how the rescue teams, miners and others’ efforts “were tremendous” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 843, Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006c). In addition, Hatfield stated, “We made what we believed to be the best decisions, based on the information available, while working under extreme stress and physical exhaustion” (“News conference with ICG officials,” 2006, para. 29). The communication issues were created by problems with
the mine rescue teams “speaking while under apparatuses,” the nature and chaos inside the command center, and the emotional nature of the rescue attempt (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 672). In the end, the scene overcame the agents and their acts.

However, the pentadic element of agency has the ability to allow the miners to overcome the scene. After the disaster, the International Coal Group pushed to enhance the agency of the miners, in order to strengthen safety measures and regulations to compete with the possibility of another unusual scene. The International Coal Group wanted to truly increase the safety and improve the practices inside coalmines, but most of their new strategies and technology are used only when the scene is out of the ordinary. The International Coal Group claimed that they needed to improve and become industry leaders in the areas of “additional caches of self-contained self-rescuers (SCSR) underground, improved SCSR design, technology advancements in underground communications and an enhancement of the mine rescue process” (“ICG response to McAteer report,” 2007, para. 1). All of those areas usually were only affected after an unusual or extraordinary scene had created an explosion like the one at the Sago Mine. The enhanced agency has the capability to deal with a tough scene. Unlike the miners, the rescue teams, and those calling the shots above ground, the technology is not limited by these human characteristics. The agents with their current agency, in most cases, can make a coal mine safe when human action normally had come up short. In the case of Sago, that dynamic was played out as experienced miners and rescue teams could not beat the
conditions of the mine, but with an enhanced agency of increased oxygen and tracking devices the outcome may have been different. By working on new safety standards and technology, the enhanced agency might have strengthened the agents to deal with the unusual and difficult scene and may have allowed miners to walk out of damaged mines.

Emerging from the discourse is a portrayal that the International Coal Group believed the act of coal mining, under normal conditions and in natural scenes, should not pose a risk for coal miners. Their agency, or how they go about mining coal, is safe under normal circumstances. Hatfield truly “believe[d] that (Sago) can be made a profitable mine and a safe mine” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 434). The agents within the coalmine are able to effectively mine coal when the scene is normal. However, when the “perfect storm,” as described by Delegate William Hamilton at the hearings, hit the mine, the scene altered the power of the agents and the power, and type, of the acts that occurred later (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 794).

Because of the unusual scene, the International Coal Group could have just chalked up the crisis to a mere fate of mining coal in Appalachia. Multiple times people have used the scene to defend themselves against blame and explain their actions (Birdsell, 1987; Ling, 1981; Tonn & Endress, 1993). In the case of Sago, the same use of scene as a defense could have been applied. While the nature of the lightning and the Omega blocks were recognized as factors outside the company’s control resulting in lesser fines from the Mine Safety and Health Administration, the
International Coal Group still pushed towards new legislation and standards in regards to communication systems, mine seals, oxygen respirators, and tracking devices for miners. The International Coal Group could have blamed the scene as the cause of the act and decided not to lobby and push for new safety measures. As Hatfield pointed out, improving technology, such as new rescuers are a “little bit more expensive... I mean, you're going to have to put out some money to update your equipment, so that this --- these men have better self-rescuers and that they don't have to rely on rescuers that are outdated” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 317). The International Coal Group took on these expenses while operating a mine that was losing money in order to give their miners the equipment and means to mine coal safely and to survive a scene that could potentially turn deadly. This stance is rare as in the history of a coalmining industry where safety was often considered a hindrance to profit (Lewis et al., 2009, p. 255).

In the end, the International Coal Group dedicated itself to creating change in order to combat future unnatural scenes, while showing that their mines were safe on a normal day. This is most likely why Hatfield described the dark days at Sago as an accident. Thus, while scene can alter the power of the agents and control the acts, it does so only when the scene shifts to an unnatural and unusual scene. However, with an increased and strengthened agency the scene might not overpower the agents, as the agency could give the miners, operators, and rescuers the tools they need to survive. International Coal Group portrayed a stance that believed that the agency given to the miners, in most cases, is able to control the scene. The company
wanted to become an industry leader in order to make sure that during an unnatural scene the company can still control the agents and acts in order to make sure their miners are safe.
CHAPTER 5: The Upper Big Branch Disaster

On April 6, 2010, disaster again struck inside a West Virginia coalmine. At approximately 3:01 P.M. an explosion, fueled by coal dust, decimated the mine. 29 miners were unaccounted for after the explosion. The rescue lasted four days, and culminated with the discovery that all 29 miners had perished. The timeline of the disaster is listed below, as described by National Public Radio’s timeline of the events (“Hour by hour,” 2011).

The Upper Big Branch Disaster Timeline

Four years after the Sago Mine disaster, a West Virginia coal mine experienced a disaster. This time, a Massey Energy owned mine, the Upper Big Branch, left 29 miners dead from an explosion. Massey Energy was the sixth largest coal producer in the United States, amassing 66 mines across the United States with most in the Appalachian region (Russonello, 2010). Despite being only the sixth largest producer, Massey was one of the worst in the field of safety. In the ten years before the Upper Big Branch Mine disaster, Massey was responsible for 62,923 violations and 25,612 significant ones, more than any other company in the same time frame. Yet, Massey only paid 27% of their fines, as they adamantly disagreed with many of the violations and 61% of the violations that were disputed after 2006 were still unresolved at the time of the disaster (Russonello, 2013). In the end, the safety violations ultimately led to the disaster.

At approximately 3:01 p.m. on April 5, 2010, an explosion of coal dust and methane occurred, shutting down the power and communication processes at the
Upper Big Branch mine. Thirty minutes later, a group of Massey employees went into the mine and found miners struggling to get out, many of whom had very serious injuries. At 4:00 p.m. Massey’s own Southwest Virginia Rescue Team arrived at the mine. At 4:22 they entered the mine, and they realized the nature of the explosion. Previous communication had indicated that up to ten miners were injured, but they soon realized the number was over thirty. Throughout the afternoon, rescue teams went in and out of the mine and several deceased miners were found. At 8:32 p.m. Massey’s Chief Executive Officer Don Blankenship informed the public that there were seven miners confirmed dead and 19 miners unaccounted for. Just after midnight, the Mine Safety and Health Administration relayed information to the public and media that 12 miners were confirmed dead, 17 unaccounted for, and two were receiving care in the hospital. Just minutes after the release of information, the rescue teams were ordered out of the mine as carbon dioxide and methane gas were rising to a point where it was no longer safe to continue. As rescue operation teams evacuated the mine, at 2:06 a.m., Massey confirmed that 25 miners had passed away, leaving four miners unaccounted for. Hope remained for the miners to survive, as safety chambers implemented after the Sago Mine disaster had enough supplies for 22 men to survive 96 hours underground.

Early on the morning of April 6, crews drilled boreholes in order to reduce the dangerous gas levels. The work continued until the morning of April 8, when rescue teams were finally allowed to enter the mine again. However, the rescue
attempt was short lived, as gas levels were found to be too dangerous once again, and rescue teams were told to evacuate. Just after midnight on April 9, rescuers again entered the mine but were forced to leave due to heavy smoke.

That afternoon, rescue teams entered the mines for the final time. They finally found the four missing miners, but they were already dead. Governor Joe Manchin confirmed the final four deaths at 1:38 a.m. on April 10. The last four miners had not used safety chambers nor rescue apparatuses, so it appeared that they were killed in the original blast.

After the last miner was found, the Mine Safety and Health Administration closed the mine so that they could perform their investigation. While waiting on the Mine Safety and Health Administration investigation results, the public and legislators sharply criticized Massey. Massey Energy had to respond to accusations that the company was at fault as Massey watched a drop of 17% in its stock, creating a market value loss of $818.9 million (“This week in dirty coal: Tax season edition,” 2010). Numerous news reports indicated that the numerous violations that Massey had amassed led to the explosion. Reports claimed that Massey had 458 violations in the previous year alone, highlighting the problems Massey was having keeping the mine safe (Sullivan, Freifeld, & Cronin-Fisk, 2010).

As tensions grew after the disaster and Massey continued to reel, President Barack Obama added pressure. In a speech from the White House Rose Garden on April 15, he claimed that we all know of the dangers of coal mining: “we know what can cause mine explosions and we know how to prevent them... I refuse to accept
any number of miner deaths as simply the cost of doing business” adding further that the Upper Big Branch disaster was “a failure first and foremost of management, but also a failure of oversight and a failure of laws so riddled with loopholes that they allow unsafe conditions to continue” (Ward, 2010, para. 3, 10). Obama painted the picture that mining companies, including Massey, were not doing enough to keep their miners safe and it required government and legislative action to force change. Massey responded and disagreed with the President's statement in a press release, claiming, “Today's statements by the White House about the Upper Big Branch tragedy are regrettable. We fear that the President has been misinformed about our record and the mining industry in general” and they believe “some are rushing to judgment for political gain or to avoid blame” (“Massey responds to White House statements,” 2010, para. 1, 5).

