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# The Social Reality of a Group of Rural, Low-Status Appalachian Women: A Grounded Theory Study

Judith Ivy Fiene
*University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Judith Ivy Fiene entitled "The Social Reality of a Group of Rural, Low-Status Appalachian Women: A Grounded Theory Study." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Social Work.

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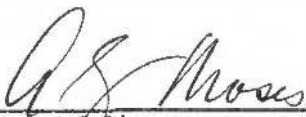
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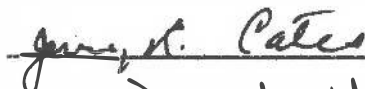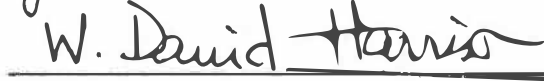
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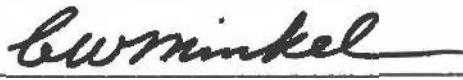
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Margaret C. Wheeler

Accepted for the Council:

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Vice Provost
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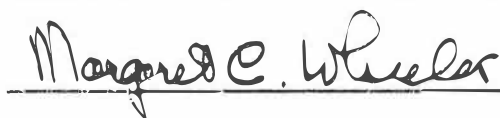
THE SOCIAL REALITY OF A GROUP OF RURAL, LOW-STATUS,

APPALACHIAN WOMEN: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Judith Ivy Fiene

June 1988

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# ABSTRACT

This study was designed to develop a deeper under-
standing of the social realities of low-status, rural
Appalachian women.  Its methodological base is to be found
in phenomenological philosophy which points to the power
of the social context in the construction of social
meanings.

Existing studies of low-status Appalachian women
present conflicting pictures of the women and contain
little information regarding the women's point of view.
Some observers have portrayed the women as members of a
traditionalist subculture -- unable to adapt to the modern
world -- exhibiting dysfunctional personality character-
istics (Looff, 1971; Photiadis, 1970; Polansky, 1972;
Weller, 1965).  Other observers have suggested that the
economic exploitation of the region since the nineteenth
century and the cultural imperialism of the middle-status
newcomers have had an adverse effect on the lives of the
indigenous people (Lewis & Knipe, 1978; Whisnant, 1980).

As a means of gaining access to the women's percep-
tions of their world, this study used qualitative research
methods -- participant observation and unstructured
interviews.  The researcher resided in the community,
part-time, and conducted interviews with the participants
in their homes.  The eighteen women in the study were
Appalachian born and raised, currently rearing children,

and had incomes below the rural poverty standard. The participants ranged in age from 21 to 67 and comprised fourteen households.

Interviews were dictated immediately after leaving the home and then transcribed. The resulting data were analyzed using grounded theory method, coding the data for categories of meanings and developing the linkages between the categories.

Three areas of social process, which aid in defining the women's construction of their world, became clear in the course of this study: (a) the belief system that directs the women's family role behaviors, (b) the morality that directs the conduct of their interpersonal interactions, and (c) the construction of the women's self-appraisals. The dynamics of this social process are as follows: the women take for granted their participation in traditional family roles. They expect personal attention and egalitarian treatment in their interpersonal transactions. When the women believe others are treating them unfairly, they feel hurt, angry, and "put down." But most of the women are able to maintain positive feelings about themselves by confining their self-evaluations to their family role performance, their ability to persevere, and their own equitable treatment of others. The women take pride in their achievements and accomplishments, no matter how small. They grasp opportunities to improve

their life situations and value their ability to maintain some modicum of independence or control.

Results of this study should be useful to social workers and other professionals who are providing social services or planning programs in this region.  Knowledge of the women's perception of their social context can enhance communication and allow the tailoring of social programs to fit the women's perceived needs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chronic poverty and the stigma associated with low
social status are important factors in structuring the
social worlds of low-income Appalachians.  This is not a
recent phenomenon.  The once self-sufficient economy of
Appalachia, founded on family-based subsistence farming
and independent commodity production was gradually eroded
by the capitalistic market economy, which made its first
inroads into urban areas in the nineteenth century, and
gradually spread into rural areas.

The Second World War initiated a period of national
economic growth and brought about the rapid expansion of
the mining industry and manufacturing enterprises, such as
textile factories, in Appalachia.  This moved much of the
rural population into the wage labor market (Eller, 1979;
Precourt, 1983).  But this exploitation of the region's
resources, mineral and human, did not secure a viable
regional economy and, during times of economic recession,
Appalachians migrated to the industrial cities of mid-
America seeking employment.  More recent industrial
relocations to Third World countries have led to the
closing of many of the area's mines and mills.

The indigenous people remaining in the region have
consistently been paid wages that lag behind national

averages and have suffered higher poverty levels.  While
9.6% of all American families live in poverty, 15.6% of
the rural families living in the Appalachian counties of
Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, and
Tennessee live below the poverty line.  A significant
number of the female-headed families with children in the
United States (40.3%) and in rural Appalachia (44.2%) live
in poverty, with annual incomes below $7356 for a family
of four (Tickamyer, A. R. & Tickamyer, C., 1987b).

Images of Appalachian poverty have been plentiful.
Precourt (1983) shows that such images have their source
in (a) the labeling of Appalachians as deprived or as
displaying antisocial traits, (b) the labeling of subsis-
tence farming as unproductive, and (c) the denigration of
local culture as a rationale for exploitation.  The media
have been active in perpetuating stereotypical images of
low-income Appalachians both in television documentaries,
entertainment shows, and cartoons (Newcomb, 1979).

These images of the poor in Appalachia are often tied
implicitly to the belief that the lifestyles of the poor
are responsible for their continued impoverishment.  This
view was advanced by observers using a culture-of-poverty
model and has been an indirect source for many of the
stereotypes associated with Appalachian poverty (Photia-
dis, n.d.; Weller, 1965).  This model hypothesizes that
individual adaptations to the circumstances of poverty are

transmitted to progeny who repeat self-defeating behaviors thus perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage (Lewis, O., 1966).

Despite sound critiques of this perspective (Leacock, 1971; Valentine, 1968), many researchers have persisted in seeking the causes of continued social problems in the life styles of low-status families. This perspective also appears in the rhetoric of the current conservative administration which blames financial assistance programs for creating dysfunctional family life styles (Murray, 1984).

The stereotypical images of the poor in Appalachia and the more general stigma associated with living in poverty in America create a devalued social role and low social status for the many Appalachian women whose incomes are below the poverty mark (Waxman, 1977). Occupation of this stigmatized position can result in negative or defensive feelings about self when the low-status person engages in interactions with higher status individuals (Sennett & Cobb, 1973). Thus, the social world of rural, low-status Appalachian women is bounded by stereotyped images of Appalachians and prejudices toward low-status individuals, just as their economic world is bounded by limited economic opportunities and sparse resources.

## Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to discover how rural, low-status, Appalachian women perceive their social world. The initial scope of this study is proposed in broad terms in order to allow the respondents to determine which aspects of their social world they consider to be important and to avoid the imposition of any preconceptions by the researcher. How the women view their world and how they are conceptualized by others is important to social work because these women and their children are among the primary clients of health and welfare agencies and are the recipients of resources from multiple state and federal programs. Social workers offer services to these individuals and families and participate in the program planning and policy making that affect the women's life circumstances. A deeper understanding of this client group should enhance social work helping efforts.

As a group, low-status, rural Appalachian women have not been the subject of much scientific investigation. There has been little systematic attention given to the importance of gender in determining individual life courses in Appalachia (Tickamyer, A.R. & Tickamyer, C., 1987a; Walls & Billings, 1977). There is a paucity of statistical data regarding Appalachian women, in general, and practically no data on female-headed households (Weeks, 1980). Analyses of social structure in Appalach-

ian communities frequently define women's lives solely in relation to their role functions or position within the traditional family group (Photiadis, 1986; Stephenson, 1968; Schwarzweller, Brown, & Mangalam, 1971).

Discussions of the women of Appalachia in the majority of ethnographic and sociological studies are embedded in analyses and descriptions of the family. Citing the prevalence of familism in the region (Heller & Quesada, 1977), these studies concentrate their attention on either the kinship network or the family of procreation -- parents and minor children. However, low-status women may be labeled in their rural communities in terms of the, often derogatory, reputation attached to their kinship group or they may be categorized as members of families "clinging to traditional mountain values."

Information regarding low-status Appalachians in general has consisted largely of (a) impressionistic accounts of mountain life (Kephart, 1984), (b) studies which compare the ways of mountain families with the implicit or explicit norms of urban, nuclear families (Weller, 1965), or (c) studies describing character disorders said to be prevalent in this group (Looff 1971). Although these studies are useful in enumerating the problems created by poverty, they present a perspective from the outside looking in. Missing from these portray-als of the lives of low-status women is an appreciation of

their view of reality and of the adaptive strengths that have enabled the women to cope with life's vicissitudes.

This study of low-status women utilizes qualitative methods -- unstructured interviews and participant observation -- to obtain the women's reflections on their past and current life concerns. The analysis of these data using the grounded theory method allows the researcher to ascertain the women's interpretations of the social processes that structure their social world.

## Conceptual Framework

Research efforts which utilize grounded theory to examine their data are not guided by the theories and hypotheses that are the foundation of hypothetico-deductive research. Rather the concepts pertinent to grounded theory research are derived from observations of a social situation, and the theories that best explain the observed social interactions are constructed from these concepts. Ideally, grounded theory researchers do not read the literature of the area prior to the initiation of their project, nor try to predict the outcomes of their analysis in advance. They do not construct a research design nor identify dependent variables.

It is short-sighted, however, to assume that researchers using grounded theory enter the field with no presuppositions, opinions, or even hunches. As products

of their culture, scientists are bound by the values and
beliefs current in their society and their perspective is
always informed by their experience and expert knowledge
(Keller, 1985).

The author of this study has been influenced both by
her past experience in interacting with low-status people
and by the particular conceptual frameworks that have
helped her to structure her understanding of her own
social world.  Most pertinent to this study are the
concepts of (a) the social construction of reality, (b)
social stratification, and (c) the nominalist perspective
on class/status.

## The Social Construction of Reality

The concept of the social construction of reality has
been developed by Berger and Luckmann (1967).  They
conclude that social reality is not a single, knowable,
objective quantity but a socially-constructed feature of a
relativistic world.  They conjecture that individuals
project their mental constructs, derived from the empir-
ical data of their subjective experiences, onto the
external world and reach a consensus of opinion, with
others in their social group, that is labeled "reality."
Individuals are inducted into this agreed-upon-world
through their socialization as children.  The immutable
facts of this world are dictated by the physical environ-

ment, the social structure and institutions of their specific society.

The social context into which one is born determines the content of one's thoughts. While individual differences in personality result from the variables of intelligence, temperament and experience, the mental constructs by which one interprets thoughts, feelings, and experiences are derived from one's culture (Shutz, 1962). Primary socialization during childhood is the initial induction into one's position in the social world as provided by parents and other caretakers.

This perspective is further elaborated in symbolic interactionist theory which hypothesizes that the child's concept of self is formed from the characteristics that are imputed to the child by significant others, usually family members. The family's world view, including the implications of their perceived position in it, is internalized by the young child. Patterns of child rearing in all cultures have an adaptive component reflecting environmental contingencies, past and present, which have been integrated into the group's belief system (Levine, 1977).

Reflecting the family`s position in the larger social structure, parents create a world for their children which contains the symbols and concepts reflecting that position. The family life style including values, beliefs,

and use of language, is derived from the cultural store
available to specific parents.  This perception may later
be challenged, either during secondary socialization
(which occurs, for example, in the educational process) or
in adult life, but individuals will erect tenacious
defenses to preserve their initial view of reality
(Peterson & Rollins, 1987).

## Social Stratification

People born into a low socio-economic group are
especially vulnerable to the stigmatizing process of the
stratification system.  Sennett and Cobb (1973) point out
that, in American society, to stand out from the crowd,
"to be somebody," is the source of personal dignity.

> The possibility of failure is the most uncom-
> fortable phenomenon in American life.  There is
> no room for failure in our schemes of respect...
> There is, as well, indifference to those who do
> not move ahead.  Failures and static people...
> are seen as having undeveloped personalities;
> the uncomfortable feelings about those who do
> not "make something of themselves" when they
> have a chance, come out of an assumption that
> men (sic) can be respected only as they become
> in some way distinctive, as they stand out from
> the mass. (p. 183)

The belief that all Americans have the opportunity to
"make something of themselves," obscures the workings of
the stratification system operative from birth and
internalized during the socialization process.  Sennett
and Cobb's 1973 study of working-class males in New
England documents how the negative assessments of powerful

others are accepted by lower-class children. These assessments are integrated into the child's self-image producing adult respondents who feel personally responsible for their low status position.

Four terms, Appalachian, low-status, rurality, and self-concept, used throughout this study have broad and varied definitions. Following is a discussion of the way in which these terms have been conceptualized in this research.

## Nominalist Definitions

### Appalachian

The most often used definition of the Appalachian region is that developed by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) which was created in 1965. The ARC was formed by the governors of the thirteen states which contain a portion of Appalachia (Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia). The Commission was set up to study the counties in these states "which had been traditionally weakest in economic development" (Ergood, 1983:35).

Subsequently, this geographical area, which roughly follows the northeast to southwest path of the Appalachian mountain chain, was divided into three subregions, Northern, Central, and Southern Appalachia. This repre-

sented more accurately the distribution of local charact-
eristics such as income, population, and employment
patterns ("The new Appalachian subregions," 1974).  Cocke
County, Tennessee, the site of this research study, is
located in the Southern Appalachian region which stretches
from the western panhandle of Virginia, through the
mountains of North Carolina and East Tennessee, the
northern tip of South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, to
the northeast counties of Mississippi.  Technically
speaking, any individual born in that area is an Appalach-
ian.

## Low-status

The term low-status is used in this study to repre-
sent both the economic position of the women discussed and
their ascribed social position relative to others in their
social world.  This approach is based on stratification
theory as proposed by Max Weber.

> Weber saw property, power, and prestige as three
> separate though interacting bases on which hier-
> archies are created in any society.  Property
> differences generate classes; power differences
> generate political parties; and prestige
> differences generate status groupings or strata
> (Tumin, 1967:6).

Weber's thesis is evident in the definition of a
social class as "a grouping of individuals with similar
positions and similar political and economic interests
within the stratification system" (Kerbo, 1983:12).  The
three main criteria for class are taken to be (a) position

in the occupational structure (a measure of prestige), (b)
position in the authority structure, that is, how many
others take orders from one (a measure of power), and (c)
ownership of income-producing property (a measure of
class).  An assumption of this study is that the char-
acteristics of any class or status group, that is, their
occupations, educational levels, power positions, will
influence their life chances and their share of society's
rewards.  This perspective has been defined as nominalist
(Kerbo, 1983).

These measures of social position produce a scale or
hierarchy of status ranging from high to low.  Social
status, then, is an evaluative concept.  Although social
status has been developed as an explanatory concept within
anthropology and sociology, it is a reification of what
already exists in the everyday world.  Bernard (1981)
notes that social status is a factor in our personal
interactions and is largely determined by local custom,
attitudes, and values.  It is when individuals from
different local groups come into interaction that social
status becomes significant.

Until recently women have been relegated to an
anomalous position in discussions of social stratifica-
tion.  Most often it has been assumed that married women
occupy the same social classes and strata as their
spouses.  In general, women's social positions have been

solely associated with, first, their family of orientation and later, with their husbands' status positions. Women's work (occupation) within the family has been ignored and their participation in the labor market obscured.

More recently, feminist scholars have suggested that the structure of social class is different for women than for men and has a strong link to the women's reproductive status and perceived economic dependency on men (Bernard, 1981; Petchesky, 1983). Thus a woman's fertility rate and role in the labor market, as well as the occupation of her mate are factors in determination of her social class. This type of categorization does not produce the same type of hierarchical groups as in classical social stratification. In feminist terms the women in this study can be characterized as belonging to the

> high-fertility, low-labor-force-participation group who are working-class -- who never or hardly ever work outside the home and are married to working-class men or receiving welfare... (Petchesky, 1983:232).

## Rurality

While the census-takers attempt to define rurality by the density of population living in a specific area and the proximity of the population to urban centers, others have recognized that the concept of rurality encompasses factors other than location. Bealer, Willits, and Kuvlesky (1965) suggest that at least three factors contribute to a substantive definition of rurality: the

ecological, the occupational, and the socio-cultural. It
is important for these factors to be considered in
conjunction with one another, for taken independently,
each aspect of rurality has limited applicability.

Ecologically the size and density of population may
or may not be related to the patterned interactions of the
people. Occupational definitions have often been limited
to agricultural activities which are becoming less and
less a factor in the economic basis of rural living in
some parts of the United States. Socio-cultural assump-
tions regarding rural populations have often been ambig-
uous, dealing sometimes with values and ideals and at
others times with behaviors. There is no current con-
sensus about a definition of rurality. However, taken
together the ecological, occupational, and socio-cultural
status of a population can be used as objective indicators
in research.

