To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Mary Beth Bingman entitled Appalachian Women Learning in Community. I have examined the final 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 Education.

John M. Peters, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance.

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

APPALACHIAN WOMEN LEARNING IN COMMUNITY

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Mary Beth Bingman

May 1995

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Mary and Fred Bingman

and to their belief in compassion and justice for all.

Acknowledgments

Without the support and assistance of many people I could have never written this dissertation. It was inspired by the lives and work of Appalachian women. I have learned from the many women in southwest Virginia with whom I have worked over the past two decades. I particularly want to thank the women active in community organizations including the two centers studied here. Your belief in this project made it happen.

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Abstract

This study examines how women active in two Appalachian community organizations define the impact of their experiences on their lives and learning. The data collection involved participant observation in two grassroots community organizations in southwest Virginia, extended life history interviews with seven women active in these organizations, and a group interview with the women from each organization to review my preliminary findings.

The community organizations in this study are grassroots groups whose members operate community centers and try through various projects to meet the needs of people in their communities. They are democratically run with small part-time staffs. Most work is done by volunteers from the community including the seven women I interviewed. Each woman told her life story in response to similar questions, but each structured her story in her own way.

While each woman had her own story they also shared many themes. They talked about their families, about the hard times and the shared support. All seven women have taken part in formal education as adults, either in GED classes or community college, but for only two did this schooling seem to have much impact beyond acquiring particular skills. Rather it was their experiences in their community organizations that they identified as sources of learning and change in themselves. They described personal changes from their community involvement which included new confidence, a new ability to speak out, and new educational and employment goals. The centers offered a supportive environment that encouraged growth and change.

This study has implications for practice and research in fields of study and areas of work concerned with learning and social change. The factors that facilitated learning for the women in this study might be adopted in many adult education programs. Programs that

support women in making changes in their lives can learn from the kind of environment which these women have created--a supportive group of women working together to make positive changes in their communities. Additional work to build the understanding and development of educational processes that support social change on the grassroots community level is needed. And as we confront the effects of global economic restructuring in our communities, we can learn from the experiences of these women who have developed ways of doing useful work beyond narrow definitions of "job."

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CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

An abandoned school is slowly being converted into an active community center. In a community forum people discuss lack of good water and proper sewage disposal. A committee of students, mostly women, negotiate with the local community college about the courses and teaching methods they want provided in their community. A parade with larger-than-life puppets celebrates local and regional history. Mothers picket to have asbestos removed from their school. These are a few examples of recent efforts of grassroots community groups in Appalachia.

People who live in the Appalachian region confront a multitude of problems including double-digit unemployment. As mines close or shift to methods of production that employ far fewer miners, people live with a profound sense of uncertainty. National and regional economic development strategies have not had a great deal of success (Fisher, 1990; Whisnant, 1980). High unemployment combined with the historic exploitation of the region by mining firms based outside the region has resulted in limited public services (Eller, 1982); in families where roles are shifting as the only jobs available are in low-wage services traditionally filled by women (Maggard, 1994); and in continued environmental degradation.

Yet, while Appalachia is a region with many problems, it is also the site of a great deal of action and organization to confront these problems. A recent collection edited by Steve Fisher (1993) documents and examines the resistance to exploitation, the efforts at alternative economic development, and the "outburst of grassroots community organizing" (p. 5) that have occurred in Appalachia in the last few decades. Recent examples in

southwest Virginia include the 1989 United Mine Workers of America strike against the Pittston Company, ongoing efforts by citizens groups to oppose toxic landfills and incinerators, and numerous community development efforts.

The women whose lives form the basis of this study are part of this Appalachia. Their experiences take place in the context of both the region's problems and the grassroots efforts to confront those problems.

Purpose of the Study

In many Appalachian communities women are active in organizations working for change. While these organizations are not called women's organizations, most of the active members are women. As they work together to bring about change in their communities, their own lives change as well. They learn from their experiences and participation. Their sense of who they are and what they can do changes. There is often a connection between community work and formal adult education for these women. These were my observations based on experiences working in various contexts with women in several Appalachian community organizations.