That same day, Massey Chief Executive Officer Don Blankenship sat down with Charleston Gazette reporters for his most in depth interview after the disaster, as he was “unusually quiet” after the disaster as Blankenship was known for speaking out on current mining issues (Sullivan et al., 2010, para. 4). In the interview with the state’s largest paper, he answered questions about the mine, Massey's record, the Mine Safety and Health Administration's violations that had been issued, and his character. Blankenship also began to defend Massey's poor safety records (Friend and Rivard, 2010). Blankenship pointed to the challenges that exist in West Virginia coalmines, a safety violation appeals system, and the large physical nature of the Upper Big Branch as factors that led to the disaster.
Blankenship also noted what his company was doing to comfort the families of the miners.

Obama and Vice President Joe Biden also visited the Upper Big Branch Mine for the memorial service on April 25. President Obama gave the eulogy and comforted the families of the fallen miners. He promised the families and community that gathered for the memorial that he would honor the fallen miners by making sure that safety improved in the mines (“Obama gives eulogy to Upper Big Branch miners,” 2010).

In the months after the disaster, Blankenship appeared in U.S. Senate hearings in order to defend and explain Massey’s practices. On May 20, 2010, Blankenship took the stand to testify on the explosion in a Senate hearing, receiving questions from Senator Tom Harkin (D- Iowa) and Senator Robert C. Byrd (D- WV). Also testifying during the hearing was United Mine Workers President Cecil Roberts. Senators Harkin and Byrd took Blankenship to task on the significant number of violations Massey had amassed and charged Massey with putting profits ahead of safety. Roberts pointed out that Massey went far beyond the norms of many other coalmining companies when it came to safety violations (”Mine safety, company panel,” 2010). Blankenship responded that Massey operated as an average mine in terms of safety, to which Senator Byrd responded, “Massey is not average” (“Mine safety, company panel,” 2010, “Robert C. Byrd”). As the hearing went on, Harkin brought up the point that Blankenship had sent out a memo claiming that “coal pays the bills” and that the companies should focus on mining coal, to which Blankenship
responded that he was simply telling them that construction and other activities do not produce profits like coal (“Mine safety, company panel,” 2010, “Tom Harkin”). At the end of the session, Harkin remarked that he understood all of the dangers miners face, from being miles underground to using explosives, but that the United States and the coal industry “have to get... miners safety measures that they can rely on” (“Mine safety, company panel,” 2010, “Tom Harkin”).

In June 2010, Massey began to mine coal out of the seam that the Upper Big Branch Mine sat on. Massey Energy created a plan to build a new entrance to the coal seam so that they could extract coal reserves that were untouched. While the Mine Safety and Health Administration had placed a hold on the Upper Big Branch Mine, Massey needed to mine coal in order to offset the loss of profits they were incurring (Huber, 2013).

In December 2010, Don Blankenship announced his retirement from Massey Energy, a company he had served for 28 years. Blankenship reportedly took home a large retirement as Massey “will provide Blankenship with $2.7 million upon retirement, a free house for life, millions more in deferred compensation, and a ‘salary continuation retirement benefit’ of $18,241-a-month that will continue for 10 years after his departure at the end of the year” (Mosk, 2012, para. 2).

Just weeks after Blankenship retired, rival coal company Alpha Natural Resources bought Massey for a price of 7.2 billion dollars. However, no legal ramifications could be brought against Alpha Natural Resources, but the former Massey officials and workers could still be tried individually (De La Merced, 2011).
Because of this, Massey and its workers still faced questions inside the courtroom for years, all while the investigation of the mine disaster was still pending.

It took over a year, but the Mine Safety and Health Administration finally released their final report in December 2011, 20 months after the accident. They found that an excess of methane and coal dust combined with several safety violations created the explosion. Furthermore, they found that Massey often intimidated their miners to stay silent about safety problems and injuries (Kerley, 2011). The investigation also found that the ignition source was a piece of machinery that was not operating with the correct safety features in order to reduce sparks and, ultimately, caused the explosion. The large amount of coal dust in the mine, which is a safety violation, also contributed to the disaster. All in all, the investigation showed that Massey and their operations played a large part in the explosion, highlighted by the 369 citations that totaled over $10.8 million issued by the Mine Safety and Health Administration for the disaster, the largest in the history of coal mining (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2011).

In January of 2012, the miners’ families settled their wrongful death lawsuits, receiving at a minimum over three million dollars, the amount Massey originally offered. The Department of Justice required Massey to give at least $1.5 million. Because of the private nature of the suits, the exact number the parties agreed on is not known (“29 W.Va. families settle in Upper Big Branch deaths,” 2012).

Since the acquisition by Alpha Natural Resources, the Upper Big Branch was idle and not producing coal. A few months after the settlement, Alpha Natural
Resources claimed that the mine was closed for good on April 6, 2012. Releasing a statement on the second anniversary of the disaster, they claimed the mine and the disaster “is a solemn reminder of why we must always put safety first in everything we do at work and at home” (“Upper Big Branch Mine to be closed for good,” 2010, para. 5)

Even though the mine closed, legal actions against the mine operators continued. Superintendent of the mine, Gary May, pleaded guilty to federal fraud as he frequently alerted miners that inspectors were on the grounds, as well as repeatedly manipulated ventilation systems to fool safety inspectors. May faced up to five years in prison and a $250,000 dollar fine for his transgressions (Raby, 2012).

In March 2013, Massey employee David Hughart was tried for conspiring to fool safety inspectors and knowingly hiding safety violations. During his testimony, he admitted that the decision to try to fool the system and hide violations came from upper management. When pushed by the judge to name who the decision-makers were, he simply said “the Chief Executive Officer” (Walter, 2013, para. 1) While he did not mention Don Blankenship by name, Massey’s Chief Executive Officer at the time of the disaster, it is unknown if a lawsuit will be brought against Blankenship because of the testimony.

Finally, it should be noted that no new coal legislation was passed after the Upper Big Branch disaster. President of the United Mine Workers, Cecil Roberts, claimed. “We heard repeatedly in the weeks, months and years after the disaster
that action would be taken in Congress after all the facts about what caused it were in... That proved to be false. Miners and their families need more than lip service from congressional leadership; they need action” (Ward, 2013, para. 6). New coal legislation that was brought to the House and Senate floor was rushed, and did not pass before the session ended. However, Senators Joe Manchin, Jay Rockefeller, and House of Representatives member Nick Rahall all want to introduce legislation to fix mining problems that contributed to the Upper Big Branch disaster, such as an abundance of coal dust (Ward, 2013).

The Upper Big Branch Disaster Analysis

As with the Sago Mine disaster, the officials from Massey Energy had to stand and answer tough questions that came from the media and government officials. A pentadic analysis of their discourse highlights the dominant features and reasoning behind Massey Energy. Their answers gave answers as to why the explosion occurred, who was at fault, and what could have been done to prevent the disaster. In the end, Massey’s rhetoric emphasized the pentadic element of purpose as dominant to lessen the elements of agency. The scene is used as a way to defend Massey from blame for the accident. The scene, as portrayed by Massey, diminishes the agents’ ability to act. The tension between the purpose, agency, and scene, shows that the motives behind Massey Energy’s discourse was to try and preserve their central purpose of making a profit.

Purpose. The Upper Big Branch Mine’s ownership had changed hands several times but at the time of the disaster Massey Energy controlled operations. Massey,
one of the largest mining companies in West Virginia, was trying to make a profit off of a mine that had the ability to make a lot of money for the owners. While Massey did not state directly that making money was their primary goal, the amount of money they were set to make begins to shed light on a purpose that dominated the way they mined coal. Massey also showed a preference to the ends, or their purpose, when set against their means of mining coal, or their agency.

Don Blankenship mentioned that the Upper Big Branch mine produced “higher-quality, higher-priced metallurgical coal” and that the mine represented over “4% of our production” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 18). After the disaster, Massey Energy’s stock plummeted 17%, so one purpose of the communication after the disaster was to likely shore up the stock (“The week in dirty coal: Tax season,” 2010). Massey had lost a lot of money from the disaster, as the disaster hurt company value as well as delayed mining coal.