Lowe and Peek (1974) have defined the rural popula-
tion in the United States as all farm residents, open
county non-farm residents, and residents of areas with
populations of fewer than 2500. "Urban residence" is
considered to be in areas with populations of 50,000 or
more. In their opinion, the urban/rural status of people
living in areas with populations between 2500 and 50,000
is too difficult to define. Using these definitions, Lowe

and Peek (1974) found that urban/rural differences in attitude and behavior still exist in our society.

No available definitions of rurality address the conditions found in this study. While some of the women in the study currently reside in the county seat, population 8000, they and their families have lived wherever low rent housing was available in the county.

The women do not consistently belong to any occupational group other than homemaker, but most have done farm work at some time (stripping tobacco, harvesting tomatoes) and a few have worked in area factories or been motel maids. In terms of population numbers, the rural nature of their county is questionable. But the ecological, occupational, and socio-cultural aspects of their lives makes these women rural, in agreement with their own perceptions that they are "country people."

## Self-concept

This study is grounded in women's reflections regarding their interactions with others over their life course. In this narrative process the women reveal images of how they perceive themselves as well as how they have felt about the behaviors of others toward them. In so doing, various aspects of their conceptions of self are unveiled.

One of the more accessible and important dimensions of the self-concept is self-appraisal or self-evaluation

which is used as the basis for building individual self-esteem. According to Gecas (1982) there are two important aspects of self-esteem, a sense of power and a sense of worth. The first is based on an individual's feelings of efficacy. The second is derived from the norms and values that direct personal and interpersonal behavior. It deals with one's sense of justice, reciprocity, and honor.

## Summary

Status position in American society is a significant factor in defining reality for individuals and groups in different strata. Individuals from low-status groups have been stereotyped in terms of the ways they are thought to vary from middle-status norms. Increasing the amount of knowledge available regarding low-status individuals' perspectives, what is important in their world views, should be helpful to social work professionals interested in serving these population groups. This point of view is exemplified in social work theory by Howard Goldstein (1981) who is concerned with the consequences of the larger society's continuing inability to improve the life possibilities of the powerless.

> It is the individual, alone or joined with others, who must have the decisive say at some point about the changes that will affect his (sic) life. Social or political action under-taken without regard for this principle often succeeds only in shifting the scenery while the human drama remains unchanged. Of greater risk, such actions may come to convince its presumed

beneficiaries that they are indeed incompetent, dependent, and helpless (Goldstein, 1981:9).

This study has been designed to develop a deeper understanding of the social realities of low-status, rural, Appalachian women. Its methodological base is to be found in phenomenological philosophy which points to the power of the social context in the construction of social meaning and ultimately, social reality.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two major areas of research provide a background to
this study.  The first pertains to the relationship
between the development of individuals' concepts of social
reality and their social status.  The second includes
investigations of life patterns in low-status groups, that
is, family structure and function, group interaction pat-
terns, and general values and beliefs.  This chapter will
review studies of low-status life patterns, urban-rural
differences in life patterns, and characteristics speci-
fically attributed to the people of Appalachia.

## Social Status and Social Reality

The theoretical position that an individual's percep-
tions of social reality are structured or influenced
through the processes of early childhood socialization is
generally accepted in the literature but there is less
agreement regarding the role of variables such as social
position, ethnicity, and gender in these processes.  Two
different aspects of this question have been considered.
First, how do the values, beliefs, and socialization prac-
tices of parents from different class groups differ?
Second, how does socialization into a specific social
class affect the development of self-concept in children

and adults?  Underlying all such studies, in both catego-
ries, is the problem of operationalizing the concept of
social class.  The many different models of class that
have been used make comparisons between studies unreliable
(Gecas, 1979; Wylie, 1979).

## Parental Socialization Practices and Social Class

Variations in parental behaviors among social class
groups were the focus of many studies in the 1960's and
early 1970's.  Areas of behavior addressed in such studies
included: discipline or child control methods, nature of
affectional bonds between parent and child, use of
parental power, importance of independence and achieve-
ment, and parent-child communication (Bronfenbrenner,
1958; Gecas, 1979; Hess, 1970).

It was found that children in lower-class families
were more likely to receive physical punishment for all
types of disapproved behavior from an autocratic-style
parent.  Middle-class children experienced parental use of
reasoning or the induction of shame and guilt depending on
the type of disapproved behavior.  Their parents were more
egalitarian in style.  Higher socio-economic status
resulted in increased parental involvement and expression
of affection with emphasis on recognizing the children's
independence and achievements (Gecas, 1979).

Two prominent theorists and researchers in the area
of social status and parenting styles are Melvin Kohn and

Basil Bernstein. Kohn (1969) takes the position that differences in parental style are the result of parental interactions in occupational settings which influence their beliefs, values, and ideologies. Thus the working class parent's emphasis on conformity to external standards is seen as reflective of the lack of autonomy in the work place. Kohn's findings are limited, however, by his exclusion of poverty families from his research population, and his concentration on the traditional intact, nuclear family with a steadily employed father.

Bernstein and Henderson (1973) posit that roles in working class families are more likely to be position oriented, that is, roles are clearly segregated by status, age and gender, they are ascribed and are rather inflexible. Communication styles in such families are more restricted with emphasis on conformity and concreteness. However, empirical evidence for Bernstein's theory is weak (Gecas, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner (1958) points out that socialization styles also are a function of cultural backgrounds, geographic location, and exposure to culturally current ideologies of child rearing. In his review of twenty-five years of research on the relationship between social class and socialization, Bronfenbrenner (1958) supports the picture of the less flexible lower-class parent, who values external controls and conformity to rules. But

more recent research contends that there is no more variation in parenting behavior between social classes than there is within a class (Tulkin, 1977).

## Development of Self-concept and Social Class

Efforts have been made to measure the effects on adult self-esteem of perceived differences in personal power and prestige stemming from socioeconomic status. In an extensive review of socioeconomic class and self-concept variables, Wylie (1979) faults the available research for failing to resolve measurement questions important in defining socioeconomic class, and failing to explore other possibly relevant variables. He further questions whether better designed studies would reveal any significant relationship between socioeconomic status and self-regard.

Rosenberg (1979) maintains, however, that there is a significant correlation between levels of education, occupation, and income and self-esteem in adults. Interest in social class as an explanatory variable in socialization research has waned, as more attention is directed toward the variables that may mediate social class differences such as biological characteristics of specific gene pools, ethnicity, and the continued socialization process over the life span (Zigler & Seitz, 1978).

## Life Patterns in Low-status Groups

A variety of terms and definitions have been used to label low-status groups. The groups studied have variously been referred to as lower-class, lower-status, low-income, or even working-class. The latter designation arises when the lower class is thought to have at least two levels, the working-class composed of semi-skilled and unskilled laborers at one level, and the underemployed or unemployed poor beneath them, with the poverty line taken as a demarcation point (Roach, Gross, & Gursslin, 1969). Other researchers locate working class or blue-collar workers in the lower-middle class which includes skilled workers (Levitan, 1971). Yet other writers describe the working class family as at the bottom of the social spectrum, and ignore the world of low-income single-parent families and welfare recipients (see Lipman-Blumen, 1984).

The family is the most frequent unit of observation in all such studies. To the degree possible, the following discussion will be limited to the literature pertaining to the life patterns of individuals and families living below the poverty line (as opposed to the working-class), with particular emphasis on low-status women.

### Culture-of-poverty Model

A dominant view of the American lower class is represented by writers subscribing to the culture-of-

poverty theory (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963; U. S. Department of Labor, 1965). Here the poor are portrayed as participating in a subculture with a unique life style based on their common values, attitudes and behaviors. In this framework, behavioral patterns, originally established as a means of coping with the situational stresses of poverty, are assumed to be counterproductive for upward social mobility. For example, the present-oriented, live-for-today philosophy that is said to be manifested by some of the poor is attributed to their chronic frustration in achieving long-term goals, while at the same time it is blamed for poor work records related to tardiness and absenteeism. These "dysfunctional" behavior patterns are said to be perpetuated through family socialization and thus to doom succeeding generations to continued poverty.

Traits associated with the poor in this perspective include weak egos, lack of impulse control, a present time orientation, a desire for present gratification, and fatalism. In family life this is said to lead to insta-bility, toleration of deviant behaviors, male domination in white families or matriarchies in black families, early sexual activity, illegitimacy, and female-centered families (Allen, 1970; Kerbo, 1983).

The idea that poor families are different from others in society has then been taken as an explanation for the continuation of poverty. This literature is replete with

descriptions of seriously dysfunctional families (See
Duberman, 1976; Polansky, Borgman, & DeSaix, 1972).
Authors who question the more general application of the
culture-of-poverty concept to all low-status people, make
the caveat that such a theory may apply only to subgroups
of the long-term poor such as the poor in Appalachia
(Roach & Gursslin, 1969).

The major critiques of the culture-of-poverty theory
are first that behaviors can not be taken for values and
second that even general cultural values are viewed
differentially throughout our culture.  These critisms
have dislodged this perspective from its primacy in the
social sciences but have had minimal effect on the public
mind and the public view that the poor are responsible for
their situation (Gans, 1970; Kerbo 1983).

Structural Model

A different perspective on low-status families is
offered by qualitative studies which reveal differences
between middle and low-income families in structure and
function.  These may be viewed, in part, as situational
adaptations to the conditions of poverty without implying
that the poor are inflexible or resistant to positive
changes in their environment (Stack, 1974; Schneider &
Smith, 1973).  This perspective suggests that the middle-
class emphasizes the primacy of the self-sufficient
nuclear family group, while the lower-class has a well

organized family system which places value on the flexi-
bility of kinship ties.  Households may include any
variety of family members over time with the expectation
that kin will reciprocate and lend assistance when needed.
Such household elasticity is clearly functional when
resources are limited (Schneider & Smith, 1973).

Whatever the household composition, the relationship
between mother and children is at the center of low-status
family relations, and the mother-adult daughter bond is
the most permanent feature of family life (Duberman, 1976;
Schneider & Smith, 1973).  Abramovitz (1986) points out
that low-status women are attempting to fulfill the same
family ethic as women in other social classes.  The
traditional American family ethic "stresses marriage,
motherhood, and nonpaid work in the home as the center-
piece of women's role" (p. 214).  When fathers are in the
home, they are the authority figures and decision-makers.

Men and women have separate social worlds and
continue their ties with their own peers and families.
Illegitimate children often know who their fathers are and
have continuing relationships with his kin.  Children are
disciplined by physical force rather than an appeal to
reason and are taught to be submissive to authority rather
than learn to control their own behaviors (Schneider &
Smith, 1973).

Low-status women are portrayed as victims of male violence, battered and abused as well as overworked and self-sacrificial. But they also are viewed as matriarchs wresting family power from their men. The men are authoritarian but not seen as essential to the family, so that a broken marriage does not predict a "broken home." A more personal and detailed view of the life patterns of individual low-income and/or low-status women is to be found in the first person narratives documented by writers such as Buss, (1985) and Coles and Coles, (1978). Such documents, however, concentrate on the particular details of each life, and while they increase readers' sensitivity to the individual's life stresses and strains, they provide little information regarding the women's social group.

Characteristics that might seem most applicable to males, particular ethnic groups, or urban dwellers, are applied to low-status people in general. Schneider and Smith (1973) state

> ... the lower class tends to place a high premium upon those qualities of the individual which enable him (sic) to manipulate circum- stances and people, and somehow come out ahead. This requires style, fluent speech, quick wit, and extraordinary personality or innate warmth and 'soul,' rather than the qualities of self discipline which enable the individual to achieve his (sic) ends through a long process of training and work. All lower-class groups, irrespective of ethnic origin, place emphasis upon these qualities of manipulation (p. 58).

It is not at all clear that these qualities would not be valued in other social classes (cf. stand up comics and television evangelists). Some would also associate these personality traits with urban rather than rural dwellers. Schneider and Smith (1973:67) further state that the lower-class person "is indifferent to disapproval of performance, but will react violently to any suggestion that he (sic) is 'less than a man;' that is, to an attack upon his attributes as a person."

## Rural Life Patterns

As has been noted above, regardless of social class designation, many writers about the American family appear to use the urban family as the norm for values, beliefs and behaviors. But normative differences do exist between urban and rural populations. Rural families have changed but they continue to adhere more closely than urban families to the traditional family norms of our society, with a higher rate of father-headed families, and a relatively lower rate of divorce, than urban families. Rural individuals are also likely to marry earlier, have more children, and share their households with more kin, than urban residents (Brown, 1981).

Rural women appear to be maintaining traditional sex-roles as well, citing marriage and children (without full-time outside employment) as their preferred life-style.

Increases in education, longevity, and new family patterns are beginning to offer more choices to rural women. But as Bescher-Donnelly and Smith (1981) point out, the more isolated, low-status women with large families have less access to these new role options. When rural women do work outside the home they are most likely to be employed in lower-paying and lower-status positions. This is due, at least in part, to the limited job opportunities in rural areas.

As a group, rural women have less education than urban women, but often more than rural men. Although more rural individuals are gradually increasing the length of their education, this does not address the inadequacies in the education provided by under-financed rural school systems. Rural women's lack of interest in education has been attributed to their view that it is not germane to their major life-roles as wives and mothers (Bescher-Donnelly & Smith, 1981).

## Rural Poverty Family

In the only current description of the characteristics of rural poor families, Fitchen (1981) observes that the stable, intact family unit is the ideal held by poor couples who believe that it is the best atmosphere for raising children. She states that parents are dependent on their children to provide self-fulfillment and to add to their self-image. Couples are also seen to cling

together in bad marriages because of their mutual emotional dependence and the fear of losing custody of the children if the family should break up. In addition, women are fearful because of their lack of experience in decision-making and their insecurity outside of their home environment.

Emotional problems stemming from their own poverty-stricken childhoods and disrupted families are an important source of stress in the adult lives of low-status persons. Further stress is experienced in the family when they take in, even temporarily, kin who are in need of assistance. Fitchen (1981) believes that poor women are better able to cope with the stress in their lives because they are better able to attain their role ideals as wives and mothers, than men who are often frustrated in their roles as providers. In her perspective the poor are seen to lack access to secondary social roles in the community, such as PTA president or Boy Scout leader. This deprives them of further social resources that might increase their self-esteem. Because Fitchen (1981) does not compare poor rural families with families in other social strata, either rural or urban, it is not clear to what degree the characteristics described above are related to the families' social, economic, and/or geographic positions.

## Poverty and Family Life in Rural Appalachia

Billings (1974) suggests that theories examining poverty in Appalachia can be categorized into those assuming cultural causality and those positing situational explanations.  Cultural theorists begin with a concept of Appalachia as a subculture within which low-status families developed a deviant and dysfunctional culture-- a culture of poverty -- which has been transmitted to their children.  The mechanism creating this dysfunctional culture may be posited as either a cultural lag -- the traditionalist mountaineer out of step with modern, urban society -- or as a pattern of regressive personality traits stemming from the inability of some inhabitants to cope with a changing world.  This latter point of view has been dominant in social work circles where the assumption of internal causation of behavior holds sway (Polansky et al., 1972).

Theorists looking at situational factors, such as the economic or physical environment, view the characteristics of low-status Appalachians as adaptive behaviors which have survival value.  This perspective presents a theoretical base that holds promise for future social work research and practice.

## Cultural Lag Theory

When applied to Appalachia, cultural lag theory
depicts a traditionalist subculture unable to adapt to the
modern world (Photiadis, n.d., Photiadis, 1970). Weller
(1965) views indigenous Appalachians as representatives of
a folk culture and looks to the lives of the early
mountaineers to find the sources of present-day living
patterns. In Weller's view the virtues of the early moun-
taineers, their rugged independence and fearlessness have
been transformed by a changing environment into behavioral
characteristics that set them apart from middle-class
Americans and account for their continued poverty. Traits
attributed to Appalachians are selfish individualism,
traditionalist values, fatalism, orientation to action and
impulsivity, stoicism and introversion, and orientation to
persons rather than objects. Weller also contrasts the
sharp role distinctions between genders in Appalachia with
the supposedly more equitable gender relationships in
middle-class America.

Stephenson (1968) sums up the effect this postulated
cultural lag has had on the children of low-status
Appalachians.

> The traditional mountain culture has been
> likened to a "frontier culture," in that it is
> adapted to a stationary condition--it is not
> geared for change or for adaptation to new
> conditions. Therefore the persons who are
> socialized into it are not prepared for change
> either, and they lack the kinds of cultural
> tools--the thoughtways, habits of looking ahead,

the constant circumspection and vigilance for
changes in the very conditions of existence--
which are the keys to survival in middle-class,
industrial society.  ...They have little talent
for scanning all possible alternative solutions
to a problem and rationally selecting the one
best suited for a long range, optimal outcome.
(p. 192)

## Personality Trait Theory

Belief in the significance of early childhood
influences on the formation of the characteristics of low-
status adults has led to a search for the causes of
poverty in socialization patterns.  This has resulted in a
conception of change-resistant adult personalities and has
put an exaggerated emphasis on intergenerational poverty
(Allen, 1970).  The developmental theory that informs this
model of Appalachian poverty appears to be grounded in ego
psychology, although this is often more implicit than
explicit.  This psychological bias is implied in descrip-
tions of the Appalachian subculture that picture the
mountaineer frustrated by a world that devalues him,
turning his anger inward and becoming apathetic (Ball,
1968, Photiadis, n.d.).  The injured ego compensates and
develops dysfunctional defenses.  It is explicit in
evaluations which assign psychiatric diagnoses to what are
identified as regional character traits (Looff 1971,
Polansky et al., 1972).