The Upper Big Branch Mine was vital to Massey Energy for its production value and potential for profit. The significant profit from the mine might have been one of the reasons that the disaster happened. Blankenship claimed that the mine was set to make "$20 million to $50 million dollars of earnings,” so keeping the mine open was important (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 81). The explosion hurt the chance for profit, but due to the large amount of insurance Massey carried, Blankenship felt that “there should not be any concern about Massey’s financial strength” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 80).
Massey also was losing money as each violation brought fines up to “several tens of thousands of dollars” ("Massey responds to today’s Senate hearing," 2010, para. 6). Their answer to these violations was to appeal well over the majority of the violations, many more than most mining companies, and at the time of the disaster they had 61% of their appeals still unresolved (Russonello, 2010). Massey put together a “five person team” to sort through the violations, sorting through them and categorizing what the problems were and what the “corrective actions” would be (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 66-67). However, because they had to wait for the appeals process to run its course, they could not give their side and their understanding of the violations, generating a problem with the appeals process (Friend & Rivard, 2010). Was Massey wanting to give their side of the story or actually trying to appeal violations to lessen the amount charged to them and their fines? The tremendous amount of violations appealed suggests the latter, as the violations had to be fixed before the mine was allowed to resume operation ("Massey responds to today’s Senate hearing," 2010). In addition, Massey had only paid 21% of the appeals levied against them (Russonello, 2010). Either way, Massey claimed that the government’s intrusion into their mine caused them trouble, created a problem, but more importantly Massey lost a large amount of money that had to be spent to cover the violations.

However, Massey was not only worried about their company losing money, but the lost miners’ families as well. Blankenship felt a need to continue to give to the families who had lost loved ones. He claimed, “the benefits are good by any
measure. We’re very proud of the benefits, although we realize that doesn’t help much” to bring back the lost loved ones (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 11). Blankenship pointed out that he and the company were “focused on the families” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 87). Blankenship and Massey viewed the coalmine as a way to make profit, providing money to the company. In that same sense, they believed that the miners also viewed the coalmine as a way to make a profit and provide for their families. Because of that, Massey went into great detail to explain how they were taking care of the families that lost loved ones through college funds, child care, workers comp, and “sizable life insurance payments [as] it will be about five times their pay” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 11). Massey quickly told the families about the benefits they would provide, making absolutely sure the miner’s families knew they “will be OK financially” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 11).

**Agency.** Massey Energy liked to portray the company as an organization who worked diligently towards creating a safe environment for miners as they strove towards a purpose. However, other information, such as actual safety numbers, proved otherwise and showed how Massey put the power of agency below purpose. Massey also shows this lessening of agency through their interaction with the government.

Blankenship noted that at Massey, “We spend a lot more money on our continuous miners, on our roof bolters, mantrips and so forth to put safety features on them that are not required by the law” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 74). In addition to that point, in a press release Massey pointed out that the “Upper Big
Branch has had less than one violation per day of inspection by MSHA, a rate consistent with national averages” (“Statement from Massey Energy,” 2010, para. 5). Keeping up with averages, Massey claimed, “The percentage of violations appealed at [Upper Big Branch] and Massey is similar to that for the industry as a whole” (“Massey Energy responds to White House statements”, 2010, para. 3). Massey claimed that they not want to be leaders in safety, but were aiming to just be average, or enough to get by.

It should be noted that Massey was not even average in regards to safety violations. Senator Byrd and Harkin pointed out, repeatedly, during the Senate hearing that Massey “is not average” and that Massey had some of the worst safety records of any coal mining corporation, despite their increased output of coal compared to other mining companies (“Mine safety, company panel,” 2010, “Robert C. Byrd”), Massey had 25,612 serious violations in the previous ten years, more than any other company (Russonello, 2010).

However, Massey believed that they were not always to blame when it came to the violations. Massey and Don Blankenship claimed, “We have to work together with the government and the company to find more opportunities to engineer the risk out of mining” (“Mine safety, company panel,” 2010, “Don Blankenship”). Massey portrayed the advances of safety as a combined responsibility of the government and the company. This helped to lessen Massey’s responsibility. Massey wanted to use the other agents to help distribute the responsibility of safety, and their accountability, when it came to their organization and workers.
Finally, when it came to further advancing safety, Massey only briefly discussed what the future safety protocols might be after the investigation was over. Blankenship testified that “I have no idea right now what they are” in reference to the new safety plans that may come to fruition out of the explosion (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 80). Blankenship was more interested in the investigation than the actual problems, once again putting agency, in regards to increased safety, behind the purpose of making a profit. Massey was worried about the investigation and the consequences, not finding the problems, and fixing the problems that ultimately caused the disaster. Massey did not value agency, but instead tried to maintain a normal rate of safety, as seen by their constant claims that they were average, when in reality they were far from it (Friend & Rivard, 2010). In addition, Massey Energy claimed that safety is a joint effort between the coal companies and the government in order to reduce their responsibility towards coalmine safety.

**Scene.** While Massey pointed out that they were an average mine in regards of violations, spending on technology, and that they tried to learn from the disaster, it should be noted that all of these, as part of their agency, are set against the scene. The scene created many challenges for safety, and in turn Massey’s agency. These situations show the importance for Massey to portray a scene that created the accidents and limited the agents, as they probably knew that they were not doing all they could to prevent the accident. Thus, the power of their agency had to be lessened in order for the argument that the scene created and caused the disaster, to occur.
West Virginia has unique scenery, with the Appalachian Mountains rolling across the state as several large rivers cut across their valleys. In regards to the scene of the Upper Big Branch Mine, according to Don Blankenship and Massey, the scene of the mine was unique as well. The physical characteristics of the mine, the mining safety standards and violation appeals process, as well as the role of coal in politics and the media all created a dominant scene which led to the disaster. By placing the blame for the disaster on the scene, Massey could lessen its responsibility in regards to the disaster, as the scene dominated the agents and the act.

The Upper Big Branch Mine, according to Don Blankenship, was one of the largest producing mines owned by Massey Energy. Not only did the mine produce a lot of coal and profit for Massey, but also it was “20-some square miles. So it’s big” according to Blankenship (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 23). Furthermore, Blankenship pointed out that the Upper Big Branch was a gassy mine, not to a point that it “was not manageable” but more than other mines (Friend & Rivard, 2010). A mine that big, and gassy, can cause problems. The methane monitors that were on machinery in the mines, according to Blankenship, might have “had an opportunity to discover the issue or not,” due to the size of the mine and the gassy nature (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 52).

Furthermore, Don Blankenship was asked whether all coalmining disasters were preventable, as some experts claim. His answer shows his belief that there are certain factors at work inside the scene of an Appalachian mine that are
uncontrollable. According to Blankenship, “People start fires by rubbing flints together. And you can create tremendous heat by sandstone rubbing together. And mines liberate gas and all that,” insinuating that accidents can and will happen inside a coalmine (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 79). These accidents are more prone in Appalachian mines, as Blankenship further reiterated that “Mining in central Appalachia, mining in deep mines, mining in the areas we mine in, it’s a real challenge” (“Mine safety, company panel”, 2010, “Don Blankenship”). The scene, of the gassy nature and large topography of the mine were obviously a major factor in the disaster, according to Blankenship.

But not only was the physical nature of the scene unique and challenging. Massey pointed out the appeals process for violations and hazard reductions was not working. According to Massey, the company appealed safety violations, but the backlog of appeals at the Mine Safety and Health Administration required a lengthy wait before the appeals were heard (“Massey Energy responds to White House statements,” 2010). In fact, the backlog of appeals was so great that Blankenship had to assign “a five-person team to sort through the violations and hazard reductions” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 65). The large number of violations and hazard reductions made it hard for Massey to sort through all of their recurring problems and find consistent solutions (Friend & Rivard, 2010). This tremendous backlog for appeals frustrated Massey, and when asked if the appeals did “more harm than good” for mine safety, Blankenship stated, “if I’m totally truthful and transparent, I think so” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 65, 66).
However, politics and the media frustrated Massey even more. According to Blankenship, in the eyes of many they were guilty and had to prove themselves innocent. Even before the disaster, the media and politicians were against Massey, which created multiple problems (Friend & Rivard, 2010). Discussions at political hearings quickly “degenerated into political grandstanding” (“Massey responds to today’s senate hearings,” 2010, para. 1). Massey called statements made by United Mine Workers President Cecil Roberts during the Senate hearing “outrageous,” as they served a selfish purpose and falsely claimed that Massey was below average on safety issues. They claimed Roberts simply wanted to use the disaster to his political advantage (“Massey responds to statements made by UMWA members at Senate,” 2010, para. 1).

In addition, President Obama was “misinformed” by his information on Massey and the disaster, in which he took to task the current safety in coalmines and claimed “I refuse to accept any number of miner deaths as simply the cost of doing business” (“Massey Energy responds to White House statements”, 2010, para. 1; Ward, 2010, para. 3). In response, Blankenship stated that, “it is just really difficult to get the right answers when one party feels like they are the subject and the other party feels like they are in an aggressive position,” with the aggressive party being the government (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 69).