Parenting in the Culture-of-Poverty Model

The assumption that specific parenting patterns are instrumental in forming adults who are inadequate in their basic psychological makeup is apparent in research that has focused on Appalachian family organization and interaction (Looff, 1971, Polansky et al., 1972). Living in sparsely-settled areas, early mountain inhabitants had to depend on the available resources of the nuclear family. Over time, intermarriage between kin groups enlarged this resource network. Loyalty to the kinship group held a high survival value in a society of subsistence farmers. The gradual modernization of Appalachia has produced changes in this way of life but kinship groups still reside in close proximity and maintain strong emotional ties.

Weller (1965) defines Appalachian families as adult-centered in contrast to the child-centered families of the middle-class. In an adult-centered family, children are accorded little special identity, except when indulged as infants, and home life is structured around adult needs. Discipline is described as lax, most often just threatened and most likely to be delivered when child behavior infringes on adult prerogatives.

Two prominent studies, conducted in the early 70's, touch on the socialization process in low-income or low-status rural Appalachian families. Although these studies

are concerned with special populations, families with
psychologically-disturbed children (Looff, 1971), and
neglectful mothers (Polansky et al., 1972), their conclu-
sions have influenced present-day images of low-status
women.

Looff generalized from his experience in rural mental
health that the most common mental health problems in
rural Appalachia are school-phobia, dependent and hysteri-
cal personality disorders, conversion reactions, and
elective mutism.  Women, viewed in their maternal role,
are described as so nurturing, warm and indulgent (a
personality strength) that they become over-protective,
potentially pathogenically so.  Another negative result of
this strong orientation to feelings is said to be a lack
of control of aggressive impulses.

In addressing the special problems of the very poor,
Looff does warn against generalizations regarding poverty
populations, pointing to the diversity of experience in
differing environments.  He also recognizes the role of
insufficient economic opportunities and resources in
creating stresses that are interactive with individual
personality configurations.

Social workers (Chilman, 1968; Polansky et al., 1972)
have used the culture-of-poverty model in their analyses
of low-status parents.  The long-term reliance in social
work education on the psychoanalytic or ego psychology

model of development as a primary knowledge base created
an affinity with the tacit assumptions of the psychologi-
cal trait assumptions of the culture-of-poverty model.

## Critiques of the Appalachian Culture-of-poverty Model

Both cultural-lag theories and attributions of patho-
logical personality characteristics to low-status Appa-
lachians have been challenged. Billings (1974) has con-
tested the concept of Appalachia as a region with a
distinct subculture. His analysis of attitude items in a
1965 North Carolina survey of low-income families and
individuals found that the weakest predictor of middle-
class orientation was region, coming after education, age,
urban-rural differences, blue collar-white collar differ-
ences, and race. Fisher (1976) contends that subcultural
models have been developed by writers already committed to
that view and have been descriptive in nature. Lewis
(1978) has pointed out that the by-product of such
descriptive approaches has been the identification of
elements of the subculture as causal agents in perpetuat-
ing poverty while ignoring or minimizing the effect of
changes in the social, economic and political environment.

A similar descriptive method has been used in the
labeling of personality characteristics seen in low-status
individuals. The validity of characteristics attributed
to persons of low-status was questioned by Allen (1970)
who reviewed the research relating personality and

poverty.    He concluded that "most of the demonstrated relationships between personality and poverty are quite weak" (p. 259).

Theoretically the culture-of-poverty model is problematic because it fails to examine the interaction of larger societal forces and the situational quality of life in low-status groups.  It also ignores the coping and adaptive value of behaviors developed in response to the reality of an inequitable society.

## Situational Theories of Poverty

The impact of economic exploitation and cultural imperialism on the welfare of Appalachian communities and families has been assessed by Gaventa (1980) and Lewis and Knipe (1978).  These observers locate the economic problems of the Appalachian region in the usurping of the area's resources by outside moneyed interests, and depict women and men who are powerless to control the profits of their labor (Lewis & Knipe, 1978).

The dominant situational explanation of Appalachian poverty is based on internal colonialist theory.  Writers using the colonialist model take a political perspective toward Appalachian history and contend that one cannot isolate a culture from its larger societal context. Lewis, Kobak and Johnson (1978) and Whisnant (1980) view the contemporary family system as an adaptation to the

conditions created by the capitalist exploitation of the region's resources, such as coal and timber.

Beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Appalachian land was bought cheap and tenant farmers were forced from their homes. Wages paid to workers in the mines and later the textile factories were so low that the workers lived lives of servitude to the company. Attempts to unionize the industries of Appalachia prior to World War II led to bloodshed and oppression.

The already strong family system became the refuge for the embattled mountaineers. The family supplied the emotional warmth and economic backup needed by the native workers facing the dangers of the company coal mines and the impersonality of factory life. The family became by necessity the protector of the clan's cultural history and traditional ways, a bulwark against assimilation into hostile or strange environments. It is this turning inward of the family that is said to have produced patterns of parenting that have been labeled overprotective.

From the perspective of the internal colonialist conceptualization, women are accorded a more heroic role than is acknowledged by other outlooks. Women are charged with caring for the home and children but they also have been active in supporting their menfolk in the struggles

to obtain decent living conditions (Kahn, 1972). Depic-
tions of Appalachians as silent types, suspicious of
strangers, are reinterpreted in this perspective as
realistic conduct for people defending their families.

Two of the significant differences between the
culture-of-poverty and internal colonialist perspectives
lie in their reconstruction of the origins of observed
family patterns and their conclusions regarding the
significance of these patterns in the lives of individual
low-status Appalachians. There is some common ground in
their observations. All would agree that blood kinship is
one of the most important elements in the Appalachian
family, and while there may be conflicts within the
extended family, the family will nevertheless present a
united front to the outside world.

Adherents of the colonialism model do not deny that
some low-status individuals are poorly prepared to compete
in the cultural mainstream, but they contend that factors
in the larger social context have contributed to the
creation of this problem. Billings (1974) points to the
need for increased understanding of how the situational
variables in the economic, political, and social sphere
interact with the life processes of low-status people.

Perceptions of Social Stratification in Appalachia

Some ethnographic studies in Appalachia have reported
a clear stratification process with some variation of

high, middle, and low-strata (Keefe, Reck, G. & Reck, U.,
1985; Schwarzweller et al., 1971; Stephenson, 1968). A
common assumption has been that the critical demarcation
between social strata is determined by each group's level
of adaptation to the norms and life styles of the urban
middle-class. Low-status groups are seen as least
assimilated to the new norms and women in this category
are said to be bound by traditional sex-role mores
(Gochros, 1974; Kaplan, 1971; Photiadis, 1970). Tradi-
tional female role behavior, restrictions in the choice of
role models, and limited employment opportunities are all
seen as factors affecting the occupational aspirations of
women (Photiadis, 1986). Schwarzweller et al. (1971) and
Beaver (1976) report that egalitarianism is an important
principle in traditional Appalachian society, but they
both demonstrate that this coexists with a stratification
system and the resulting incongruity is rationalized.

Working in a small community of 52 families, Beaver
(1976) found that an ideology of egalitarianism was the
basis for social interaction. But the residents did
perceive two distinct social groups: "most folks around
here" and "worthless" folks. Beaver defined "worth" as an
inherent quality attributed to all until it is proven
otherwise. People are considered worthless when they are
too lazy to work, although they are physically able, and
have become dependent on social service agencies. Some

deviant behaviors, such as alcoholism, illegitimate preg-
nancy, or criminal activity, may render a person worthless
but individual circumstances are considered within a given
community context.

Schwarzweller et al. (1971) gathered data in a
comparable community of 77 Appalachian families in 1942
with a follow up in 1961. While they encountered the
concept of worth/worthlessness, they found it was bound to
a clear stratification system founded on economic achieve-
ment and behavioral norms.

Perceptions of stratification differentials become
part of the life view transmitted to children in different
social groups through the socialization process. This
principle is operative in Appalachian society. Despite an
outward show of egalitarianism, everyone in a given rural
community knows which families are worthless and this
label becomes part of family members' identity whether
they are dealing with the neighborhood grocer, the school
principal, or the welfare worker.

## The Perspective of Low-status Appalachian Women

Histories or documentations of contemporary life add
first hand accounts of the ordinary lives of individual
women to the record (Kahn, 1972; Lewis, Selfridge, et al.,
1986). Women in this type of study are portrayed as proud
and decent with a natural dignity. The realities of their
uncompromising environment and the economic exploitation

of their families may have led to feelings of frustration and anger but have also motivated efforts to resist future exploitation (Kahn, 1972). The women are noted as showing "courage, humor and strength in the face of formidable odds" (Smith, 1986).

It is in the nature of this type of literature to feature the positive characterological aspects of the subjects. But such writing also demonstrates that a central feature of these women's lives is their role as the protector of the emotional well-being of the family, whether nuclear or single-parent. These women have been called upon to comfort and cater to men who have faced failure and humiliation. They must attempt to defend their children against the slurs and prejudices of those who have superior economic positions. They have banded together to protest the industrial insults to their families and their environment. But the documents also make it clear that this role expectation -- to be a strong, emotionally supportive woman -- has a price: fatigue, emotional depletion, depression, and frustrated anger that can result in periodic emotional dysfunction.

The perspectives of low-status women discussed up to this point may seem, at times, contradictory. Are they unsophisticated hedonists, apathetic drudges, or stoic protectors of the family? The wide variety of reported perceptions are probably attributable to the range of

persons and behaviors encountered by the observers, the range of observers with their various levels of observational interests dictated by different professional disciplines, and the underlying ideological positions that structure the studies. It is certainly feasible that much of what has been reported is true for some part of the population under discussion at some time.

But there is a further dimension that can be added to enhance an understanding of the social world of low-status women in Appalachia. This dimension can be derived from an analysis of the ways the women describe and explain themselves. For the women under discussion are more than products of their social context or the sum of their psychological characteristics: they are also creative actors.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This study was designed to honor the integrity of
each participant's world view through the use of qualita-
tive methods for data collection -- unstructured, open-
ended interviews and participant observation. The
investigator took up part-time residence with a family in
the community where the participants resided. This
provided the opportunity for an ethnographic perspective,
the chance to observe the women in their social context.

The methods used to gather the data are consistent
with the theoretical base of the study and are derived
from symbolic interactionist research and ethnography.
Grounded theory methodology was used to process the data
and to discover the social processes revealed by the
subjects.

The Chicago School of symbolic interactionists,
exemplified by H.G. Blumer, maintains that social inter-
action is a formative process, not simply a medium wherein
determining factors produce behavior. Individuals use the
available cultural set of meanings to fashion their own
interpretation of events in their social world. In
conducting research, symbolic interactionists have used a
variety of qualitative data sources including life
histories, autobiographies, case studies, diaries,

letters, non-directive interviews, and participant observation. They avoid the predetermination of variables to be studied, on the grounds that such an approach renders the world in mechanistic terms (Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds, 1967).

This perspective is also present in the field of anthropology as researchers have applied the ethnographic method to the study of groups within their own cultures. Ethnography is a holistic research method aimed at "the more general process of understanding another human group" (Agar, 1980:71). Unlike the linear progression of the hypothetico-deductive methodologist proceeding from hypothesis to data collection to analysis, the ethnographer goes directly into the social situation of interest and by observing and talking with people attempts to discover embedded categories of meaning. The ethnographic method is an attempt to get at what Imre (1982) means by implicit knowledge, knowledge that is contextual. It is concerned with the beliefs and values that are woven into the fabric of the common-sense world and that are used to define meaning in a personal context (Agar, 1980; Agar, 1986; Pelto, P. & Pelto, G., 1978; Spradley, 1980).

Grounded theory refers to a research process based on the use of inductive reasoning. Empirical data, consisting of the researcher's obervations and the respondents' statements, were used to generate conceptual categories

and define their properties. The data were then analyzed for patterns of relationships occurring between categories as a means of elucidating the concepts and developing an explanatory theory that fits the data. Proponents of grounded theory claim that it can provide accurate evidence because it uses natural observations, enables the investigator to develop empirical generalizations, assists in specifying concepts worthy of in-depth study, and makes possible the generation and verification of theory (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mullen, 1986; Turner, 1981, 1983).

## Study Site

The study was conducted in Cocke County, Tennessee, a rural East Tennessee county in Appalachia. It was chosen as the site for the study because the author was familiar with the community, and because its population is largely rural (75% of the population live outside of its two small towns), and native born ( 87% are native Tennesseans). The county maintains a stable population of about 29,000, 8000 of whom reside in the county seat, Newport. Forty-seven percent of the population claim to be of English, Irish and German descent. The small minority population, 2% black and 0.7% Spanish American, largely reside in Newport (US Census, 1980).

The news media have portrayed Cocke County as epitomizing traditional mountain culture. Dating from the years when Cocke County supplied moonshine whiskey to surrounding, dry urban areas, the County developed a reputation for violence and illegal activity, "hillbilly" style (Anson, 1981). This has continued to the present with media focussing attention on clandestine cock fights, marijuana growers battling the government helicopters that patrol their skies, and "chop shops" where stolen cars are stripped so parts can be resold (Smith, T., 1985).

Situated at the conflux of three rivers, the Pigeon, the Nolichucky, and the French Broad, Cocke County's arable valleys rise from 1400 to over 6600 feet in the Great Smoky Mountains. It was settled in 1783 and became a political entity as early as 1797. The first settlers had to battle Indians to carve out their farms and establish the small village of Newport. Poor roads kept the community relatively isolated until the railroad opened the region, arriving in Newport in 1867. In the 1880's the lumber industry began to develop and joined agriculture as part of the economic base of the community. Subsistence farming was the basis for family self-sufficiency.

After World War I inhabitants began more and more to grow cash crops such as tobacco and vegetables which were sold to canning factories that were established nearby

(Godshalk, 1970). Families then became increasingly
dependent on wages and agricultural price fluctuations.
For many this spelled the end of their self-sufficient
lifestyle.

By the 1950's and 60's Cocke County began to attract
small businesses and industries, enticed by non-union
cheap labor, but during the recessions of the 1970's many
of these employers left the area (Maples, 1968). The
promotion of tourism and its associated businesses is now
a major economic strategy.

Unemployment is high, averaging over 20% in the
winter months. Only forty percent of the adult residents
have graduated from high school. The tourist industry in
near-by areas, such as Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge,
provides temporary summer employment, usually consisting
of minimum wage jobs in service occupations for women.
Residents must have reliable transportation to take
advantage of such job opportunities.

Almost one quarter (23.68%) of the families in the
county have incomes below the poverty level (US Census,
1980), and are receiving food stamps (Tennessee Advisory
Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1985). Cocke
County has the highest rate of low-birth-weight infants in
the region and an infant mortality rate of 16.3% (Tennes-
see Health Improvement Council, 1984-1985). As the
foregoing statistics attest, many people in Cocke County

have no access to the prosperity enjoyed by middle
America.

## Selection of Participants

The researcher sought as participants women who were
(a) rural Appalachian-born and raised (preferably in Cocke
County), (b) currently raising children in their homes,
(c) living below the rural poverty standard, and (d)
deemed by the referrer as average or not unusual for their
social group.  Referrals of appropriate participants were
solicited from helping professionals in the community who
had regular contact with low-status mothers and children
such as the staff of the Public Health sponsored Child
Development Program; East Tennessee Human Resources
Agency, Homemaker Services; and the Douglas Cherokee
Community Action Program.  Twelve of the fourteen house-
holds that participated in the study were referred by
staff at the Child Development Program.

Several possible categories of local women were
either deliberately excluded from the study or were
unavailable for participation.  In the first category were
women experiencing current, severe family or legal
problems.  It was the researcher's belief that participat-
ion in a research study might increase the already high
stress levels in the lives of these women.  A number of

the study participants, however had experienced periods of
serious family problems in the past.

Also excluded from the study were local black women.
The researcher made this decision after interviewing a
young black mother, receiving AFDC, who was referred by a
black professional in the community. There are about 670
black residents in Cocke County, comprising 200 house-
holds. This small ethnic community has always been sur-
rounded by considerable prejudice and discrimination.
There are still parts of this county whose residents boast
of their "sundown law." That is, no blacks allowed there
after dark.

The black mother who was interviewed felt that she
had experienced prejudice in her dealings with local
whites. She had been socialized within a small ethnic
conclave and all her social contacts were within that
group. She had more education than the white subjects,
having attended college for two years. Black women in
this community appeared to the researcher to have a
different social reality than the study participants and
so were not included in the study. A study of the social
reality of black, rural, Appalachian women could reveal in
what ways this one black respondent's perceptions were
typical of her social group.