With this in mind, Blankenship claimed that he was “not at all what’s represented by the media” and that only the people who knew him really understood his character (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 109). Furthermore, only the
miners could really understand the safety measures that Massey implemented in the coalmines. According to a Massey press release, an anonymous survey “found that of all underground Massey miners, over 90% of those who responded said that Massey is safer than other companies. Over 95% said that Massey stresses proper safety procedures, 93% said Massey is committed to safety in the workplace” (Massey responds to statements made by UMWA members at Senate, 2010, para. 3). Those in the media are not as friendly according to Massey. Massey claimed that they were fighting an uphill battle on multiple fronts, not only before the disaster through the physical nature of the mine and the violation process, but also after with the media and certain political entities attempting to “use the UBB mine tragedy to promote [their] agenda” (“Massey responds to statements made by UMWA members at Senate,” 2010, para. 1). Those outside of the Massey organization were aggressive towards the company even before the disaster had occurred, and now they had a rallying point against them.

The scene had created problems for Massey and their agency. The tough mining conditions in Appalachia, the political landscape, and the appeals process made it hard for them to keep their miners safe. Massey argued that even in the everyday, normal scene, it affected their ability to mine coal safely. Those who work and breathe inside the coalmines understand the dangers, but yet they have interference from other areas, such as the onslaught of violations and the government. Thus, to Massey, keeping their mines running at a normal violation level is an accomplishment in the current scene of the Upper Big Branch Mine. That
struggle shows how easily an explosion could occur deep inside the Upper Big Branch mine, as the scene lessened the power of the agency and the agents to stop the disaster.

**Agents.** Throughout the disaster, two main agents emerge: Massey, in conjunction with their CEO Don Blankenship, and the coalminers who worked in the mines. While Massey continually blamed the scene for creating problems for the agents and diminishing their power to stay safe, they also contributed to the scene. By intimidating their miners to not speak up about safety issues, they enabled the mine to become a dangerous scene while diminishing the agency of the miners.

Massey Energy, who at the time of the disaster was a dominant force in the Appalachian coal industry, was the owner of the Upper Big Branch Mine. While critics described Massey was a greedy and money driven machine, Massey tried to portray themselves in a light that showed that they did not value money over the health and safety of their miners. The Chief Executive Officer of Massey Energy, Don Blankenship, wanted to make it clear that, “I’m smarter than to ever take the risk of putting somebody at risk over dollars” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 85).

According to Massey, the disaster was not a product of putting purpose over agency, but a product of the strong scene. The scene, as depicted by Blankenship diminished the officials at Massey, the miners, and those who tried to rescue them. Blankenship claimed that “I know in my mind and my heart that I’ve done everything correctly that I was capable of as a human being” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 85). Further reiteration of the agents not being able to overcome the scene is
demonstrated when Blankenship claimed, “We don’t know if any human being of any level of intelligence, dedication or experience could have done anything about [the explosion]” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 93). In the end, the agents are challenged by the characteristics of Appalachian coal mining, as Blankenship noted, “We meet that challenge as best as we’re humanly capable of doing” (“Mine safety, company panel”, 2010, “Don Blankenship”).

But one group of agents’ power is further diminished than the others, and those agents are the miners. Blankenship stated that he “considered these particular coal miners to be among our best because they were with us, some of them, since 1994 at that particular mine, not just with Massey. Some of them longer with Massey, but at that mine since 1994. They were sort of an A team” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 16). However, not even the A team was able to overcome the scene. In fact, they were discouraged to try and point out problems within the mine, as Massey would often intimidate the miners not to speak out on safety violations (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2011). Thus, miners had little leeway to try to change the scene and create a safer working environment. They were also at odds with the greater scene, one that most likely required a job in the coalmines to pay the bills and put food on the table, so they kept their mouths shut and did their jobs. Even the “A Team” was not able to overcome the scene and acts, reducing the power of the miners to only being able to mine coal, no matter what the situation they were put in.
While the physical characteristics, according to Blankenship, played a large part in the disaster, Massey Energy also enabled the scene, through the agents, by muting the miners to point out flaws in the mines. Miners who worked hard and long shifts day in and day out, who were trying to provide for their families and who ultimately lost their lives. As Massey placed blame on a scene of legislative problems and physical and natural characteristics of an Appalachian Mine, in reality they also enabled the scene by not allowing miners to speak up about safety issues. Massey created an organization where people who work hard to give life to their families, the miners, were powerless to speak up for problems that they were seeing deep inside the mines.

The agents, including the miners, due to the scene of the coalmine and the corporate scene of Massey, were quickly diminished. In fact, in their human form, they are not able to either escape or reconstruct the scene in order to avoid the explosion. In this case, they needed to be greater than humans to overcome the scene, as Blankenship mentions, “Man can’t do what God can do” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 79). But it would not matter if these miners had powers greater than humanly possible, as Massey still would not have listened to their concerns. Massey was found in the Mine Safety and Health Administration’s investigation to often silence their miners when they spoke up about safety problems in the coalmine (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2011). While Massey continually blamed the scene to be a part of the problem, they also enabled the scene to overcome the workers, who could not speak up, deep in the coalmine.
Act. According to Massey, while the scene dominated the agents, the scene also affected the act of coal mining. According to Blankenship, the act of coal mining was a very dangerous one. The physical characteristics of the mine itself were something that the miners had to deal with everyday, such as the fact that “People start fires by rubbing flints together. And you can create tremendous heat by sandstone rubbing together. And mines liberate gas and all that” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 79).

These physical characteristics generate a scene that creates hazards for miners every single day they go down into the mines. The mere fact that the mines were gassier than normal also leads to the consistent dangers that were found below the surface. Blankenship pointed out that these characteristics lead to him running a "hazardous business like coal mining" ("Mine safety, company panel", 2010, “Don Blankenship”). The act of coal mining was dangerous, every day, every hour, and every minute.

The dominant element. All of the elements inside the pentad play a large part in understanding how Massey viewed and understood their organization and the industry of coal mining. After examining the pentad, three elements stand out. Massey highly values their purpose, which overshadows their agency, or means to mine coal, to one that is structured towards a goal of making money with plans to expand to over 80,000 employees with new business acquisitions (Friend & Rivard, 2010). However, this was a vision that was contrasted by other entities, such as the view from President Obama. These contrasting views show how the purpose-agency
ratio, dominated by purpose, created the disaster and affected the potential outcomes from the disaster. The scene is portrayed as a dominant element to lessen blame for Massey and hide a flawed agency that was given a backseat to their purpose of making money, and ultimately caused the disaster.

This view emerges from the element of purpose, with the understanding that coal is a valuable resource, that it makes money for the company, and has implications to the state and country in tax dollars and cheap energy. Blankenship asserted, “We all need to recognize the importance of the coal industry to the economy, and to the security of the United States. Coal is an abundant, affordable, and reliable source of energy that reduces our dependence on foreign oil” (“Mine safety, company panel”, 2010, “Don Blankenship”). The purpose of mining coal, is portrayed to be an important one for anyone in the United States and shapes the way that Massey views the agency and scene of coal mining and the industry. By showing that the mining of coal does more than just help the company and the employees, while keeping in mind that Massey was set to make “20 million to 50 million” off of the mine, Massey reveals that the purpose of mining coal might overshadow other areas of importance, such as safety.

Purpose plays a large factor in the agency, or means, that Massey used to mine coal. While Massey tried to portray themselves as a safe company, it was all lip service. Senators Harkin and Byrd pointed out the actual safety numbers of Massey, and despite the large amount of production that Massey does, the safety numbers were well below average even before the disaster (“Mine safety, company panel,”
Massey was in hot water, as their record showed a disregard for safety, especially when considering the significant violations that they continually received (Russonello, 2010). Violations took a backseat to maximizing profits as they appealed them to defer costs. Massey wanted to continually grow, and at the Senate hearing Senator Harkin noted that Blankenship had sent a memo to all his mine foremen in 2006 telling them to focus on mining coal, not construction and other mine responsibilities. Blankenship stated, "This memo is necessary only because we seem not to understand that the coal pays the bills"("Mine safety, company panel," 2010, “Senator Harkin”). As Senator Harkin pointed out, that "doesn't sound like putting safety first to me" (“Mine safety, company panel,” 2010, “Senator Harkin”).

Massey also showed that they valued profits over safety in their portrayal of why the accident occurred. The scene, as described by Massey, was used as a defense for the accident and the number of violations that they incurred. Repeatedly, Massey mentions that the human capabilities of the miners, the operators, and the supervisors in the Upper Big Branch Mine were not powerful enough to overcome the scene and stop the explosion. However, the results from the Mine Safety and Health Administration portrayed a different finding. Serious safety violations and disregard for reducing coal dust led to the explosions (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2011).

Blankenship pointed out, “there are limitations to mankind” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 79). While it is true that there are limitations to the human race, this was not the problem in the actual scene that was revealed in the federal
investigation by the Mine Safety and Health Administration. In the scene that
Massey portrays, however, the miners and the operators of the mine were limited to
overcoming a mine that was huge, gassy, and unpredictable, making the limitations
of mankind a problem in that scene. Birdsell (1987) noted that the power of the
scenic elements “forces operating upon the agent to make it not-the-agent, to make
it different” (p. 276). Massey was trying to use the scene to diminish its
accountability in the disaster, while also trying to mask their poor safety record.
This use of a powerful scene to diminish the agents and affect the acts that occur in a
c coal mine is also used to mask the importance of Massey’s purpose, and the lack of
regard to the safety, or agency, involved in how they mine coal.

Further illustration of this point comes from a different point of view on the
disaster, as President Obama did not share the same view as Massey. President
Obama claimed that “We owe [the miners] an assurance that when they go to work
every day, when they enter that dark mine, they are not alone. They ought to know
that behind them there is a company that’s doing what it takes to protect them, and
a government that is looking out for their safety” (The White House, Office of the
Press Secretary, 2010, para. 2). In Obama’s eyes, it is first the duty of the
organization and the government to protect these miners, not to put purpose first,
even if it puts food on the table and gas in the truck, all while powering the nation.
Furthermore, Obama claimed that the overriding problem is that “we know what
can cause mine explosions, and we know how to prevent them. I refuse to accept
any number of miner deaths as simply a cost of doing business” (The White House,
Office of the Press Secretary, 2010, para. 2). This is a completely different view than Massey's. At Massey, miners were a business cost. Massey employed tactics that could improve their bottom line as they continually appealed violations and intimidated miners to not speak out on safety issues that could shut down the mine for a period of time (Mine Safety & Health Administration, 2011). Because of this, miners almost were not even an agent, but rather just a tool to mine coal, as Massey made a profit and the miners got a paycheck. Miners were no longer valued as people who could find and report safety problems, but rather as workers who wanted to earn a paycheck. Massey believed that the miners were focused on making money, which was revealed by their excellent and prioritized financial benefits to the families (Friend & Rivard, 2010). By reducing costs and keeping the mine open, both Massey and the miners could earn money. The “A team” that Blankenship mentioned weren't great miners, but rather great tools Massey had assimilated to help them mine coal and achieve their purpose, as they helped the miners achieve their purpose as well (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 16).

While Massey and Obama differed on many items, including the miners, Obama shared some of the same views as Blankenship. However, they differed on the outcomes. Obama claimed that the scene created problems when he stated, “We can’t eliminate chance completely from mining any more than we can from life itself. But if a tragedy can be prevented, it must be prevented” (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2010, para. 13). The coal industry, while dangerous, could still be controlled to an extent. Because of this belief, Obama did not go on to
blame and demean Massey, but instead began to demonstrate the need to strengthen the safety regulations and laws, allowing for a safer means to mine coal. Obama stated that keeping miners safe is “the responsibility of mine operators. That’s the responsibility of government. And that is the responsibility that we’re all going to have to work together to meet in the weeks and months to come” (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2010, para. 13). While Massey was focused on the investigation, blaming the government and the scene for what went wrong, Obama was focused on making sure this never happened again. Blankenship mentioned that the government and the coal companies need “to find more opportunities to engineer the risk out of mining” but this was simply an attempt to reduce blame, not find solutions (“Mine safety, company panel,” 2010, “Don Blankenship”).

As previously mentioned, Blankenship blamed the government and the appeals process for playing a part in the disaster (Friend & Rivard, 2010). Massey claimed improvements to the safety standards and legislation in the coal industry must come from both the government and the coal companies, but that discussion was not happening because the government was using actions “that are meant to demonstrate power or authority or that are to gain public attention,” not create safer mining laws (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 70). Massey was simply trying to reduce blame, not find new, safer ways of mining coal by portraying the government to be a problem, not part of the solution, like Obama suggested. This reveals an orientation from Massey that legal compliance is more important than being
concerned with the safety of their miners. If safety were truly Massey's first interest, then the company would take safety measures into their own hands. However, because they were only interested in complying enough to remain legal, and continually operate their mines, they showed that they were more interested in making a profit compared to making sure safety improved after the disaster.

This is further illustrated when Blankenship was asked what he expected the outcome of the investigation would be, and he responded only towards the findings and their implications towards Massey. He stated, “I’m hopeful that it’s something that can be prevented in the future, but it’s nothing that was in place to prevent it today failed” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 105). Blankenship goes on to talk about how he doesn’t want to guess as to what caused the disaster, as he stated “my candidness gets me in a lot of trouble” but that if “I were not of high character and I saw the government and/or others causing dilution of effort or putting in place things that were nonsensical and I didn’t speak out, then in my opinion I would be letting our 6,000 people down, as well as the 30,000 other coal miners” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 105). Blankenship did not mention the new safety laws that could come forth. He does not mention new policy changes, safer ways to mine coal, or working with the government to keep miners safe, despite what the investigation finds. He was fixated on making sure his company would survive the disaster, that the government would not create problems for the mining industry, and that Massey could ultimately fulfill their purpose. As Blankenship himself stated, “I am focused on the investigation, focused on the families” as that was his duty to his organization
right now (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 87). Blankenship portrayed his duty as one that should protect Massey and their miners from intrusion that might change their mining practices. As he claimed, his outspokenness is “directed toward doing what’s right for the coal miners, and I have a tremendous responsibility for coal miners, and if I see regulations that are diluted like you mentioned, or if I see things I think that need to be challenged, I’m torn between the scrutiny I know it will bring on me and the responsibility I have to be the spokesperson for coal miners” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 105).

On the other hand, Obama admitted that, “we can’t just hold mining companies accountable, we need to hold Washington accountable” and that the government “[needs] to take a hard look at our own practices and our own procedures to ensure that we’re pursuing mine safety as relentlessly as we responsibly can” in regards to the appeals process and who was in charge of the Mine Safety and Health Administration, carefully selecting those without friendly ties to corporations (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2010, para. 12). Obama put agency first, actually blamed his own government as well as Massey and their lack of collaborative effort, and wanted to work together to make miners safer. Massey did not express those same views. Massey was more interested how the outcome of the investigation would affect them, trying to protect their industry, rather than using the disaster to help improve safety for miners in the future. Massey remained focused on preserving purpose, rather than strengthening the agency.
Throughout the discourse, Blankenship revealed a focus on purpose. The intimidation of miners, the lack of regard for future safety measures, and the large amount of appeals shows how those at the Upper Big Branch put purpose over agency. Blankenship tried to portray an overriding scene as controlling, but it was actually the purpose to maintain operations, despite clear danger, that ultimately caused this disaster. Furthermore, after the disaster Massey reveals how they are focused on the investigation, not new safety measures, and a desire to continue operations to preserve their purpose. Massey was fixated on the ends that coal mining gave them, leaving behind an agency that needed to be strengthened in order to protect their coal miners as they mined for West Virginia’s most precious resource.
CHAPTER 6: Risky Business

In the aftermath of the two disasters, different viewpoints from each coal company emerged. In order to understand these dissimilarities, the following section compares how the companies defined the pentadic elements differently in order to defend their practices and further their orientation towards coal. Noting their orientations towards coal, an examination of how each company perpetuates, or alters the purpose-driven orientation of the West Virginia coal industry will occur.

Comparing the Two Disasters with the Pentad

Massey Energy and the International Coal Group faced disasters in the same state in a close timeframe. Yet, their responses revealed very different orientations to their work and their responsibilities. In the analysis of the two disasters, the dominant element of the purpose-agency ratio creates a shift in the other pentadic elements from the Sago Disaster to the Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster. When purpose is set against agency, as the dominant pentadic element, as in Upper Big Branch Disaster, purpose shapes the agency, the power of the miners, and creates a scene where the act of coal mining is accepted as dangerous. On the other hand, when agency comes before purpose, like in Sago, the agency and agents are able to control the scene, making the act safe.

The purpose-agency ratio shows the difference in how the International Coal Group and Massey Energy viewed their employees, especially the miners. While both considered the miners to be doing all they could in order to survive, and their
efforts were commendable, the actions the companies proposed in the aftermath demonstrate their views in regards to the capabilities of the miners. The International Coal Group wanted to give the miners the best chance of survival if the scene would turn sour again. They claimed that the events, the investigation, and the public hearings should allow the industry to “learn valuable lessons from it and implement the best available technology capable of minimizing and, indeed, preventing a similar recurrence and protecting future generations of miners” (Mine Safety & Health Administration, 2006a, p. 193).