Two categories of women were unavailable to the
researcher. In the first group were women whose husbands

controlled utterly the circumference of the woman's social world. Local health professionals spoke of such women but said the husbands barely tolerated their interactions with the women and thus the professionals were reluctant to refer the women to the researcher. Several participants in this study (see particularly references to Lorraine and Reena) indicated that at some point in their marriages their husbands had controlled all aspects of their lives. The perceptions of these women may be relevant to the lives of the women who were thus excluded from the study.

Also unavailable were women from the low-status group who had either married non-local men and left the area, who had married local men and migrated to urban areas, or who had found other means to leave the county. The researcher did hear stories about women who had left the area and achieved a higher economic standard of living than their local relatives. The informants said that such women did not often visit local kin.

The researcher first attempted to visit the homes of the women who had been referred to discuss their consent to participate in the study. Once in the home on subsequent visits, she added other adult women in the home to the study, with their consent. She was not able to contact all of the women referred due to difficulties in communicating with referrals who did not have telephones or were frequently away from home. The researcher

arbitrarily stopped accepting referrals after the fourteen households agreed to participate in the study and when it became clear there would be insufficient time to follow up further referrals.

## Subject Characteristics

In Appalachia, as in the rest of the United States, female-headed households are over-represented in poverty groups. In the Southern Appalachian region, which includes all of Tennessee's Appalachian counties, 11% of the male-headed families with children live in poverty compared to 36.8% of the female-headed families. (Ticka-myer, A.R. & Tickamyer, C., 1986).

All the households in this research had incomes below the rural poverty level. Nuclear family groups were, however, more likely to have some earned income than female-headed households. The majority of the families existed on some combination of Aid to Dependent Children, Social Security or VA benefits, supplemented by food stamps. Few of the women had ever worked outside the home.

The eighteen participants, all mothers, ranged in age from 21 to 67, although more than half of them were in their twenties. They represented fourteen different households. Only four women lived in nuclear family households, six households contained three generations of family members, and seven households were headed by

females -- representative of the varied family composi-
tions so seldom noted in Appalachian studies.  Three women
had never married, seven were divorced, two separated and
one was widowed.

This group of women had a fertility rate considerably
higher than the national rate of fewer than two preg-
nancies per women.  The women under 30 had averaged three
pregnancies apiece while the middle group had an average
of 6.6 pregnancies.  One subject in her 60's had twenty
pregnancies -- more than double the pregnancies of anyone
else in the group.  Although the women under thirty had
stayed in school a few years longer than the older women,
only one had graduated from high school, and one had a
GED.

## Data Analysis

Data for this study include observations made on
site, in the form of field notes, made during the five
months the researcher was in residence in the county.
These notes were dictated into a tape recorder immediately
following the interactions in the field and an expanded
version was typed within a week of the contact.  The
researcher also kept a personal journal.

The analysis of the field notes was an ongoing
process starting shortly after taking up residence in
Cocke County.  The constant comparative method was used to

begin analysis of the field notes. Data were compared, paragraph by paragraph, for similarities and differences. As this was done the data were coded on a series of cards containing descriptive labels, or terms derived from the data. For example, an early card contained maternal caretaking activities while later cards contain data on perceived consequences of rural residency, and feeling "put down."

The initial coding process generated over 60 codes containing notations of the linkages between cards, that is cards that appeared to be connected conceptually or which touched on aspects of the same subject. Gradually these cards were sorted and grouped into larger conceptual catagories. During the course of this process other topic areas to be explored appeared and were included in the data collection, which was ongoing. This is referred to as theoretical sampling, in that the ongoing data analysis suggests further sources of information. This might mean interviewing participants from additional sites, adding specific types of participants to the study, or adding a specific area of questions to future interviews (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Mullen, 1986). Toward the end of the study, for example, the concept of boundaries, both geographic and psychological, emerged in the data and later interviews reflect direct questioning of partici-pants about this concept as well as discussions of this

subject with local women from different socioeconomic groups.

Writing started almost immediately. This took the form of memos in which the researcher began to define conceptual catagories using the data on specific cards, noting ideas and connections between concepts stimulated through the analysis process, and exploring theoretical connections between categories. Memo-writing was a cumulative process, in which later memos built on, integrated, and expanded the thinking of earlier memos. Through memo writing, the core concepts and hypotheses began to emerge from the data. It was at this point that the researcher began to explore the linkages between her findings and already existing theory.

Ideally, grounded theory research should reveal underlying social processes or basic patterns in social life. These might be either social psychological proces-ses drawn from individual behavior or social structural processes found in organizational behaviors (Mullen, 1986).

## Research Validity

Questions of validity and reliability are as impor-tant in qualitative research as they have been in quanti-tative work. They cannot be approached in equivalent terms, however, due to the nature of qualitative studies,

in which the instrument is the observer and the measure-
ments are cultural observations translated into categories
and themes. Validity is achieved in qualitative studies
by (a) providing for different and multiple exposures to
the problem of interest, (b) checking the researcher's
observations and the validity of original data through
contacts with a variety of people in multiple situations,
and (c) by framing questions meant to confirm or contra-
dict working hypotheses. As Kirk and Miller (1986) point
out

> To the extent that confirmatory methods are
> used, they are used quickly and informally,
> rather than constituting entire research
> projects in and of themselves, and they belong
> to the data-collection rather than the analysis
> phase of research. (p. 31)

In the course of this study, the researcher's residence in
the community provided many opportunities to seek informa-
tion from a variety of sources including her landlady and
the director of the local welfare office. Personnel in
the local health care system were particularly helpful as
sounding boards and informants as the researcher began to
air her emerging thoughts about the social processes she
was observing.

## Research Reliability

Reliability is a difficult issue in qualitative study
because the research process is difficult to replicate.
Some forms of reliability testing are patently inappropri-

ate in ethnographic work. One cannot expect a single method of observation, for example, to yield significant data about a complex social situation, nor for any measurement of the spontaneous world to remain unchanged through time as in test/retest procedures. Neither can any set of measurements or observations hope to capture more than a small part of the rich social context under study. With that understanding, the researcher has attempted to clarify her research process by:

1.    spelling out her theoretical biases both in
      her proposal and in this dissertation;

2.    delineating her analytic process;

3.    having field notes and documents developed
      during analysis available for study;

4.    checking the hypotheses drawn from the data
      with people representative of different
      status groups in the community .

## Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is that the women who participated cannot be proven to be a representative sample of low-status, Appalachian women and the wider applicability of the cultural themes of their lives might be questioned. As has been noted, this study was limited to Caucasian women. Women living with men who severely limit their communications with outsiders, and low-status women who have left the community were not available for study. The degree to which the low-income

mothers of Cocke County are representative of other Appalachian mothers might also be questioned. It will require further research to ascertain if the findings of this study are applicable in different types of Appalachian communities.

Because of the researcher's years of association with low-status mothers in this area of Appalachia, she did not come to this study with the freshness of perspective that many ethnographers possess when they first enter new cultural groups. Valuable first impressions were, of necessity, missing. Her familiarity with the setting did aid her in establishing rapport in the community, but it left the possibility that previously formed opinions and theories about this cultural world could intrude into her findings. It is one of the strengths of the grounded theory method that it forces the researcher to stay close to her data and eschew theories that cannot be supported by the data. This was effective in helping the researcher suspend her prejudgments during the course of this research.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

## Introduction

The findings of this study support descriptions of
low-status Appalachian women to be found in the available
literature which discuss the dominance of traditional
family values and the personalization of interactions.
Traditionalist women have been described as women to whom
motherhood is the core identity. Marriage and home are
the sources of their security, and they retain close
connections within their kinship networks (Bernard, 1981).

The women in this study believe that a woman's
primary role is to bear children and raise and protect
them. Most of these women want to live in a nuclear
family with the male provider present. They accept
sharply differentiated sex roles and are comfortable when
men and women have different social spheres. In addition
to their traditionalist stance regarding family and gender
roles, the women enter social transactions with expecta-
tions that they will be treated fairly and equitably with
attention to their individuality. When the women do not
receive equitable and personalized responses from others
in their social environment, some of them silently
withdraw from the situation while others express anger or
dissatisfaction.

This study reveals that far from feeling defeated by
the rejection they experience in social interactions --
particularly with higher-status individuals -- the women
have intense feelings about negative encounters.  They
hold firmly to their beliefs about the egalitarian basis
of social behavior while labeling the offending other
person as inadequate in some sense.  Furthermore such
negative encounters with others do not appear to perma-
nently affect their self-appraisals which are buttressed
by their adherence to traditional values and their role
performances as mothers.  The following three chapters
detail these findings.

Chapter IV discusses the women's perceptions of the
structure of their social world.  The discussion includes
the their views of (a) family role expectations, (b) mar-
riage and the nature of male-female relationships, and (c)
the world beyond their families.

Chapter V describes the women's perceptions of their
social status in the community and their expectations for
interactions with others.

Chapter VI presents the study's findings pertaining
to the women's construction of their self-concepts derived
from their values and beliefs, and the process through
which the women maintain self-respect despite their
feelings of injury in countless social situations.

## Family Role Expectations

### Female Roles

The women's expectations for female behavior in the context of the family are dominated by an emphasis on the care and protection of children. In all three of their important life roles: mother, daughter, and wife, the women expect to meet the needs and wishes of parents, husbands, and children. Even the small pleasure some of the women may find in becoming "working girls" is subject to cancellation by their family. Being a mother is the central concern of their lives and the endless return of adult children and the assumption of care for grand-children ensures that mothering remains an active, life-long occupation and status.

When I grow up. Motherhood is the major social role anticipated by the women. For some women the desire to be a mother "when I grow up" was clearly identified by early adolescence. When asked to remember what they wanted from life when they were age 13 or 14, these women spoke of their desire to be mothers and to have large families. "I wanted to be a mother just like my mother and to have 14 children like she did." "Since I was an only child raised by my grandmother, I wanted to have the big family I'd missed."

There were exceptions to these early expectations of self as a mother but alternative roles were not attained.

Some women had girlhood desires to become a nurse while a
few hoped to have some other type of paid employment.  But
only one of the women had taken any steps during her
educational years to achieve an occupational goal.  Norene
had joined the Job Corps to pursue a career in nursing,
but she came home after only one week.  She became so
anxious away from home, living with strangers, that she
became "ill."  Within a year of coming home she was
married.

The strength of the family in determining the women's
role choices seems unlimited.  Several women had fanta-
sized working outside the home.  Ida identified with her
older sisters and wanted to go to work with them in the
textile mills when she quit school at age 12.  But the
family thought she should remain at home and she was
married when she was 15 and never sought outside employ-
ment.  Seventeen-year-old Caren wants to move to town when
she turns 18 and get a job.  Her family says "no way."

## Planning Pregnancies

As a group, the women in the study have exercised
little control over their reproductive lives.  The women
over thirty had begun child bearing immediately following
marriage, rarely used birth control, and had had repeated
pregnancies with little or no attempt to space their
children.  Cora had six pregnancies in six years with only
four live births.  This was so detrimental to her repro-

ductive system that a total hysterectomy was necessary. After five pregnancies, Lorraine was having "female trouble." She reluctantly took birth control pills for less than a year, but was fearful that the pill could cause cancer. After her sixth pregnancy, a hysterectomy was recommended.

The younger women seem to have begun their families in much the same pattern but show an inclination to limit the number of children after three or four pregnancies. This is most often accomplished by a tubal ligation.

Family planning is not ignored but situational factors frequently interrupt such planning. Barbara is married and has four children under the age of five. She takes birth control pills but is not always able to attend the Public Health clinic to obtain refills. She cannot get enough child car seats in her auto to make the trip to the clinic and has to wait until a friend or family member can sit with the children. She attempted to arrange a tubal after her last delivery but her Medicaid was cut off (in error) before the baby came. If she became pregnant again she wouldn't even consider abortion.

The reasons given for termination of reproductive activity are economic. Since the women's concern is to provide for the children they do have, they continue to see themselves as good mothers in that respect.

Some observers of Appalachia (Polansky, et al., 1972; Weller, 1965) have cited low-status women's reproductive behavior as an example of their impulsivity or present-oriented nature. Such an interpretation implies that conception is a byproduct of unrestrained or hedonistic sexual activity. This type of labeling seems unwarranted in light of the women's strong orientation toward mother-hood. Their implicit expectation is that they will become mothers sooner or later. When is not important. Methods for spacing pregnancies are not plentiful. Some, such as abortion, are morally unacceptable to the women, others such as birth control pills are not always obtainable due to transportation and child-care problems. None of the women held the man responsible for preventing conception. Medicaid payment for tubal ligations has provided an acceptable means of limiting family size.

The Good Mother

All of the study participants conceived of their activities as mothers as central to their lives, consti-tuting their major social role. Thus the requirements of this role present the longest and most articulated family role description in the study. The women talked about the positive and negative qualities of the women who mothered them, complained about women they knew who were not good mothers, enumerated and demonstrated their own accomplish-

ments as mothers, and spoke of the exhausting task of raising a family on a limited income.

The following characteristics of the "good mother" emerged from their varied stories. A good mother is happy to have children, is unselfish, and always puts the children's needs before her own. She ensures that the children's basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing are met and protects them from physical harm. She accepts her children and grandchildren unconditionally and tries to be a good role model for her daughters.

The importance of children is testified to by the women who report having choosen their children's welfare over and above their relationships with a male partner, whether or not he was the children's father. Lorraine finally evicted her alcoholic husband after he struck their daughter. Marilyn said she divorced the children's step-father after she found bruises on her baby. Reena left her husband after years of abuse when she had to choose between staying and possibly losing custody of her children. She explained, "My children are everything to me." Nancy said she doubted that she would ever marry because she didn't believe she could find a man who would "treat these two young ones (her two children born out of wedlock) right."

The unselfish mother. A good mother welcomes all of her pregnancies and does not attempt to terminate any of

them. She is saddened if she miscarries and always counts both the miscarried infants and children who died after birth when recounting her reproductive status. Norene even keeps track of how old the twins that she miscarried would be if they had survived. A good mother does not consider abortion a reproductive option even when her pregnancy is the result of rape.

She does not desert her children, live with a man who mistreats her children, or seek her own happiness at her children's expense. They are considered a life-long obligation. Activities for the mother's benefit may be postponed to meet the child's needs. Eunice, a grand-mother in her fifties, needed to go to Knoxville for a cardiac evaluation. Her pregnant daughter, Doris, said, "Now Mamma, you know you can't go away until this baby is born," and indeed, Eunice has not gone for her tests and is providing child-care for the new infant.

A good mother ensures her children's basic needs are met. She first looks to her husband, if married, to provide the economic resources in the family. If this fails, she will locate all the local resources for assistance and even beg if need be. If she has never lived with the children's father, she will assume total responsibility for the children from birth. All aspects of child care fall to her. Her children remain with her at all times. They go where she goes.

Mothers are the family emissaries to all social agencies. While a father may drive the mother to an agency, he will wait in the car while she transacts all the family business. She will keep numerous appointments to obtain or retain services, and will even venture to large metropolitan areas, which are frightening even to consider, to obtain the special services her children require.

Keeping them from harm. A good mother protects her children. It is her responsibility to keep her children from harm. Specifically she does not allow anyone to tease them and hurt their feelings, to do them bodily harm, or to abuse them sexually. Cora says that one of the reasons she won't leave her shack in the hills for the housing projects in town is her fear that her grandchildren will be teased or blamed for trespassing in neighbor's yards. When one of her daughter's adolescent male friends teased one of the grandchildren and made him cry, Cora became so angry she threw what she had in her hand at him. It was an open can of tomato sauce.

The good mother is expected particularly to guard her daughters from sexual molestation or voluntary sexual activity that results in pregnancy without marriage. The emphasis on the protection of female children may be due to the gender of the informants. But it is also a part of the development of strong bonds between mothers and

daughters which lead them to live their lives in close proximity to one another.

Within this injunction to protect one's daughters there exists a hierarchy of behaviors. First and most important is to protect the daughter from sexual molestation by male family members, then to protect her from men outside the family, and lastly, to protect her from herself, that is, teach her to avoid voluntary sexual activity outside of marriage.

A mother's failure to protect her daughter from male family members may result in complete estrangement between mother and daughter. Judy not only will have nothing to do with her mother, but has incurred her mother's anger for gaining custody of her younger half-sisters. When Judy was in her mid-teens, her mother didn't believe her claim that her stepfather attempted to fondle her. Judy left home never to return.

Daughters who have been raped by outsiders do not believe their mothers have failed them. But mothers do try to guard against this. As long as the daughter continues to reside at home, the mother believes she bears some responsibility for the younger woman's sexual deportment. Eunice made a point of saying that her daughter had not become pregnant outside of marriage until after the daughter had moved away from Eunice's home.

Coming home to Mamma.  Adult children come back home

periodically to live and may stay indefinitely.A good

mother accepts her children and grandchildren uncondition-

ally.  This does not mean that the mother may not be

critical of a child's behavior, particularly an adult

child.  But these criticisms do not result in permanent

estrangements.  A grandmother reported with disapproval,

that the physically-handicapped grandson she is raising is

severely impaired due, in part, to her daughter's use of

drugs during pregnancy.  Yet this daughter, later arrested

locally on a prostitution charge, received a warm welcome

when she showed up after an absence of many months.

Another subject was quite critical of one of her daughters

and attempted to deter her from having a tubal ligation.

Yet the grandmother provided child care when the daughter

proceeded with the disapproved operation.

As part of her acceptance of each child, the good

mother does not play favorites.  Family resources are to

be meted out fairly; every child gets its share.  The

mother must also not appear to love or pamper one child

more than another.  When Barbara talked about why she

didn't feel close to her mother, although she visits her

daily, she noted that she believed her mother had favored

the youngest and oldest children, her two brothers, over

herself.  Residual feelings of sibling rivalry are evident

in stories told by some of the women.  Sometimes the

mother is faulted as continuing to play favorites among her adult children.  Other women seemed still to be vying for their mother's approval or attention.  The importance of mother's acceptance remains strong in these families, for life.

Active motherhood is a life-time role for the women in this group.  For those over thirty-five the rearing of children has not ceased though their children have matured, as they have accepted responsibility for raising various grandchildren and even great-grandchildren.  In addition, adult children and other relatives may move in and out of their home when they are in economic trouble. During the five months covered by this study, Lorraine shared her home with her unmarried daughter and the two grandchildren she was raising.  But when her daughter, son-in-law, and three grandchildren moved back from Alabama, she moved them in for a few months until they could get jobs and find a cheap place to rent.  Cora was raising four grandchildren and her teenage daughter, but also provided housing over a period of four months for another teenage daughter who had just had a baby, the girl's new husband, Cora's two young-adult daughters, and the male friend of one of these daughters. Women in this group do not seem to confront the role changes that are referred to as the "empty nest syndrome."  One of the

benefits of the maternal role in this group seems to be the feeling that one is always needed.

The expectation of nurturing behavior is not limited to one's procreative family, but is thought equally desirable in one's family of origin. The women gave numerous examples of arranging their own lives in order to care for a family member. Nancy quit school to help her mother care for a disabled sibling. Judy is rearing her younger siblings who were in need of protective care. Kitty feels guilty because she was unable to nurse her terminally ill grandmother due to her responsibilities to husband and children.

Being a role model. A good mother is a proper role model for her daughters. She maintains her self-respect. This expectation is held by adult daughters who, upon reflection, speak of what their mothers "should have done." This standard pertains largely to the mother's relationships with men. She is expected to stand up for herself and protect herself from physical abuse even if it means leaving her male partner.

This expectation has been a source of conflict for some of the participants and may be superceded by their expectations for a good wife where "stand-by-your-man" is a major theme. It may also conflict with the mother's beliefs about what she must endure to ensure her children are provided for economically. Nancy said she would never

allow a man to treat her the way her father had treated her mother. Nancy now lives with her mother, Nora. Speaking of those beatings, Nora put her head down, and said, "I know I shouldn't have let him do that, but I thought I had to put up with it for you children's sake."

It should be noted that a woman does not have to be married to the father of her child or any other man to be a good mother. Despite the fact that both parents may adopt a highly protective attitude toward their daughters while they reside at home, once an illegitimate pregnancy occurs neither mother nor child are rejected. If the unmarried mother then performs according to the role prescriptions in this group, she may obtain approval according to the women in this study.

Employment and mothering. Josie and Barbara have been periodically employed since they married, but only when their husbands are unemployed. They always return home to resume full-time mothering when their men find jobs. Although they have typically held low-paying service jobs, both women enjoy outside employment. But being employed outside the home never takes precedence over the roles of wife and mother. When a wife and/or mother is employed outside the home she accepts her family's prescription for her performance. She is expected (a) to fulfill the role of wife and mother as well as meet the requirements of her employment, (b) to

abide by her husband's decisions regarding when and where she will work, (c) to quit her job if any family member decides she is needed at home, and (d) to put her earnings into the family coffers because the justification for her employment is the economic need of the family.

## Being a Good Mother's Daughter

The women in this group demonstrate close and enduring relationships between mothers and daughters. Mother-daughter relationships are the most stable family relationships in this group. Five of the women reside with one or more of their adult daughters, and two of these households appear to be long-term arrangements. Several other women live adjacent to their mothers or daughters or they visit them frequently. Only one woman is so estranged from her mother than she has no contact with her.

In contrast, the women did not reveal the same emotional closeness or physical proximity to their fathers. In talking about their early family life, they either omitted their fathers from their narratives or commented on negative paternal behaviors that had affected their lives. Neither did the women appear to have regular interactions with their fathers in the present. Eunice's mother is dead and her elderly father continues to reside in Cocke County. When Eunice's daughter mentioned she had run into grandpa at the grocery, it was apparent that

Eunice had little interest in his condition and had not seen him in some time. This lack of close involvement with the father may be related either to the strict separation of parental roles in these families where the mother is responsible for all child rearing activities or to the high incidence of absent or abusive fathers in this group.

Mothers also appear to have close bonds with their sons but adult sons are not as likely to maintain close physical proximity as are daughters. Detailed information on the role of son was not forthcoming. However, in a few of the families interviewed, the husband has maintained close ties with <u>his</u> mother and in all instances the wife was critical of this son-mother dependence. This behavior would appear to conflict with the wife's expectations that the husband will be the family leader and not look to his mother for instructions.

The daughter role is inferred from the women's self-expectations as daughters and from their observed behaviors. The rules for being a good daughter are fewer than those for a good mother but it is also a life-long role. Deviation from these family rules can produce ongoing conflicts between mothers and children but the children are not cut-off or disowned. A good daughter is loyal and will stay in close contact with her mother and family.

A good daughter should put loyalty to the family above her own needs or desires. She will not tell outsiders anything that might cause serious problems for family members. The obvious areas of family life where this injunction is critical are in cases of physical and sexual abuse since these behaviors will provoke outside intervention in the family. Daughters are also held back from public exposure of abuse by their own psychological feelings of guilt and shame. Young women who tell outsiders about sexual abuse may be held responsible for the break up of the family. Four years ago at the age of 13, Caren told a teacher she was being sexually abused by a member of her extended family. This resulted in the man's going to prison. She now feels her entire family is permanently angry with her and believes she did the wrong thing by telling an outsider. However, her parents have not disowned her and, in fact, they do not want her to leave home to seek employment.

A good daughter will abandon her activities to assist in the home when needed. It was not uncommon twenty years ago for daughters to be expected to quit school to help raise the younger children, keep the house, or work in the fields. Illiteracy among older rural women is related in part to the necessity in their youth, for all family members to perform farm labor in order for the family to survive. Some like Nora, now 67, never went to school at

all.  Currently, adolescent daughters are not expected to
contribute to the family income.

Today a daughter is more likely to leave school to
assist in the care of a family member with a long-term
illness.  Marilyn left school at 14 because her mother had
cancer and she nursed her for the next four years.  Nancy
left school to help with a disabled older brother, and
Dorothy to assist her mother when her father was dying.
This requirement for a good daughter may result in role
conflict when the daughter is married and believes she
cannot take time away from her own husband and children.
Kitty believes her family blames her because she had
married and was unable to nurse her granny when she had
the stroke that eventually led to her death.  Kitty says,
"I just have to accept the guilt."

A good daughter does not leave home until she is
ready to establish her own family.  Until that time she
will abide by the restrictions set by her parents.
She will stay in close contact with  her mother even after
she is an adult.  This is part of the reciprocity of
mother/daughter roles.  Mothers always accept their
children and daughters' primary loyalties are to their
mothers.

The daughter will not abandon her mother.  Nancy is
disdainful of her sister in a nearby state who "wants to
put Mom in a nursing home."  Even though Kitty was not

raised by her mentally-handicapped mother, and believes that the mother indulges Kitty's sister, she makes an effort to take the illiterate woman for her food commodities. She will maintain frequent contacts with her mother even if she does not find this a comfortable or pleasant experience. Barbara visits her mother almost every evening, even though she believes her mother favors her brothers, and she dislikes her mother's partisan behavior toward the oldest grandchild.

Daughters believe they are not bound by these rules unless their mothers have fulfilled the "good mother" requirements. Judy has obtained custody of her younger half-sisters because her mother was not protecting them from the advances of the step-father.

The women in the study paint a picture of "the good mother" and "the good daughter" that are in large measure compatible with role prescriptions for family behavior in traditional families throughout contemporary America, particularly in working-class and lower-class families (Schneider & Smith, 1973). The continuation of close bonds between adult daughters and their mothers is viewed as virtually universal in our society and thus is not specific to this rural Appalachian sample (Chodorow, 1978; Cohler & Grunebaum, 1981). The women indicated that they believe women can and should live up to their role ideals.

Male Roles

In their perceptions of male family roles, the women put more emphasis on the discrepancy between the ideal and actual role performance. The women's reflections on the paternal role include recognition of the influence of their particular social and economic environment on their expectations of male behavior. The increase of female-headed households and the incidence of divorce in this status group has reduced the chances that a low-status woman will experience a relationship with a "good father." In fact, none of the women in this study thought they had both a good father and a good husband. At least a third of the women either never lived with their fathers or lost their fathers to divorce or early death. Given the centrality of the provider role for males in this culture and the difficulty low-status men experience in obtaining lasting employment in rural Appalachia today, the odds are not in favor of their success as fathers and husbands.

The Good Father

The description of the ideal father role was largely drawn by inference from stories of father behaviors of which the women disapproved, with the attendant implications for behaviors that are held to be desirable. A good father provides for his family economically and refrains from abusive behavior within the family. He is protective without being excessively restrictive. When there are no

legal bonds, a good father acknowledges his children, does not abandon them, visits the children and brings gifts. In considering paternal role behavior, the women drew on both their experiences in their families of origin and their interactions with the fathers of their children. Attempting to secure economic provisions and protecting the family are held to be the most important qualities of a good father.

Making the effort.  A good father provides economically for his family to the best of his ability.  This does not apply if he does not live in the home.  Since the standards for a good wife and mother do not usually include economic activities outside the home, the family's dependence on the father's economic activities is total. The amount of income the father earns is obviously important but it does not determine whether he is or is not a good father.  It is the effort he makes for the family that is paramount.

Men who are unable to find work, are too unskilled to work regularly, or who don't even look for work, may still be good fathers if they meet the other expectations. Despite the importance of the work expectation, the tolerance for fathers who do not work but otherwise fulfill their role, seems to be based on the very real environmental constraints imposed by high unemployment in the region, a dearth of unskilled jobs, and poor educa-

tional resources. Men who earn income but do not share it
completely with their family, that is, use the money to
drink, gamble, and carouse with women, are bad fathers.

Even a chronically unemployed father may be held in
high regard if he refrains from violent and abusive
behavior toward all family members. A good father not
only does not abuse his children, he does not abuse their
mother.

A good father is protective of his daughters without
being excessively restrictive. Daughters believe that a
good father should allow his late-adolescent daughters to
leave home to find work and live independently, although
none of the women in the study who lived in homes with
fathers did leave before marriage. Apparently the fathers
believe that good daughters do as they are told and should
not leave home until they are safely married.

A good father acknowledges the paternity of his
children. To the unmarried women in this study the
question of paternity is not a legal issue. It becomes a
legal issue, however, if they receive AFDC, since the
Department of Human Services now requires the mother to
sue the father for support. When he denies paternity, the
mother, child, and putative father all have to go to Knox-
ville for blood tests and then the parents appear in
court. From the woman's perspective if the man denies
paternity there is nothing she can do about it socially,

so she may disdain him or shrug it off, maintaining "he isn't worth bothering about."  She may allow him very limited interaction with his child, but it is more likely that she will prevent him from seeing the child at all. He is considered such a bad father, that the child is better off away from him.

A father who acknowledges paternity also contributes to his child's identity in a community in which individuals are frequently identified by their family of origin. Adult daughters who are unsure of their parentage still speculate about whose child they might be.

A good father displays visible interest in his children even if he does not reside in the home.  An absent father who acknowledges his children can be a good father if he visits periodically and brings the children gifts.  If the parents have not been married, the mother does not expect more substantial support.  A father living in the home is expected to interact with his children but need not assume any regular responsibilities for them and his interactions need not take any specific form.

A good father does not abandon his children.  Some fathers leave their families and drop out of sight.  Even thought initially they made an investment in family life and provided some resources economically and emotionally, if he returns to the family at a later time, he has forfeited the role of a good father.

The expectations for fathering are complementary to, and supportive of, the more detailed mothering role. In order to meet their expectations for the care and protection of their children, the adult women desire a provider who will support their efforts. Conspicuously absent from their expectations are love or romance. This was particularly apparent when they spoke of how they came to marry.

## Marriage and Male-Female Relationships

For the women in this group the necessary ingredient for realizing their dream of marriage and family is finding a "good man" who will be kind to them and their children and will be able to provide some economic security for their lives. Some do not stop searching for this ideal mate. Marilyn has married three times in search of this elusive dream. She now believes her first love, the man her step-father drove away, would have had those qualities.

Most of the women appear to have married or gone to live with the first man in their lives who wanted to have a continuing relationship. Some did this in an eagerness to have their own home and thus to begin to realize their dreams, or to escape the restrictions they felt in their families of origin. Although she was nineteen and a high-school graduate, Kitty's felt she had to abide by her grandfather's rules and he would not let her go out on

dates. A relative brought her future husband to visit and after a courtship via telephone, she slipped off and married him. She realizes now that she did not know her husband very well when they married but she saw him as her means of escape.

## Spousal Roles

The wife-husband roles are interwoven and complementary in the same model as parental roles and the rules for being a good wife also apply to females who have a live-in boyfriend. They demonstrate a pattern in which the male occupies the dominant position and the female the compliant position. A wife is expected to remain loyal no matter what happens. She tries to please her husband. In return she expects her man to provide for the family and make the major family decisions. Furthermore, she expects her man to refrain from violent behavior in the home, but may find excuses for him when he errs.

Stand by your man. A good wife is loyal to her husband. She stands by her man. A good wife does this without questioning the man about his activities. She trusts him. Her loyalty to her husband and desire to believe him may bring her into conflicts with her daughter when sexual abuse is alleged. If the man does not live up to her expectations, she does not reveal this to others if she can help it. She may lie about her black eye when she has been abused and will keep up pretenses except with the

closest family members. The woman's loyalty to her husband may be mixed with personal feelings of shame which reinforce the injunction to keep the injuries private.

Even when she can admit that her husband fails to fulfill her expectations, she is reluctant to terminate the relationship. Kitty believes she married a man who is not capable of supporting them and their four children due to his limited skills and his dependency on his mother. But she plans to remain in the marriage and has taken responsibility for finding financial resources for the family. Lorraine felt quite isolated raising her four young children in a shack out in the country, but as long as her husband worked and came home at night she felt she should be grateful she had the home and family she had always desired. Although divorce is not uncommon, it is not the choice of a "good wife" unless she can justify her decision by a higher ethic: the welfare of her children.

Aim to please. A good wife believes she should attempt to please her husband. She tries to keep the house the way he wants, cook the meals he likes, and keep the children from disturbing him too much. Barbara, who has four children is not much concerned with tidiness in her small trailer during the day but she always straightens up before her husband arrives home from work and keeps things in order on his day off, as a messy house bothers him.

When her man does not fulfill his role as she expects, the good wife blames herself. She attempts to determine what she is doing wrong, or failing to do, that might be causing his undesirable behavior. Reena persisted in looking for her own faults in the face of her husband's chronic alcoholism and abuse.

A good wife continues to be sexually available to her husband no matter what his behavior. Doris made it through two pregnancies despite the fact that her husband refused to take her for any prenatal care and she feared he'd be too drunk to take her to the midwife's for her delivery. Ida bore her husband several children during the final five years of their marriage even though she knew he had a mistress. He finally left Ida.

A good wife should be sexually naive. It is desirable that she be a virgin when she begins sexual relations with the man she will marry or has married. She remains sexually faithful in her marriage. She should not be exposed to sexuality outside the family context. Eunice was very upset that her daughter-in-law who worked in a nursing home had to clean up bed clothing where male patients had masturbated. She wanted her son, not her daughter-in-law, to complain to the management.

A good man is hard to find. A good husband provides economically for the family. Similar to the role description of the good father, the " good husband" is expected

to be the main economic provider for the family. If he allows the wife to work outside the home, for brief time periods, it is only to supplement other resources and she will be expected to terminate her employment when he finds a job.

When a husband is meeting his economic obligations and is not abusive to the children, the wife will not complain much about his role performance in other areas. Husbands who try and are unable to find work can remain good husbands. If unemployed men drink and become violent, they are not good husbands, but their behavior may be excused by a minority of wives. In part, this is based on an assumption that such behavior may be in reaction to the men's feelings about not being able to fulfill their economic roles. These women recognize the stress men in their status group endure due to unemployment, underemployment, or occupational hardships, such as assignments to do dirty or dangerous work.