The International Coal Group believed that if they could give their miners the technology to succeed, that they could have made it out of the mine alive. When asked by a West Virginia Delegate Mike Caputo at the public hearing if International Coal Group and Hatfield would go on “the record endorsing stronger regulations that would allow these problems to be fixed with the use of safety chambers, more oxygen, mine rescue teams employed at the mine and tracking devices on miners underground?” Hatfield gave a detailed answer explaining where each area could be improved, claiming at the end that “Yes, I do” want to be on record supporting the improvements in each of the areas (Mine Safety & Health Administration, 2006b, p. 843-848). Hatfield believed improved technology could give the miners the agency they needed to survive in the coalmines of West Virginia, first and foremost.

Massey and Blankenship had a different burden to bear, and they valued their purpose to obtain a profit, over the agency of safely mining coal, protecting those who mined the coal. Massey was more focused on the investigations and how
the investigations would affect their company. They had suffered a huge loss in profit and stock, and wanted to recover some losses. In addition, they gave the families a large amount of money to try and make sure the families would not have to worry about finances.

Despite the fact that Massey may have overlooked safety in regards to profit, Blankenship felt a need to continue to support the families who had lost loved ones. He claimed, “the benefits are good by any measure. We’re very proud of the benefits, although we realize that doesn’t help much” to bring back the lost loved ones (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 11). Blankenship goes into more detail and depth in regards to the benefit package they will provide, rather than the safety recommendations and changes that may come from the mine. Blankenship points out that he and the company were “focused on the families” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 87). Blankenship and Massey viewed the coalmine as a way to make profit, providing money to the company. In that same sense, they believed that the miners also viewed the coalmine as a way to make a profit and provide for their families. Because of that, Massey goes into great detail to explain how they are taking care of the families that lost loved ones, through “sizable life insurance payments [as] it will be about five times their pay” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 11). Massey claimed that the benefits for the families “are designed to ensure that no family will have to worry about missing a paycheck, paying a medical bill or sending a child to college” (“Massey Energy responds to inaccurate reports about benefits,” 2010, para. 1). It was as if Massey was almost oblivious to the fact that the mine might need to be
improved, but that was because they were so focused on purpose, and this was portrayed through the fact that they were making absolutely sure the miner's families “will be OK financially” and that they quickly told the families about the benefits to “[take] a burden and a worry off them” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 11, 9). Massey believed that the coalminers were more worried about providing for their families, rather than making sure they walked out of the mine safely every time.

Not only was there a difference in how the companies viewed their miners, but also in how they viewed and used the scene. With regards to the International Coal Group and the Sago Mine, they described the scene as manageable on a normal day in the coalmines. However, when the scene became unusual, only then did it provide problems for the rescue teams, the miners, and those in the command center. The scene did dominate the agents, from the “well-trained miners that did exactly what they believed was the right thing to do and exactly in compliance with their training” to “everyone in the mine office was fully committed physically and emotionally... to the rescue effort” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 226; Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 875). But this was after the unusual lightning and poor performing seal created an explosion that ultimately transformed the entire scene.

On the other hand, Massey described the scene as one that is inherently dangerous and prone to hazards. The physical characteristics that Blankenship mentions that caused problems within the mine shows that he and Massey consider
the act of coalmining to be hazardous day in and day out. They also show the scene as dominating the agents and acts as well, not only after the explosion, but also before. He claimed that accidents can and will happen in the mine because “we’re dealing with human beings and we’re dealing with circumstances sometimes beyond our understanding” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 80). This is in sharp contrast to how the International Coal Group portrayed the scene on an average day at the mines. Only when the scene shifted did the International Coal Group believe that coal mining was something that could not be controlled in order to maintain safety; after the disaster they were focused on regaining control. Massey, on the other hand, portrayed the coalmine as a dangerous place, with elements that could not be controlled by humans.

Because of that portrayal, one might think that Massey would continually try to advance safety in the mines, or their agency, to attempt to dominate the scene. However their attention was quite different. How could a mining company, that believed the mines were so dangerous, keep sending their miners into the ground? The answer is simple. They could obtain their purpose, to make money in those mines. Massey Energy, along with the miners, accepted risk as the “cost of doing business,” paid by the miners with their health and sometimes their lives. Safety was a hindrance to Massey, just like it had been for many coal companies throughout the industry’s history (Lewis et al., 2009).

On the other hand, when the Sago explosion unearthed new problems, the International Coal Group tried to figure out ways to overcome the unnatural and
unusual scene that created the explosion. They were adamant towards finding new ways to track miners, creating new ways to communicate, and making sure that the miners had the oxygen they needed to survive (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b). They were working towards strengthening their agency.

Ultimately, this shows a difference between the two mining companies. It is doubtful that any change in geography or mining might make a mine more dangerous in just four years, but Massey viewed the mines as much more dangerous than the earlier case of Sago. The reason for this was to hide a general lack of commitment to safety. One of the main ways to do that was with the scene as a defense. The scene became a way to defend, and require less work, in the areas of how Massey mined coal in order for them to maintain their ultimate purpose, to make money. Of course, Massey’s reading of the situation could lead to a different decision. Due to the safety risks, Massey could shut down the mine. However, when the mine contains high priced metallurgical coal the desire to make a profit may lead to risky mining. The ends justify the means.

In the end, it was the element of purpose that led to the accident in the Upper Big Branch. As Massey was trying to achieve their purpose, their focus left a void in their means to mine coal. This is reflected through how they used the scene as a defense and how they viewed the miners as sharing their purpose. International Coal Group on the other hand, viewed the miners as capable and deserving of survival. Because the scene had shifted and overcame agency, the agency needed to be strengthened so that the agents, the miners, could begin to resume their safe act...
of coalmining. The dominant element of the purpose-agency ratio ultimately determined how a company views the coal miners, the scene, and the act of coal mining.

**A Purpose-driven Orientation Revisited**

The International Coal Group and Massey Energy viewed the mining disasters differently. However, while both companies were driven towards maintaining their purpose of making a profit, a tension is shown between that end and keeping miners safe. Balancing the risk of mining coal with profit margins is a dynamic that not only troubles mining companies, but also endangers West Virginia miners.

**Purpose as a motivating force.** The purpose-driven orientation of the coal industry shows how the dependency on coal drives the need for the coal industry to succeed, creating a focus on purpose and profit. However, while both the International Coal Group and Massey Energy were focused on making a profit, their actions towards making a profit and keeping miners safe were different. As Sago tried to responsibly manage making a profit and keeping miners safe, Massey was determined to stretch the limits as they tried to make a large profit.

Surfacing from the discourse following the Sago Mine disaster is that the International Coal Group was losing money at the Sago Mine. Hatfield claimed in the hearing, when questioned about if Sago was making a profit that Sago “continues to lose money. But we believe that it can be made a profitable mine and a safe mine” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, para. 436). The International Coal
Group, while working towards a profit, understood the importance of safety in
relations to profits after the disaster, and wanted to make sure that the mine was
not just profitable, but also safe for the miners who worked there.

However, this is a slight recalibration from the purpose-driven orientation.
The purpose-driven orientation was built on the fact that the coal industry was a
tremendous resource for the state. Sago was putting safety, or the means through
which West Virginia coal industries mine coal, as an essential aspect of mining, as
they hoped to create a mine that made a profit and was safe (Mine Safety and Health
Administration, 2006a). This was an alternate view for many coal companies, as
throughout the history of the coal industry, many companies had written off safety
as an expense to be avoided (Lewis, et al., 2009, p. 255). However, the International
Coal Group did not subscribe to this standpoint, even though they were losing
money at the Sago Mine. They took it upon themselves to make sure that they had
the top safety systems, especially in regards to tracking devices and self-rescuers as
they are a “little bit more expensive... I mean, you’re going to have to put out some
money to update your equipment, so that this --- these men have better self-
rescuers and that they don't have to rely on rescuers that are outdated” (Mine Safety
and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 317). The West Virginia coalmining industry
was not solely driven by purpose, as the International Coal Group was showing that
safety was also a large issue in the coalmines and state, even when the company was
losing money and safety advances would cost more.
However, just a few years later, in Blankenship’s discussion after the Upper Big Branch crisis, it was evident that his purpose to make money was a driving force. For that reason, Massey highlighted the money they were providing the miners and their families, claiming that the scene was the major reason for the accident, not the safety measures at Massey. Massey resisted outside help to fix mining problems. Massey Energy was determined to succeed at making money and paid their miners more than other area mining companies. By doing so they became great providers to the area, as they were providing for their employees and the communities that surround the mine. Many miners shared their purpose-driven orientation. Despite the risks and the explosion, their miners were proud to be working for this mine because of the money they earned from Massey. As one family member of a miner stated after the disaster, “There is a lot of pride that Massey people feel about their work and working in the mines over all,” and that the miners “are happy to be working and many, not all, but many feel lucky to be working for Massey and Blankenship” (Urbina & Leland, 2010, para. 10, 11). But why did they feel lucky working in a mine that had so many violations and that ultimately lead to 29 of their fellow miners’ deaths? The answer lies within the orientation. Because Massey Energy was a non-union company and was the sixth largest coal company in the nation, they could pay quite well. That same family member declared that her brother “chose Massey because it pays better” (Urbina & Leland, 2010, para. 13).

Money was the driving force for Massey, and while coal miners probably knew of violations, they accepted the conditions because they were getting paid
more. Massey was more economically motivated, as were the miners who worked for them. The risk was worth the reward. Their drive towards purpose was easily accepted because of the dependency that many miners had on mining jobs. Massey employees participated in the orientation because they were not only provided with a job, but also a job that paid more. The miners accepted a dangerous, profitable trade off.

Massey’s discourse showed that coal mining was, and is, essential to provide economic life to the state. The International Coal Group understood that while purpose was important, so was safety. They spent time and money to create safer mines throughout the industry. Massey spent their money in order to continue to provide for the miners’ families.

**Defending the industry from outside influence.** In the purpose-driven orientation, the industry must be protected from outside threats, especially ones that may hurt their production. Throughout the history of the coalmine, regulations have hampered production and safety improvements have been an expense to be avoided by coal companies (Lewis et al., 2009). Recently, the coal industry has had multiple attacks on their industry, from the Environmental Protection Agency to new federal legislation. In addition, most of coal industry adamantly opposes those who seek new coal regulations, such as President Obama (Hastings, 2012).

Following the disaster, the International Coal Group and Massey diverged in their response to outside influence. The International Coal Group worked with outside groups in order to make sure the mine was safe and the industry learned all
that it could from the disaster. As with many coal disasters, multiple investigations occurred. The Mine Safety and Health Administration and the International Coal Group’s independent investigations found that lightning was the cause of the explosion. However, despite the unusual cause of the explosion, the Mine Safety and Health Administration’s President Davitt McAteer concluded that the International Coal Group had multiple methods to improve their practices that possibly could have saved their miners (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2007). The International Coal Group responded, claiming that “the [International Coal Group] supports many of Mr. McAteer’s recommendations for changes in the industry to improve mine safety” (“ICG Response to McAteer report,” 2006, para. 1).

This is in stark contrast to how Massey treated the Mine Safety and Health Administration. Massey blamed the Mine Safety and Health Administration for intruding into their practices and creating an appeals system, according to Blankenship, to hurt their practice (Friend & Rivard, 2010). Furthermore, Blankenship took it upon himself to protect the coal industry from outside interference.

Blankenship had frequently been an advocate for the coal industry, participating in many discussions on the coal industry and environmental problems. During the stages after the investigation, he claimed that his role had driven him to become a spokesperson and defender of the industry. Blankenship remarked to a question from the media, that his outspokenness was “directed toward doing what’s right for the coal miners, and I have a tremendous responsibility for coal miners,
and if I see regulations that are diluted like you mentioned, or if I see things I think
that need to be challenged, I’m torn between the scrutiny I know it will bring on me
and the responsibility I have to be the spokesperson for coal miners” (Friend &
Rivard, 2010, para. 105). Massey Energy was not just defending its viability, but also
the miners’ way of life as well. Regulations that might hurt the industry caused
Blankenship to speak out. Blankenship claimed that if “I saw the government and/or
others causing dilution of effort” to the industry, he was required to speak out, and
by not doing so he “would be letting our 6,000 people down, as well as the 30,000
other coal miners, and that trumps my popularity” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para.
105). Blankenship puts the industry, and the ability to mine coal successfully with
regards to a profit, over his image. By saying this, he is showing that the coal
industry is greater than any one person, even the Chief Executive Officer of one of
the largest coal-mining firms in the country. The purpose was to be preserved and
protected from outside control, despite the consequences that may come from
standing up to outsiders that try to change the coal industry. While the International
Coal Group disagreed with some of the charges levied against them by the Mine
Safety and Health Administration, the International Coal Group still took the time to
listen and work with the outside agency. However, Massey did not take that
approach, as they perceived outside influence as a threat.

**Coal miners as heroes.** A differing view emerges that West Virginia miners are
“Superheroes” (“Your view: Readers speak,” 2005, para. 4). Because they accept
great danger and risk to provide for themselves and their families, they are “heroes.”
This “hero” viewpoint is driven through the views of the scene as portrayed by each the International Coal Group and Massey Energy, respectively.

Throughout the discourse, a view arises in the portrayals of the scene by the International Coal Group and Massey Energy. In regards to the International Coal Group miners were recognized to be skilled and experienced workers but they could never really survive the scene, especially when it went astray, without the correct tools. According to Hatfield, those who lost their lives were “well-trained miners that did exactly what they believed was the right thing to do and exactly in compliance with their training” (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 875). However, quickly after the disaster the International Coal Group claimed self-contained oxygen apparatuses, tracking devices, and other new laws and safety regulations should be implemented in the mines (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006b, p. 846-847). Miners should be able to control the scene in the coalmine with the correct tools.

The International Coal Group believed that miners deserved the ability to escape the mines. Without the correct tools to be safe and escape, the miners were continually fighting a losing battle. The International Coal Group showed that miners did not just need a paycheck, but also new tools and technology to survive despite the costs. They did not need to be “heroes,” fighting against the risks in the coalmines, but rather capable and skilled miners in order to stay safe in the mines.

However, Massey and the miners adopted an orientation to mining that favored “heroism.” Miners give all they can, day in and day out, in a world that they
serve a primary purpose. What this creates is an orientation where the miner is not a “superhero,” but will always be a “hero” for the risk they face from the scenic challenges in the mine (“Your view: Readers speak,” 2005, para. 4). The miner’s stated purpose is economic; as they do dangerous work to provide food, clothes, and support for their families. To achieve the purpose, the miners must enter a dangerous scene and accept significant risks when they do. The means, or agency, to lessen risk rests in technological efforts by the companies to make mining safer. However, in some coalmines under some conditions, technology fails to offset the risk and disaster results.

Throughout the Massey discourse, they use the scene to defend the actions of that unfortunate April afternoon and the miner's heroism. However, this use of the scene as a defense, portrays the miners as unable to overcome the scene. Numerous times Massey claimed that the miners were experienced, claiming that the deceased “had over 400 some years of experience” (“Mine safety, company panel,” 2010, “Don Blankenship”). They also claim that the miners were the best they had, claiming that “They were sort of an A team” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 15). However, even the best group of miners was not able to overcome the scene. This portrayal by Massey allows the miners to remain, for now and always, heroes. Every day that they venture into the mine they had to combat a scene that Massey claimed was too great. Blankenship claimed that the elements that made the scene so tough were inseparable from mining, such as people “start fires by rubbing flints together. And you can create tremendous heat by sandstone rubbing together. And mines liberate
gas and all that” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 79). The elements that can create a mine disaster are present every day in a coalmine. There is no effective way to eliminate them. Because of this, the miners will remain heroes, as the risk remains every time they go down into the mine, and the risk can never be removed. The miners go down into the mine to do what is necessary for their families and the state, fulfilling a purpose, yet risking their lives due to the scene that is the West Virginia coal mines.

In the end, International Coal Group was not putting the bottom line and the outcomes of the coal industry in West Virginia completely in front of the means to mine coal. While the International Coal Group did resume mining coal quickly at the Sago Mine, and before they were able to equip all the miners with the new technology and standards, they still were taking appropriate safety measures. This showed a small shift in the purpose-driven orientation of the industry, as they tried to balance profit and safety. They felt that it was important to keep their miners safe, but it was still also important to try to make a profit. They understood the balance of agency and purpose, and they improved their safety records and helped the state of West Virginia pass new coal safety legislation and the federal government to pass the MINER Act to help keep miners safe. The International Coal Group did not oppose these laws. They understood the importance of agency, took down their walls to allow outside agencies to help, and in the end made sure that miners didn’t need to be heroes because they were facing a risk and a situation they could not overcome. The International Coal Group wanted to learn from the
disaster, and in the end miners, and the coal mining industry, was safer for it. Instead of trudging forth with the same purpose driven orientation, making sure production was up, the International Coal Group understood the importance of coal for the state and their company, but also the importance of making miners safe and making sure they got home to their families each and every day.