A good husband takes responsibility for the major decisions regarding where the family will reside, how they will live. Along with his economic role, he determines the family life-style. A good husband does not defer in these decisions to other people. He particularly does not allow his "mamma" to interfere in his family. However, this type of interference may actually be prevalent in this status group because of the primacy of the mother-

child bond.  Most husbands handle the family money, giving their wives what they think they need for household expenses.

A good husband refrains from violent and abusive behavior in the family.  He does not drink to excess because this is seen by many women as the trigger for violent behavior.  Women have different opinions about the causes of male violence.  Some believe it is related to male frustrations in fulfilling their social roles, others think they learned the behavior from their fathers or even mothers, while others see male violence as an expression of their belief in male superiority.

A good husband is sexually faithful.  Although women expect fidelity they each have their own tolerance level beyond which this may become an important issue.  They usually do not break up their family solely because of male infidelity.

A good husband does not have to help with any household chores or child care.  When he does lend a hand at home, it is appreciated but not expected on a regular basis.

At least half of the women have experienced major crises in their lives related to their husbands' behaviors.  Of the others, three of the women have never married and six report relatively satisfactory marital relationships, although one of them believes her husband

is inadequate as a provider. The nine women who struggled with major marital disturbances are now divorced, separated, or widowed. They report a variety of complaints about their late husbands' behaviors including, alcoholism, infidelity, wife abuse, child abuse, sexual abuse, and criminal activity.

This group of women reported high incidence of both sexes failing to fulfill the positive family role prescriptions. The litany of family problems the women have endured is staggering. Josie, Judy, Lorraine, and Kitty never knew their fathers; Nancy's father beat her mother and seduced Nancy's sister; Norene's father was in prison, and her step-father sexually abused her; Marilyn's step-father sexually abused her; Judy's step-father tried the same but she left home; Barbara's father was an alcoholic who beat her mother. Marilyn's first husband is serving time for theft; Ida's husband deserted her and their large family of seventeen children. Lorraine's husband beat her and finally the children; now an alcoholic drifter, he shows up looking for shelter. Eunice's first husband was an alcoholic; Dorothy's and Reena's husbands drank and then beat them; Cora's husband is blatantly unfaithful.

Kitty's retarded mother gave her to her maternal grandmother to raise; Lorraine's mother had her out of wedlock and gave her to grandmother as well; child-like Doris remains dependent on her mother, Eunice, to raise

her children; Callie has left her children with Cora and has been charged with prostitution; and Judy's mother has lost custody of her younger children because she did not protect them against their step-father's sexual advances.

Yet, it is remarkable that all of the women, with the possible exception of Doris, are clear in their minds about how family members should behave and are attempting to live up to their ideals. They are frank about mistakes made by their own mothers and make a conscious effort not to replicate those errors. Grandmothers apparently provided the female role models for some of the women. The standards for family behavior seem to be so widely accepted in this group that the women understand the rules even in the absence of an immediate positive role model.

## Other Family Roles

The only other kin, excluding their children and grandchildren, with whom the women seem to have frequent contact are their siblings. The women provided little information regarding sibling roles. Women do not appear to have close emotional relationships with siblings of either gender. Rivalry for mother's affection and attention is still a major theme in their adult lives. None of the women spoke about having a close emotional tie to any sibling, except for Nancy who still mourns a deceased brother. The elasticity of kinship ties in this

group did not appear to extend beyond the women, their children, and their children's children.

## Socialization to World Outside of Family

The women had few opportunities to gain first hand knowledge of the world outside of their immediate family and social circles. Almost all the women stayed with their families until they married or went to live with a man at the median age of seventeen and a half. Their families did not want them to leave home before then, and they believed they should try to please their families. Only two of the women found employment outside the home during the hiatus between school and marriage.

Only one of the women has traveled out-of-state on her own. Most have never traveled outside of Cocke County. Some even feel very anxious if they have to make a trip to Knoxville, a distance of fifty miles. In contrast, local middle-class women say they feel comfortable traveling anywhere within the United States. While the economic circumstances of the lower-status women's lives inhibit much travel away from home, they are not eager to take advantage of travel opportunities that do become available. When Barbara's husband began to drive her to Nashville to show her where he was working, they got as far as Knoxville when Barbara decided she'd rather return home.

Not only do the low-status women lack worldly experience, this seems to produce a lack of interest in what the world is like outside their own self-imposed boundaries. The researcher sent some of the women postcards from the seashore. When she returned, the women acknowledged her absence but never asked a single question about her experiences. Eunice and Doris, however, are regular viewers of the Phil Donahue show. They quizzed the researcher regarding her opinion on a number of controversial issues such as surrogate mothering and abortion. Their own opinions did not appear to have been affected by the variety of viewpoints presented on the television show and they stayed solidly in the conservative camp. Nancy and Nora put their own interpretation on information from television viewing. They informed the researcher that the hard-to-place and handicapped children up for adoption seen on a weekly news show had "been given up by their mothers just so they could get a man." Their favorite shows were reruns of Dukes of Hazard and Beverly Hillbillies.

Educational Decisions

The local education system does not appear to have extended the women's general knowledge of or interest in the world outside of their families. Only two of the eighteen participants completed a high school education. Callie received a GED, while Kitty believes she was only

socially promoted and that her education was inadequate. None of the women over 50 had gone further than the 8th grade; they implied that it was far enough to go in their day. This may be representative of their pre-World-War-II cohort. Most of the younger women had quit school in the 10th grade. Ostensible reasons for quitting school included putting family needs before personal ones, wanting to set up housekeeping, marriage or cohabitation, getting pregnant (two pregnancies both resulting from rape), having a vague, but persistent illness, cocky self-assurance that one knows it all, and going to work.

Dropping out of school to help at home may entail providing assistance in caring for a seriously ill relative, caring for younger children, or doing housework or farm work. If a women in this status group becomes pregnant, marries, or begins to cohabit with a boyfriend, she often quits school. The rural school system does not encourage pregnant women to continue in school, supplies no special programs or counseling. Since most pregnant women do not remain in school, a woman who did would find little peer support. The women believe it is acceptable for a woman to withdraw from activities if she is not physically able to continue. The physical problem need not be clearly defined.

## Summary

The most prominent feature in the lives of the women in this study is their bond with their children. The relationship between mothers and adult daughters is particularly strong and includes close physical proximity. Family ties are strong and flexible. Maintaining the intact family unit of parents and children despite all vicissitudes is of high value to most, but not all, of the women. The major alternative family style is a three-generation home, composed of grandmother, mother, and children.

As is typical of rural families in general, the women in this study married relatively early, have more children than the national average, and are likely to live in multi-generational households. Like other rural women they appear to follow traditional sex roles and prefer marriage and motherhood to outside employment. When present, males are expected to provide the economic resources of the family. Although many of the women have experienced family violence, the desertion of a parent, and disappointments in heterosexual relationships, they seem secure in their beliefs about how family roles should be performed and judge themselves accordingly.

CHAPTER V

THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Following is a discussion of how the low-status women
in this study perceive their transactions with others in
their community.  The women have their own sense of social
status differentiation and are aware of the differentia-
tions made by higher-status people.  Three important
social norms emerge from the women's narratives: the norms
of reciprocity, equality, and personalized caring.

## Awareness of Social Status

The women perceive the local social status hierarchy
as a system containing two types of people: those who are
in economic positions similar to their own, and those who
have more money.  They believe that having more money does
not make a person better.  As long as the more econom-
ically advantaged person treats the women "just like
anyone else," that is, personalizes their interactions and
makes no responses that the women deem to be condescend-
ing, the low-status women are comfortable with their
belief that only an economic difference exists.  Higher
status individuals who insist upon status privileges are
labeled as "snobby people."

In contrast, most middle-status informants, profes-
sionals and clerical workers in the area, think there are

three social levels: the upper class; the middle-class, subdivided into outsiders and locals; and the lower-class, subdivided into the diligent and the lazy. (One male interviewee said there where two groups, the "haves" and the "have-nots.") Other studies have varied in such overall class definitions of rural Appalachian groups. Kaplan (1971) identified the "better," "get-by," and "sorry" classes. Stephenson (1968) found four class groups: (a) the top, full-time-employed white collar workers; (b) the middle comprised of full-time-employed blue collar workers, (c) the lower-middle of the fairly steadily employed; and (d) the bottom class that is seldom or never employed.

According to the middle-status informants, the upper stratum in Cocke County comprises well-paid professionals (doctors and lawyers) and old families with money and/or land. Most of these reside in select residential areas in the town of Newport. Membership in this group is not always apparent in appearance and dress. Ostentatious displays of wealth are frowned upon.

The middle stratum is comprised of two groups, the outsiders and the locals. The outsiders are people who moved into the area either as retirees looking for a pleasant physical environment, or as employees of the few national firms that do business in Cocke County. The locals include most of the regularly employed residents.

In these families the wife is likely to be employed and
this has enabled the families to weather the recent
economic recessions when layoffs have been frequent.
Because of the poor employment picture many locals have to
"hustle" to bring in needed income.  Most "hustles" are a
legal means of using one's skills and abilities in the
"underground economy" which includes trade and barter as
well as money transactions.  Some engage in the illegal
but profitable business of growing marijuana.

The lower stratum is described by middle-status
informants as consisting of two different groups, the
diligent and the lazy.  The "poor-but-honest" are seen as
independent types who have never had much in the way of
material goods, are perennially financially strapped but
too proud to ask for a handout.  The "new" poor are in
this category.  These are people who have had regular jobs
and a taste of the middle-class life style but have been
shut out by the drying up of jobs in the area.  They
usually have less education and fewer resources than the
struggling middle-income worker.

The other group of the poor are "too lazy to work."
These are the "dirt poor, on welfare for generations."
Some identify the local criminal element as springing from
this group.  Others remark that this group of people
"won't help themselves," or give examples of people on
welfare who work for money paid under the table while they

draw relief from all available programs (the welfare cheats). The characteristics attributed to group are congruent with the descriptions of "worthless" folks found in other studies of Appalachia (Beaver, 1976).

Lower-status participants showed some awareness of the types of differentiations made by higher-status people. But the lower-status women rejected any implication that they, or members of their family, were lazy or not trying hard enough to help themselves. The women usually indicated that they did know "other people" who were not following the behavioral norms of the community, for example, people who cheated, laid out of work, lived off someone else, etc., and that they, too, were indignant about such behavior.

## Sensitivity to Status Differences

The women appear to be sensitive to many cues in the context of interactions and become defensive, guarded, angry, hurt, or suspicious when they perceive that their assumptions about the terms of the relationship are violated by the other person. Kitty went to the local church where she has received Christmas baskets in previous years. She said it hurt her feelings the way a woman at the church said there would be no baskets for anyone this year. When questioned further, Kitty added, "She just didn't act like she cared."

The researcher entered the homes of these women as a stranger and an outsider, although she was introduced to most of them by local agency representatives whom they seemed to trust. The researcher was clearly viewed as a person of different status by some of the women who asked her questions about social service resources. Yet, many of the women confided sensitive details about their personal lives to her on second and even first visits.

The researcher attempted to observe the etiquette of equality in her dealings with the respondents but became aware of how easily persons from outside the area may inadvertently transgress the rules. As she prepared to leave Eunice's home, Eunice said she'd cook her a big meal on her next visit. Knowing the limits of Eunice's budget, the researcher demurred, not wanting to take advantage of the participant in any way. Eunice flushed, and said heatedly, "Well, my house may not be so clean, but my cooking is good to eat." The researcher realized that when she declined Eunice's offer of hospitality, Eunice assumed she thought she was "too good" to eat with Eunice, and had a poor opinion of the cleanliness of her home.

## Interactional Expectations

The women in this study have a system of beliefs regarding desirable behaviors in various interpersonal relationships. They judge and measure both their own

behavior and that of others by these standards. When other people do not fulfill the women's expectations, they experience feelings of injury and/or anger. Such interactions occur in both informal and formal contexts.

In informal interactions with economic and social peers the women seek emotional and economic reciprocity. Informal interactions take place with family members, extended family and in-laws, peers such as schoolmates, close friends, neighbors, local tradespeople-- people the subject see and interact with on some regular basis.

The women have more ambivalent, quasi-informal interactions with certain higher-status community representatives, such as Child Development workers, who visit in the homes frequently and come to be viewed as friends. Reciprocity is an important factor in all of these relationships.

Formal interactions most often take place with persons of higher social status who are encountered when the women are in the process of obtaining resources and services for their families. This involves interactions with employees of educational, health, welfare, and charitable institutions, as well as with local police, judges, and lawyers. The women occasionally deal with higher-status people from outside the local community, hospitals and doctors in neighboring communities, Social Security agents, and so forth. Most often individuals

dealt with in formal interactions occupy a more affluent position in the women's eyes. Not only do these others appear to control access to resources, they appear by their dress, manner, and speech to have more personal resources.

## The Importance of Reciprocity

Sociological exchange theorists have pointed to the universal importance of reciprocity in the maintenance of social life (Heath, 1976; Nye, 1982). Heath (1976) differentiates between balanced and generalized reciprocity. Balanced reciprocity contains the expectation that the exchange will be repaid with something of equal value and within a finite time period, with the emphasis on the economic basis of the transaction. In generalized reciprocity the expectation for the return is indefinite and is defined by the social need of the other. Heath (1976) describes generalized reciprocity as "typified by the working-class mother who helps her daughter look after her baby when she is ill and keeps no tally of the debts owed but doubtless expects to be helped herself should she ever need it." While the giver of a service or favor momentarily assumes a superior status, the relationship is kept in balance by the ability of the other to return the service or favor in kind (Heath, 1976).

The importance of reciprocity for these women was demonstrated to the researcher during observations of the

women in interaction through stories told by middle-status Child Development workers, and through remarks the women made in a variety of contexts. The women described engaging in both balanced and generalized reciprocity in their informal relationships.

Balanced reciprocity is the process of doing favors for others and returning their favors so that no one appears to have an upper hand in the relationship. The women's economic reciprocity is limited by their lack of money and often takes the form of barter. They share garden produce and canned goods with visitors such as Child Development workers. The act of giving an item or extending a service to another may be an advance payment for a favor to be requested. When Norene gave her aunt a beaded necklace she was wounded when the aunt refused to give her a piece of handwork in return without an exchange of money. Eunice asked if the researcher would help her find employment in Knoxville. Shortly after that request, Eunice offered to fix the researcher a special meal and gave her homemade jelly.

The process of generalized reciprocity appears to be of particular importance to the women's relationships with family members and close friends. When they need help, particularly in caretaking functions such as nursing the sick or raising children, they cannot purchase private services but must count on close associates. Thus they

help others as a down payment on future needs. Nancy did heavy yard work for a friend feeling she was repaying her for her willingness to provide transportation for Nancy and her children both in the past and the future. Mothers who periodically provide a home for their adult children and their families expect to find a home eventually with these children when they no longer can live independently.

Another form of reciprocity occurs in informal interactions when the women feel the other has given them a negative interchange. In these cases, the women actively plan how they will pay the other back in kind. How many of these planned revenges take place is unknown, but the women are convinced they will find an opportunity to get even. One of Norene's church friends commented that Norene "did not have the good sense of a two-year-old." Norene is still rehearsing her retort.

## The Etiquette of Equality

Reliance on an ethic of egalitarianism and an expectation of personal treatment, has been described as typical of Appalachians. Beaver (1986) suggests that the necessity for maintaining cooperative behaviors in small rural communities has required the belief that all people are accepted and equal. Despite the fact that social distinctions have been present in Appalachian rural communities for generations, the observance of the egalitarian ethic persists in local social customs.

The women in this study possess a well-developed
sense of etiquette for this type of interaction, an eti-
quette of equality.  Their sense of fairness demands that
they be accorded the same services available to others
regardless of economic or social status, and that they be
treated as equals.  The other person's behaviors and/or
their non-verbal communication, may imply to the women
that they are in some sense being rejected, criticized, or
scorned.  If it seems to them that someone believes them
to be inferior, the women feel put down.  But at the same
time, they believe the other has a problem and should
change their behavior.  Eunice was angry when she thought
that nurses in the Emergency Room were usurping the
doctor's role and "asking me questions like the doctor
should ask.  I let them know right then that I intended to
see the doctor."  She attributed this behavior to the
fact that she had a Medicaid card and thus was a charity
case.  "You better believe the nurses and doctors would
act different if I came in with a $50 bill."

When others put on airs, or act as if they are better
than the women, they transgress the rules of egalitarian
relationships.  Those who are members of higher status
groups, such as the middle-class Child Development
workers, are expected to minimize the differences between
themselves and the low-status women.  Cora's town friend,
who has plenty of money and a nice house, broke this rule

when she said she "had better things to do with her time than visit (Cora) way out in the country" thus emphasizing the social distance between them.

The women are sensitive to criticism that implies they (or a family member) are not performing appropriately or adequately and thus may be held in low esteem. The women believe that they have been behaving correctly and doing their best and are indignant when others imply differently. Often the women are in the process of fulfilling one of their major self-expectations, that of providing for the needs of their children and other family members when they encounter such criticism. Cora believes she manages her large family well and became indignant when she thought her food-stamp worker was implying that "she (the worker) would not have any trouble feeding a family on that amount of stamps without running out of food" as Cora sometimes does. Implied criticism of family members is also taken as an insult. Mary was furious that the food worker implied her husband was lazy and had not really looked for work.