On the other hand, Massey uses the purpose-driven orientation of the West Virginia coal industry to their advantage as they perpetuate the orientation. Within this orientation, the miners accept the risks of the coalmine because they depend on the mine for a job and a paycheck. Massey focuses on the financial side of the disaster, providing for the families, instead of looking for new safety solutions. A lawyer who represented clients who sued Massey, mentioned that Blankenship has tremendous motivations towards purpose. He claimed, “I think what drives him is that he honestly believes what he is doing is materially benefiting the lives of the people who work for him... He may be tone deaf to other issues, so he comes off as cold” (Urbina & Leland, 2010, para. 29). Blankenship was driven towards making a profit, and he developed an orientation that was focused on that ends, not safety.

Finally, Blankenship tried to protect the coal industry in order to preserve coal as a valuable resource. West Virginia has depended on coal for a long time, and Blankenship argued that Massey was fulfilling their purpose as a company that provided for the miners and the state through the coal industry. The purpose-driven orientation deflects attention away from safety violations, and tough mining situations, as no mine was too dangerous if the ends justified the means.
Balancing Risk

Massey Energy and the International Coal Group approached their disasters in two distinct fashions. While one was focused on the purpose of making money and providing for their workers and victims’ families, the other was working towards making sure that the same situation would never happen again, equipping future miners with better technology. Both were focused on areas that are very important to their miners and the state, making money and making sure that they return home to their families each and every day.

Purpose and agency are consistently set against each other in the West Virginia coal industry. The means affect the ends, however the means produce more than just creating a profit and providing for their employees and giving power to the nation. Mines are dangerous places, and throughout coal’s history many miners never came out of the mine alive again. While these dangers are present in all West Virginia coalmines, some mines are more dangerous than others, especially one like the Upper Big Branch that was gassy and massive. Mine operators could have shut it down. However, the same mine contained metallurgical coal, a high priced coal that was set to make the company “20 million to 50 million dollars” (Friend & Rivard, 2010, para. 51). When the purpose defines agency, loss of life in the mine and risking life become just a business expense. The ends of making money justify the means. Companies always have the authority to close a dangerous mine. However, the drive towards a purpose created a trained incapacity towards agency and the dangers of the mine. Massey truly was trying to make as much money as possible at
the expense of safety, as their operators often alerted miners when safety inspectors were entering the mines and often forged documents to fool inspectors as well ("Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2011). Mining was about production first, safety second.

The industry was always built at purpose first, as West Virginia wanted the coalmines to industrialize the area quickly (Burns, 1997). In that same era, miners were treated as a means to an end, the production of coal. The coal industry has moved away from that state as miners have more protection than previous days in which they were issued scrip and were sometimes forced into tent towns during mining strikes, such as the Paint Creek Mine War ("The story of Paint Creek," 2012). However, by continually putting the economic purpose first, new safety laws and regulations were slow to come to fruition as historically coal companies opposed them as a hindrance to their profits (Lewis et. al, 2009)

Conversely, the International Coal Group led the charge on making sure miners had what they needed after a disaster, and quickly after the disaster supported legislation in West Virginia that mandated coal companies give miners additional emergency air supplies, tracking devices, a faster way to report a explosion, and better communication devices ("Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response Act of 2006," 2011). However, no new legislation was passed after the Upper Big Branch mine disaster. While senators blamed the end of the session and other factors, legislation still was not passed in the years to come. Massey definitely paid for their actions, as they quickly had to sell their company
and Blankenship quickly retired. Furthermore, two Massey employees were charged in federal court and sentenced for felonies of trying to deceive federal officers (Walter, 2013). But why wasn’t there any action taken legislatively?

The answer stems from the discourse Massey produced after the disaster. Massey was focused on providing and producing coal for the state. When thinking with the purpose driven orientation in mind, safety is left on the backburner or possibly not even on the stove at all. West Virginia was reminded of the goals of the coal industry, to provide for the state and their families where there were not a lot of other places to turn, a fact that had been built into the orientation of West Virginians from the very beginning stages of the coal industry. With West Virginia relying on coal for so long, it seemed that to defend West Virginia from further economic decline one must also support and defend the coal industry. The two have become almost interchangeable.

Burke claimed that an event that changes the status quo might change the orientation (Burke, 1984). However, even disaster barely disrupted the purpose in the West Virginia coal industry. Even when blatant safety violations created the Upper Big Branch disaster, miners were not any safer after the disaster. On the other hand, when the International Coal Group understood that agency mattered, legislation was passed.

Thus, West Virginia is in a delicate state, with coalmines having to balance production and safety. Their orientation to coal is embedded deep, as they have grown to believe that coal is a resource, and even though it is not as big as they
believe, they actively defend the industry so that they have coal to rely on (Bell & York, 2010). Burke claimed that an orientation is formed by past experiences, the current status, and a hope for what the future might hold (Burke, 1984). West Virginians are embedded in a past and current state when coal was a provider, and they hope that coal will remain that provider. For that reason, strengthening the purpose driven orientation allows for those in the coal industry to only think of the benefits they provide, the ends overpowering the means.

However, when the individual company, such as the International Coal Group, takes it upon themselves to change the means of production, change does happen. West Virginia needs the coal industry, but they also need their mines to be safe. Both arguments, from prioritizing safety to providing for the state are solid arguments in the eyes of West Virginians. They need both. The question becomes, how do coal companies balance them to create a “profitable and a safe” coalmine (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2006a, p. 434)? Both the Sago and Upper Big Branch Mine struggled with this dilemma of being both profitable and safe, and became different providers because of it.

These two disasters showed that there are two ways to provide for the people of West Virginia. On one hand, there is the purpose-driven provider such as Massey Energy, working towards giving the miners a solid, above average, paycheck and a job. However, that job comes with a risk of safety. The alternative is the International Coal Group. While they were still striving hard to make a profit, they made concessions, financial concessions, in order to keep their miners safe. They
not only provided a paycheck for the miners, but also a means of staying safe and surviving in the mine. Thus, the International Coal Group tried to be a responsible provider, providing the means to mine coal safely, as well as a paycheck. However, they still could not balance quality safety measures in a dangerous mine with still making a profit. In the end, both mining companies closed. They no longer became providers. While they were ultimately pursuing a purpose of profit, they could not obtain that goal. In addition, miners in the area, who needed to provide food, clothes, and essentials to their families lost out on a valuable job and paycheck, and lost their role as a provider as well.

Due to the dependence on coal in West Virginia, it is easy for the industry to shift towards purpose. West Virginia lacks well paying jobs, and the coalminers like the fact that they are paid handsomely. The purpose driven orientation shows that West Virginians value the coal industry as a provider first, as some choose the mining company to work for based on the money they would provide (Urbina & Leland, 2010). As Blankenship strengthened and reinforced the purpose driven orientation, West Virginians are reminded that their past, present, and future are most likely rooted in coal. However, the balance can be brought closer to the middle when a company stands up for the safety of miners, as West Virginians are reminded that they need not only their miners to provide for their families and the state, but they also need and want them at home.

After a disaster, safety should be prominent, but Massey showed that even after a disaster claimed dozens of lives, safety might not dominate discussion.
However, the International Coal Group showed that even though they did do some things wrong, and had a goal of making a profit, safety in coal mines had improved after their disaster and they took responsibility to lead the industry in new technology and mine safety ("ICG response to McAteer report," 2007). West Virginia mining companies have the opportunity to sway the scale either way, towards a purpose or towards an agency that promotes safety, the question is, what does West Virginia, the coal industry, and the miners need more?

Unfortunately, no matter what the miners need more, mining in West Virginia is driven towards purpose; so mining companies take risks in regards to safety in order to maximize profit. However, these risks leave miners in dangerous situations. Sometimes, disasters are avoided, but as these two disasters showed the risk is not worth the reward, as in just two moments 41 miners were lost as companies gambled on the risk of a disaster in order to maximize profits. The purpose-driven orientation makes coal mining a risky business. However, as the International Coal Group proved, there are ways to reduce the risk in coalmines with new technology and regulations. Conversely, because of the purpose-driven orientation and the strive for companies and miners to be providers, the coal industry remains a risky business as they push for profits and a larger paycheck. Unfortunately, as these disasters showed, just one disaster can ruin the ability for the company, and the miners, to be a provider. Despite the different approaches to the disasters and the converse orientations, both companies had to fold. Their purpose would be lost. The miners would be without a provider and they would
have to search, in a region with a barren economy, to find jobs in order to become providers for their families again. Not only is mining a risky business, but a gamble. If mining companies bet the house in order to maximize profits, the lack of safety and increased risks can easily lead to a disaster. As these two disasters revealed, one disaster can destroy a whole mining company, coalmine, and jobs that many regions in West Virginia ultimately depend on. Not only is their risk for the miners and the coal company, but also for the families, communities, and the state that use the coal industry as a provider. The dependence on the coal industry in West Virginia creates a dynamic that allows companies to put purpose over agency, but that same dynamic makes coalmining an extremely risky business for all of West Virginia.
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