This feeling is particularly keen when the women believe their peers are putting them down for reasons over which they have no control. The women do not deny that they possess the attribute germane to the put-down and feel rejected because some attribute integral to their self has been deemed inferior. Caren felt so put down by

the other girls at school who teased her about her
placement in special education resource classes that she
dropped out of school. Josie was not comfortable or happy
after she began to attend the large county high school.
She thought schoolmates who had more economic resources
made too much of their differences from the poorer young-
sters. It was one of the reasons she dropped out of
school. Josie's mother had not been married and she was
raised on welfare.

## Personalization and Caring

The personalizing of relationships among Appalach-
ians, particulary low-status people, has often been viewed
in negative terms. Weller (1965:83-84) states, "Because
the mountain man (sic) finds his self-identification
mainly in his relationship with others, he has never
developed a satisfactory self-image as a single individ-
ual. Weller refers to the man's "...inability to relate
to persons on other than a personal basis...." From his
perspective Appalachians cannot deal with the impersonal
or hostile behaviors of others because the mere hint of
criticism threatens basic feelings about self.

A more benign view is held by Brown and Schwarzweller
(1974) who theorize that personalism and belief in
equality have a similar source in Appalachian history as
accommodations to pressure created to maintain kin
networks. Pearsall (1974) notes the prevalence of

personalism in other rural or isolated societies. She
notes rural people are more likely to base their reactions
and behaviors on how they are treated in a situation than
on an overall appraisal of situational factors.

> "Whether a patient stays in a hospital or leaves
> against medical advice depends more on his (sic)
> personal relations with hospital personnel than
> on any understanding he may have of his medical
> condition and the hospital's technical compe-
> tence in treating him" (Pearsall, 1974:61).

The women in this study expect that others with whom
they interact will take a personal interest in them and
their family members. They feel put down when they
believe they are being dealt with in an impersonal or
stereotyped fashion. When others do not seem to take
notice of the women's particular needs they may feel
scorned or rejected. Because they feel they would be
sensitive to the needs of others if the roles were
reversed, they think their needs are apparent and do not
need to be defined. When Cora stayed in the Knoxville
hospital with her grandson, she had no money for food nor
a place to sleep. She was incredulous that the nurses, a
generic term for women in white, had not shown any
interest in her situation as she remained at the bedside
day after day. In these contexts the women are sensitive
to the manner of other's communications. Cora thought the
"nurses" stereotyped her when they did communicate with
her. She noted that the women kept repeating the home
care instructions to her as if she was some type of "dumb

country woman," but she did not see them acting that way
with city women.

Because the women see their interactions as personal
in nature they expect their honesty to be accepted on
principle.  Marilyn became distraught and angry when her
HUD worker would not believe that Marilyn's ex-husband was
not living with her, which would be a breach of her rental
contract.

In their own eyes, these women attempt to honor the
etiquette of equality and personal caring in their
interactions with others.  They believe they are sympathe-
tic to other people, and do not "put on airs," or "act
like they are better than others."  They accept other
people as they present themselves and are only critical of
others who they feel have put them down.

## Dealing With Feeling Put Down

The women's belief in the community norm of equality
and their commitment to their social roles in their
families appears to aid them when faced with "unfair"
criticism.  They are confident they are right.  Whether
they take an active or passive stance toward the critic
depends on their personality style.  Some women defend
themselves against criticism by letting others know they
disagree with their assessment of them.  Eunice describes
her feelings when she believes others are putting her

down. She said her feelings just "well up" and she can feel the pressure of them in her chest. When that happens she just has to say something to the other person and apparently she will "give them an earful." But Eunice added, she only does this "up to a point." She seems to have a sense of how much of a hostile retort another person will take before retaliating. And since these others may play a role in providing access to resources or services for the women, retaliation is to be avoided.

Some women keep silent in the face of "unjust" criticism, but they fashion a justification for their own perception of the situation and append this to the telling of the incident to sympathetic listeners. Cora decided the food-stamp worker did not know about living in poverty and feeding a large family. "You have to have lived it to understand it," Cora justifies herself.

The most common response to situations in which the women do not believe they can do anything to affect the negatively perceived behaviors or attitudes of others is silence and withdrawal from the situation as soon as possible. Keeping their feelings of unfair treatment to themselves, the women retreat to the safety of their families. But they retell the story of the unhappy interaction to family members, neighbors, and sympathetic others, seeking justification and support for their own behavior.

In some instances, the women seek out someone who might have sufficient power to defend them or to right the wrong they feel. Marilyn decided to go to Legal Aid when she was unable to convince her HUD worker that her ex-husband was not spending the night with her, which was grounds for eviction. Marilyn believed the HUD worker was retaliating against her for going over her head to get the present trailer she rents -- perhaps a type of negative reciprocity. When the Department of Human Services refused to return custody of Shirley's children because they suspected abuse was occurring during home visits, she filed a petition in court, hoping the local judge would see her side of the story. He did not.

Some of the women in this study defend themselves by attaching a negative label to the others' behaviors. Thus when others break the women's social rule regarding equality in interactions, they may be labeled "snobby people" or "people who put on airs." In the women's opinion, even individuals who do have higher social standing and more economic resources should know that they are not supposed to call attention to their status and certainly not at the expense of those who have less. Some women feel this so keenly that they will give up advan-tages for themselves rather than be associated with "snobby" people. When Barbara was promoted to the fast learning group in middle school she left most of her

status peers behind. When she heard how the higher status students teased and talked about the slower learners, mostly her old friends, Barbara decided she did not want to remain in the group. Her personalized view of how people should treat others was her guide and she did not believe that the advantages of remaining in the fast group should outweigh her loyalty to her friends.

## Discussion

The women in the study seem to use interactional modes which are common in their Appalachian setting. But an important dynamic in their lives, from their perspective, is the frequency with which these interactional norms seem to be broken by others with higher social standing. Two questions come to the mind of the observer. Do the women really sustain more put downs than women in other social strata, or are the women more sensitive or suspicious in their dealings with others? This study cannot answer these questions in a definitive fashion but it does supply some information germane to their consideration.

The opportunities for perceiving social put downs should increase with the number of interactions a low-status person has with higher status individuals. Certainly the daily lives of these women are rife with opportunities of this sort. The search for services and

resources for their families brings them into contact with employees of social agencies, most of whom would define themselves as having a higher social standing than the applicants for their agency services. During the five months of this study, the participants were involved in obtaining services or resources from nineteen different local or regional community agencies. These usually involved trips to offices, time spent in waiting rooms, or waiting lines. (See Appendix for Summary of Agency Contacts.) The women did not encounter criticism, rejection or scorn in their contacts with individuals in all the service sectors enumerated. But given the numbers of people they interact with every month, including receptionists, clerks, and professionals in each setting, the risk of feeling slighted in the exchanges is considerable.

As a participant observer in some of the community agencies serving low-status women, the researcher overheard random negative comments about specific low status people and the poor in general. One agency person told the researcher that they did not like a male recipient of their services because he let his wife do all the working but he kept on siring her children. The worker said they had taken the husband to task, claiming he had misused a service, and implying he would not receive help again, although he was eligible for further service.

It is not feasible from the women's accounts of the put-down incidents to determine the intent of the others in the interactions, nor to ascertain whether the women are hypersensitive to slights. The expectation that relationships will be personalized is, however, a prescription for disappointment and hurt feelings for people entering large and impersonal social systems. Therefore, low-status Appalachian women may be more sensitive to put-downs in places like big city hospitals and clinics. The anxiety that many of the women associate with being so far from home may also play a role in their sensitivity to the behaviors of others.

Attitudes about the deserving versus the undeserving poor appear to override the traditional egalitarianism of the region for some middle-status locals. The mixture of attitudes in the local community about why people are poor and why they remain so, does set the stage for what the women perceive as snobby behavior. How the women deal with social put downs and maintain a positive sense of self will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

FEELINGS ABOUT SELF

Chapter V discussed the interactions between the women of this study and others in their social environment, as perceived by the participants.  When the women believe they have been treated unfairly or as inferiors by others they describe feelings of injury and anger. Interactions which produce such negative feelings seem to occur regularly in the women's lives.  An analysis of the women's self-perceptions reveals that while negative interchanges with close family members may lead to bad feelings about self, the women are able to maintain positive self-appraisals in the face of perceived put downs from higher status people.

The very mores that render the women vulnerable to feelings of being put down, a belief in egalitarianism and the personalization of all relationships, also serve to protect their self-evaluations.  For as long as they conceive that they live up to these standards of behavior, the women can feel good about their own performances. Their adherence to their family and gender role as mothers is the other essential part of their self-appraisal.  By remaining within the boundaries of their role prescriptions the women receive both internal and external reinforcement for their activities.

The most serious threat to the development of positive feelings about self among these women was a history of childhood sexual abuse, specifically incestuous behavior. Feelings of self-esteem may be damaged in abusive intimate relationships but positive feelings are regained when such relationships are terminated.

Although the scope of the women's lives is a narrow one, largely limited to their families, particularly their children, they are generally able to maintain positive self-images as they fulfill their expectations as mothers and to find small ways to express their individuality. This chapter will first examine how the women use their view of their family role performance to express positive feelings about themselves. Next the negative self-images projected by a few of the women will be discussed. And finally, the personal characteristics and accomplishments the women value in themselves will be detailed.

## Self-Esteem and Family Role Performance

The women are completely absorbed by the details of their daily lives in which their children are the central part. Almost all of their energies are directed toward obtaining the basic necessities for their families. Few have any prospects of this changing either because they are supported by welfare or have other limited sources of

income.  The exceptions are male-headed households where
the potential for employment is higher.

## Doing Right By The Children

The women use their belief that they are "doing
right" by their children to sustain positive self-feel-
ings.  When women meet their standards for being a good
mother, accepting all pregnancies, ensuring the children's
basic needs are met, putting the children's needs first,
protecting the children from harm, accepting the children
unconditionally, and providing a proper model for their
children, they consider themselves successes.  These
mothers do not feel responsible for molding their child-
ren's intellectual development, nor do they judge their
own performance by their children's achievements.  Rather
they conceptualize their role as a succession of care-
taking tasks related to the physical well-being of the
children and as a life-long responsibility.

The women have definite opinions about the process of
raising children and take pride in sharing their child-
rearing wisdom.  The general pattern for raising children
centers on providing them care and protection.  Infants
are indulged, remaining on the bottle well into their
second year.  Once beyond the toddler stage, children are
expected to become more independent and the most common
form of punishment, following lengthy verbal threats, is

the application of small switches or soft belts to whatever part of the child's anatomy is handy.

When faced with people from a higher social stratum the women may become defensive about late weaning and physical punishment or recite middle-status toilet training procedures in response to their perception of the other's expectations. But the women know how they want their children to behave and what is important to them. It is important to Barbara that her children be able to stand up for themselves and she does not interfere when her oldest daughter picks on the little ones, for she wants them to learn to defend themselves. She is firm in her adherence to this policy and defies the opinions of both her husband and father-in-law, who live in the home. Nora is proud of her grandchildren's quiet behavior in autos. She has trained them so they will not disturb the driver.

The women express pride in their own performance when they believe they have surmounted uncommon obstacles in order to care properly for their children. Ida knew she was in for hard times when her husband deserted her for another woman and left Ida to raise their seventeen children on a poor rural farm. She had no medical insurance when five of the children "came down with the pneumonia fever." (This was prior to the enactment of Medicaid benefits.) She nursed them all at home, using

some herbal remedies and the help of the country doctor whom she paid with her cherry crop. Nearing seventy, Ida is the respected matriarch of her family and is raising her great granddaughter. Her whole life is centered in her family.

Reena's statement, "My children mean everything to me," expresses the value which ultimately guided her through years of sorrow. Reena had wanted nothing more than to be a good wife and mother when she married at 17. By the time she had six children she was living in a small, isolated trailer with an alcoholic husband who beat her and stole all the family's resources to buy liquor. She tried to protect her children from the physical abuse and to find enough food for them even if it meant begging when she could get to town. But she knew that this way of living was not right and that her younger children had become terrified of their father. Still she felt power-less to do anything until the Department of Human Services took her oldest daughter into custody, claiming incest, and threatened to place the other children as well.

Reena had nowhere to go but she was determined to keep her children. She left that day with little except the children and with the help of the Department of Human Services' Homemaker, Reena found a small house to rent and began to receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children. She still lived in fear of her husband, but slowly she

learned to do for herself and the children all the tasks she had once expected her husband to perform. Reena has recently married a second time. She has also gained the mature confidence that she can make it on her own again if need be.

The importance of feeling that one is a good mother was demonstrated by Callie, a women who, to all appearances, seems to have failed as a mother up to this point. Callie was raped at 13, and married at 15. Now at 21 she is divorced with three children who have been in her mother's custody for over a year while Callie lived in another state. Her mother, Cora, speaks disapprovingly of Callie's drinking and promiscuous behavior since her divorce. During the course of this study, Callie returned to her mother's home, immediately resumed physical responsibility for her children, got a part-time job, and began to talk of saving money for her own trailer and a water hookup so she could regain custody of her children. No one in her family appears to have insisted that Callie attempt to resume her role as mother to her children. It seemed to be important to her sense of self. But Callie was unable to live up to the standards she knew must be met. She began to go to the bars in town and it was not long until she was arrested on a charge of prostitution.

## Negative Feelings About Self

### I Don't Count Him As My Real Father

Norene and Marilyn reflected predominantly negative feelings about themselves and both felt their lives were in constant turmoil. Both women attributed their present unhappiness to their feelings about being sexually abused by their stepfathers. Callie, whose promiscuous behavior cost her the custody of her children, had also been abused by a male family member.

These adult women are filled with anger toward the step-fathers who raped and had continuing sexual relations with them. Marilyn feels she did not really have a father. She never knew her natural father and of her step-father she said, "I don't count him as a real father because of what he did to me." Allied with this feeling are the women's perceptions that their mothers failed when they were either unwilling or unable to prevent the abuse. Thus the bad father's behavior produced an estrangement between mother and daughter as well, disrupting the closest emotional tie that most low-status women develop.

This type of injuries seem to be permanent and to have a negative and pervasive effect on the women's lives. The men's mistreatment of them is held responsible for problems the women have in fulfilling their self-expecta-tions in the present. Norene believes ultimately that her step-father's abuse and her continuing anger toward her

non-protecting mother is the cause of the recurring
depressions that require hospitalization and interfere
with her desire to be a good wife and mother. After three
marriages, Marilyn despairs of finding a "good man" and
blames this on her abusive step-father who, she believes,
is still "pulling the strings" in her life.

## I Thought I Had To Stay

Women who were abused by their husbands also reported
experiencing negative feelings about their self-worth
during the marriage. But once removed from the violent
relationship, they spoke of regaining their self-respect.

Eight of the women reported they had been physically
abused by a husband at some point in their lives. Most of
them look back on that period of their life as a night-
mare. They believe they stayed so long (almost always
years) because they thought that was what they were
supposed to do. They were trying to fulfill their family
roles, be good wives, keep the family together, please
their men, protect their children, and they were always
hopeful the men would provide the economic base for their
survival. Some were puzzled when their efforts to be good
wives were not rewarded, so they tried harder. Some spoke
of having feelings of failure after they left which
persisted for some time.

These women also believe they were demeaned and
psychologically abused when their men disparaged their

skills and abilities. The women said they accepted the mate's evaluation of them until they came to reject their mates for other reasons. Lorraine's husband had told her, "Nobody would want you," when she talked about going to work. She said that she accepted that dim view of herself until she realized her husband was unfaithful and she began her attempts to make him move out of their house.

The women who disentangled themselves from dependent and abusive relationships saw that they had changed their life course. Lorraine called this process "getting back-bone." She said that when she was married to her unfaith-ful and abusive husband who told her no one else would have her, she used to just "hump up to life," taking life's blows. When asked how she got "backbone," Lorraine said it was through the hatred she developed for her husband. First, she refused to have further sexual relations with him. Then she demanded that he move out of the home. He has accused her of alienating their children from him, but she replied that he had condemned himself through his own actions. She has never had the money for a divorce but what is important to her is that she knows she is free.

The women in this study did not think that they deserved to be abused physically or psychologically. They did imply that at the time, they felt they must not be living up to their men's expectations for a wife and thus

they tried harder while tolerating the male behavior.

Allied to their desire to live up to their expectations was their perception that there were few alternatives. They were raised to depend on their mates for economic survival, had no marketable skills, little experience of the outside world, and no place else to go. Returning to their parental home was usually not a viable alternative because it also had sparse resources. As Reena said, "My Mom still had the other young ones to raise." Families were also reluctant to become involved in disputes between spouses since such interference could backfire if the partners reconciled.

The injuries to feelings about self emphasized by these women, which occurred in the course of their primary relationships with family members, were the result of behaviors that are not uncommon in families in other social strata. And despite the painfulness of such experiences, all of the women, except those who were sexually abused, were able to recount how they regained their self-esteem once they removed themselves from the abusive situation.

## Endurance and the Little Things in Life

The women revealed positive feelings about themselves related both to personal characteristics and to their view of their accomplishments. They were proud when they

believed they had persevered in hard times and had
exercised some control over some aspects of their life.
While this is not a cultural group in which people "toot
their own horns," the women do like to demonstrate their
skills and accomplishments, albeit often indirectly.

A Little Independence of Mind

The women are pleased with themselves when they
believe they are the kind of person who does not give up.
They speak of efforts to tackle tasks in the face of
failure or of doing what is needed despite obstacles.
Types of perseverance and the credit women take for their
efforts depend on where they are in their struggles.

Some women can reflect back on how difficult it was
to keep trying when so much seemed to be against them.
Ida 's stories of raising her seventeen children after her
husband's desertion are of this type.  Other women are in
the midst of trying to do something where they have no
assurance they can succeed, but they keep trying.
Lorraine is in her mid-fifties and afraid of water, but
she goes back each summer to take swimming lessons with
her grandchildren, determined to learn the skill.  Some
women keep trying although they almost lose heart.  Kitty
has been trying for over a year, and through a variety of
appeals, to establish her youngest child's eligibility for
SSI payments.  That additional income will mean the
difference between having a trailer of their own or

continuing to live with relatives. She calls Social Security weekly and watches the mail anxiously. She has not given up but some days she feels discouraged.

The women feel good about themselves when they believe they are responsible and in charge of at least some of the important aspects of their lives. In their perception they are instrumental in shaping at least a part of their destiny. This sense of agency takes various forms.

Some of the younger women are proud that they have not allowed men to abuse them as their mothers had been abused. These women are confident that, unlike their mothers, they will leave a relationship if the male becomes abusive. Nancy is not even sure she ever wants to marry and take the risk of mistreatment.

Some women believe they have an independence of mind that establishes their sense of agency in life. Independent-mindedness was defined by one woman as not taking orders from others. This does not necessarily mean the women directly confront others. Rather an independent-minded woman knows how to bargain to gain her point. When Barbara was first married, her husband was against her reading so many books and wanted her to stop. She said she'd stop if he'd give up something of comparable value. They could not decide on what that something would be.

Finally, her husband gave up his demand and bought her a
box of books at the flea market.

A few of the women have found that their ability to
competently fill an occupational role as well as a mater-
nal/conjugal role makes them feel empowered.  These women
say they feel best when they are working outside the home.
They are invigorated by their interactions in the larger
world and find that they have more energy to complete
their usual tasks at home.  Although these women will
usually terminate their employment at their husband's
request, they do not forget the positive image employment
provided them and have plans to return to work later.

## Tell the Lady Who Painted Those Pictures

The women take pride in their accomplishments and
readily demonstrate or talk about these to available audi-
ences.  Most of their accomplishments are achieved in the
context of their home environment.  The home is the only
sphere where many of these women have any opportunity to
exercise their skills.  Rural isolation, inability to
drive a vehicle, or lack of reliable transportation limit
the women's environment.  Some women report that their
husbands or boyfriends would not teach them how to drive.
This acts as a cultural restraint imposed by some men
which supports the continued patriarchal control of these
women's lives.  Thus, learning to drive a car is an accom-
plishment to "crow" about.  Ida's husband "never let her

around his cars," but after her divorce, Ida, then in her
fifties, learned how to drive and "got my license on the
first try while my friend had to go there four times."

Some women proudly point out their home activities
while others bring these to a visitor's attention indi-
rectly. When Edna and Dorothy moved to a new rental home,
Edna (the grandmother) cleared the backyard of brush and
began to adapt an old shed for her chicken coop. The
researcher was taken on a tour of her accomplishments. In
contrast, Nancy spoke through her two-year-old who was
pointing to the many pictures and illustrations tacked to
their wooden walls. "Tell the lady who painted those
(paint-by-the-numbers) pictures," she said. "Mamma," came
the reply. Other women show visitors shelves of newly
canned foods or talk about their gardens past and present.
Other skills the women claim include house repairs,
helping a mate build their home, growing tobacco, raising
animals, and generally managing to make ends meet on
limited resources.

A few women count as an accomplishment the ability to
transcend their limited physical environments. They
believe they are more knowledgeable about the world in
general because they have "been other places." Ida
attributes her superior knowledge of the world to living
in a mill town in North Carolina in her childhood. Her
relatives and neighbors come to her for advice on many

matters. After her divorce, Lorraine got up the courage to go all by herself to visit relatives in a distant state.

## Summary

Positive feelings about self were expressed by most of the women in this study. They felt good about "doing the right thing." This involves meeting their commitments to their children and never acting like they are better than the next person. While these positive feelings about themselves may be lost in the course of an abusive relationship, the women demonstrate resilience once they terminate such relationships. Only the women who were abused as children appear to have permanent damage to their self feelings. Within the boundaries of their family-centered lives, the women take pride in their achievements and accomplishments.

The women's ability to maintain positive feelings about themselves does need to be viewed within their larger social context, for they maintain this vital coping capacity in the face of many negative situational factors. As detailed in Chapter III, all of these women live in poverty. They never cease struggling to make ends meet. Many live in inadequate housing. They must constantly interact with impersonal social institutions in which some personnel offend the women's sense of equity. And the

women's hope for family stability is dependent on the
ability of the men in their status group to find employ-
ment and make family commitments.

# CHAPTER VII

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

### SUMMARY

This research was developed to gain knowledge regarding the social reality of low-status Appalachian women. Specifically how does a group of these women perceive themselves and their social world? What are the values and beliefs that direct their behavior? Existing studies of low-status women present conflicting pictures of such women and contain little information regarding the women's point of view. As a means of gaining access to such information, this study was conducted using qualitative methods, participant observation and unstructured interviews and was centered on visits with eighteen rural women in their own homes. The resulting data were analyzed using grounded theory method, coding the data for categories of meaning and developing the linkages among categories.

Three primary areas of social process emerged which aided in defining the women's construction of their world: (a) the belief system that directs the women's family role behavior, (b) the morality that directs the conduct of their interpersonal interactions, and (c) the construction of their self-appraisals. The dynamics of this social process are as follows: the women take for granted their

participation in traditional female family roles, and the egalitarian nature and personalization of all social interactions. This perspective leaves the women situationally vulnerable due to two factors: first, economic conditions that threaten family formation and stability and second, the necessity of engaging in multiple impersonal and unequal interactions in the search for economic resources for their families. Most of the women maintain positive feelings about themselves by confining their self-evaluations to their family role performance, their ability to persevere, and their equitable treatment of others.

## Comparisons to Other Low-status and Rural Women

The life style of these low-status women is not unique nor does it appear to be a specific adaptation to the conditions of poverty that are an ever-present part of their lives. They are in tune with the values and beliefs of their rural community. In their adherence to traditional female family roles, the women are similar to rural women everywhere who have less access to new role options. The dominance of the mother-daughter bond and the women's emphasis on the centrality of child-care to their lives are characteristic of low-status women elsewhere in American culture. The women's morality of equality has roots in past Appalachian culture.

## The Nuclear Family Ideal

This study highlights, however, some aspects of the women's view of their world that are either absent from or contradictory to earlier descriptions. The primacy of the nuclear family in middle-status society versus the importance of the extended family in lower-status social groups is a recurring theme in social science literature (Schneider & Smith, 1973). While it is true that the majority of the women in this study were not living in nuclear family units, it is important to understand that the nuclear family unit is their ideal and the fantasy they carry into adulthood. They attribute their inability to achieve this ideal to the failure of the men in their lives either to find the means to economically support a family, or to avoid antisocial behaviors, specifically alcoholism and violent behavior. Involvement with their extended family is not central in their lives and multiple living arrangements seldom extend beyond mothers and their adult children's families.

## The Egalitarian Ideal

The women did demonstrate what has been called traditional Mountain Women values: cooperativeness and egalitarianism (Lewis, Kobak, & Johnson, 1978). They also personalized all of their interactions. The researcher did not find that these values differed, however, from those held by many middle-status individuals in the

community.  Interactions between individuals in this rural
community, regardless of status group, follow an etiquette
that requires recognition of each person's identity,
through acknowledgement of either their social role or
family connections and calls for egalitarian conduct.

The women feel injured when they think they have been
put down in an interaction, and often withdraw.  This
study found that, contrary to descriptions of this as
passive or fatalistic behavior, there is considerable
anger and self-righteousness in the women's reactions.
They are indignant or incredulous when others break social
contracts.  They seek comfort in the assurance that they
are behaving correctly and the other is at fault.  This
may be the reason behind the women's frequent telling of
stories about social insults, for in the retelling they
are free to present the righteousness of their own
behavior and the undesirable snobbishness of the other.

## Self-appraisals

The women in this study have positive self-appraisals
based on their performance as mothers which supports
Fitchen's (1981) conclusion that low-status women are able
to attain their role ideals as wives and mothers particu-
larly when compared to men in their social group who
become frustrated in their roles as providers.  But the
more subtle means by which these women add to their self-
esteem have seldom been noted.  They value their competen-

cies and small achievements even while recognizing that others may not.

When low-status women are viewed both within their environmental context and on the basis of their perception of reality, the psychological characteristics attributed to them in earlier studies, overconformity, inexpressiveness, and fatalism, seem too limited (Polansky et al., 1972; Looff, 1971). Conformity takes on new meaning when it is seen that adherence to the traditional mothering role is a source of positive self-feelings for these women. Inexpressiveness may be a characteristic of some families in this region but could not be applied to the majority of the women in this study. In reviewing the course of their lives, the women do report feeling fatalistic about some events and life situations, accepting these as God's will or as unchangeable. But the same women grasp opportunities to change these very situations and value highly their ability to exert some independence or control.

An awareness of the women's perspective can enrich our present understanding and provide the knowledge essential for the destruction of stereotypical images and class-biased views of the world of low-status women.

## Implications

Developing an understanding of how women in a specific social stratum and a particular environment conceive the reality of their lives has implications on two levels for social work practitioners and program planners. First, it presents a model for increasing the practitioners' knowledge of the world of their clients and how this world differs substantially from the practitioners' reality. Such knowledge is essential to the process of aiding individuals and groups in solving life problems. Second, such an understanding provides the basis for tailoring general social programs to meet the perceived needs of specific population groups.

### Knowledge for Practice

One of the basic directives to social work practitioners is to "start where the client is." While such an approach refers to clients' views of the problem, their particular strengths and weaknesses, and what they desire from the practitioner, it also implies understanding the clients in their social context. This requires the practitioner to make a series of assumptions about the client's beliefs and values, and customary ways of interacting, often with only minimal evidence. The practitioner is often reduced to using social categories based on demographic norms. Age, sex, race, occupation,

and income are frequently the only data available for developing such an understanding.

The method used in this study, however, offers an alternative route for securing a deeper understanding of the client's world.  This consists of analyzing the clients' stories about their lives -- analyzing them for the underlying themes and the meanings clients attribute to events.  It can provide a means of examining the cultural prescriptions that direct clients' lives.  Tentative conclusions regarding clients' constructions of their social worlds can be verified and modified or discarded as needed.  The ability of the practitioner to reflect back to clients such an enhanced understanding of their world should have a positive effect on the helping relationship.  It may also assist clients in developing a more holistic way of seeing their life space.

An understanding of the rules that govern social interactions for given clients may assist a practitioner in avoiding interventions that are incongruous within the client's reality.  Certainly it should guide the practitioner's relational style.  For example, the women discussed in this study would be uncomfortable with a practitioner who stood on formalities and insisted on calling them by a formal title after their initial meeting.

Program Planning and Service Delivery

Social workers employed in administrative and planning roles can also benefit from knowledge gained from grounded theory studies of specific social group values and interactional expectations. Studies of this type point to areas where situational stress and institutional practices impede client functioning. They also alert the planner to the fact that programs must be flexible enough to adapt to pertinent local situations.

The current call for welfare reform at the national level includes provision of some type of "workfare" for welfare recipients. What would be the impact of such program requirements on the women in this study who are dependent on public monies? It is likely that without an appreciation of both the women's guiding beliefs and the salient factors in their environment, such a program would do harm and accomplish little more than the creation of more middle-class, bureaucratic jobs.

At the individual level, employment would be feasible and positive if it did not jeopardize the women's belief in their ability to do right by their children. This would require provision of low-cost day care and after-school programs staffed by personnel prepared to personalize their interactions with the parents. It would require employers who would accept the fact that no self-respect-

ing mother in this group would leave a very ill child with other caretakers even if a job depended on it.

The low educational levels and lack of job experience in this group of women would require job training programs which were close to home, and provision of additional economic support. If the women's day were to be spent in training or employment they would no longer be able to make the regular rounds in search of the community resources on which they depend to augment their small welfare allowances. If this resource gap could not be closed, the women would undoubtedly begin to drop out of the program. Driving lessons and low-interest loans for the purchase of cars would be needed by a sizeable number of women in order to make employment feasible.

An alternative approach would be more extensive development of handcraft cooperatives, a model for which currently exists in a few Appalachian counties. Training interested women to produce craft items in their own homes for the tourist market would obviate some of the women's concerns regarding leaving their young children to go away to work. These are just some of the more community-speci-fic concerns that would enhance the probability of success in introducing new jobs programs aimed at this population group.

Findings of studies of this type can be useful in community and regional planning done on a more systemic

level.  The needs of specific population groups are important when dealing with comprehensive economic planning.  For example, the economic well-being of most women in this study has been tied directly to the ability of the men in their status group to find and hold employment that pays wages above the poverty level.  A jobs program that addressed this issue might have a longer range effect on the stability of family life for these women than any change in welfare benefits.

Mental health planners can use data of this type in ascertaining the type of clinical services that would be utilized by this population group such as early intervention for victims of child abuse, and alternative resources for victims of family violence.  They can also explore the kind of family-life educational programs that would enhance their clients' coping skills.

## Further Research

Grounded theory research is just beginning to emerge in the social work profession and the breadth of its applicability is still to be tested.  This study took a holistic approach by studying the general construction of social reality in a specific status group.  But the method should be equally applicable to looking at the interactional context of individuals, families, and small groups, within clinical settings, and the interactional rules of organizational structures of concern to social work.

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APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF SUBJECTS' AGENCY CONTACTS


Services with a * indicate those that a higher status
mother would be less likely to seek out.

1. Basic resources-- subjects went to agency office

    * a.   Aid to Families with Dependent Children,
           Department of Human Services, eligibility
           determination (this may include a journey
           to Knoxville for blood tests as part of a
           requirement to force absent fathers to
           provide child support.)

      b.   Food stamp eligibility determination

    * c.   Community Action Office--for food
           commodities, monthly, utility and emergency
           food vouchers as needed

      d.   Social Security office

    * e.   Housing and Urban Development office--
           rental assistance (includes home visits by
           agency worker)

    * f.   Housing project offices

2. Services for children

    * a.   Women, Infants, and Children -- a nutrition
           program for pregnant women and children
           under 5, provides vouchers for specific
           food stuffs.  Obtained at Public Health
           Department or Child Health and Development
           Program.

      b.   Pediatric care-- doctor's office, local
           hospital emergency room, Public Health
           department

      c.   Hospital care-- local and Knoxville

    * d.   Head start--provides transportation

    * e.   TOPS-- a special day program for develop-
           mentally delayed preschoolers-- provides
           transportation

&ast; f.     Child Health and Development-- largely a home based program but includes an office appointment every three months

    g.     Specialty clinics in Knoxville-- Crippled Children, Speech and Hearing, Birth Defects and Human Development Center

3. Health services

    a.     Prenatal care-- local hospital clinic or Public Health Department-- home visits and transportation sometimes provided by Department of Human Services

&ast; b.     Family planning clinic-- Public Health Department

    c.     Mental Health Clinic

    d.     Local doctors

4. Involuntary services

&ast; a.     Protective services-- Department of Human Services, home investigation of complaints of abuse and neglect

&ast; b.     Homemaker-- home based service to increase compliance with protective service goals

VITA

Judith Ivy Fiene was born in Louisville, Kentucky on January 9, 1936.  She attended the University of Louisville on a Ford Foundation Scholarship receiving a BA, cum laude, in June, 1957.  She was elected to membership in Mortarboard and Phi Kappa Phi honor societies.  In 1960 she entered the Kent School of Social Work, University of Louisville receiving a MSSW in 1962.

The author has been employed as a psychiatric social worker by the Kentucky Department of Mental Health; medical social consultant by the Indiana Department of Public Welfare, Services to Crippled Children; psychiatric social worker by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health; and chief medical social worker, Birth Defects and Human Development Center, University of Tennessee Hospital, Knoxville.

The author entered the University of Tennessee College of Social Work in September, 1983.  She has been the recipient of the Hilton Smith and Alumni Fellowships. She received a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work degree in June, 1988.

The author is a member of the National Association of Social Workers, Academy of Certified Social Workers, Council on Social Work Education, and is licensed as a social worker by the state of Tennessee.  She is currently

employed as an Assistant Professor, College of Social Work, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.