But while there has been some work examining the learning and change experienced by women involved in grassroots political activism (See Bookman and Morgan, Eds., 1988 & Anglin, 1993.) few people have looked in depth at community organizations in the mountains or at the activities of women in these organizations (Seitz, 1992 & Maggard, 1990 are discussed in Chapter 2). Sally Maggard (1992) has written of the "polluted silences" (p. 2) in Appalachian scholarship regarding the "importance of gender relations in the region's history, culture, and social structure" (p. 2). Little research documents the experiences of women in Appalachian community organizations or examines the changes and learnings that occur in the women involved. The purpose of this study is

to document the experiences of women active in two Appalachian community organizations and their understandings of these experiences. The study's three components--life history interviews, participatory observation, and group analysis/discussion of the preliminary findings with the participants--focus on the research question:

How do women active in Appalachian community organizations define the impact of their experiences on their lives and learning as adults? What have they learned and how have they changed?

Significance of the Study

I came to adult education out of my experiences working and teaching in Appalachian community organizations. I had been both inspired by what was accomplished and frustrated by both external and internal barriers. I believed that the field of adult education would provide a framework for reflection and maybe some answers. That has been true, but I have also found that the field has much to learn from the organizations. As they describe their experiences and understandings of what led to change in their lives and perspectives, the women in this study speak to those involved in planning and conducting adult education programs.

This study also helps fill in some of the gaps in Appalachian studies in both documentation of women's experiences and in examining the work of community development organizations. Most of what has been written about these organizations is in local newsletters and regional publications. (Fisher's bibliography in his 1994 collection, *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change*, is a good source of what is available. The upcoming book *It Comes From the People: Community*

Development and Local Theology by Hinsdale, Lewis, and Waller will be an important addition to this area.)

In addition to what we can learn that is applicable to various fields of practice and research, I find real value in the telling of the lives of the women in this study. We live in a world of rapid change and increasing interaction between peoples and regions. Learning about each others' lives *from* each other will increase our understanding *of* each other.

I am not able to say these life histories tell us something True about women and education and community work in Appalachia, but the lives shared by the women in this study have intrigued and inspired me, and I believe will help other women think about and value themselves. Reading these stories, and particularly the things the women said about learning and working for change in particular communities, can help others attempting similar work.

I have been privileged to assist seven women in telling their stories, getting them down, seeing what's there, documenting the resilience and strength and contradictions. Catherine Bateson (1989) argues that much of the ambiguity, contingency, and interruptedness that are part of women's lives is a source of strength, flexibility, and creativity and should not be regarded negatively. Instead she believes that these aspects of women's lives make them better able to function and make contributions in a rapidly changing, diverse world.

> The circumstances of women's lives now and in the past provide examples for new ways of thinking about the lives of both men and women. What are the possible transfers of learning when life is a collage of different tasks? How does creativity flourish on distraction? What insights arise from the experience of multiplicity and ambiguity? And at what point does desperate improvisation become significant

> achievement? These are important questions in a world in which we are all increasingly strangers and sojourners. (pp. 9-10)
>
> Women have always lived discontinuous and contingent lives, but men today are newly vulnerable, which turns women's traditional adaptations into a resource. (p. 13)

In these lives we have a valuable resource.

Assumptions

I bring to this project a belief that Appalachia is an exploited region, but a region where change can be brought about by people working in community organizations. I also believe that education can play an important role both in the empowerment of individuals and in bringing about democratic social change.

I define this work as feminist as well as critical (Simon & Dippo, 1986), identifying with Kathleen Weiler's (1988) characterization of feminist research as (a) rejecting the possibility of impartiality, (b) having an "emphasis on lived experience and the significance of everyday life" (p. 58), and (c) being politically committed.

The relationship between the researcher and the "subject" is a collaborative one in feminist research. Research should lead to change for those involved. The research process should make some contribution to empowerment defined by Lather (1991) as "analyzing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognizing systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives" (p. 4). Research that starts from the particularities of women's lives, which tells these lives should be empowering.

> Feminism's grassroots, "no more experts" credo is premised on the sturdy sureness that, given enabling conditions, every woman has something important to say about the disjunctures in her own life and the means necessary for change. (p. xviii)

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized in seven chapters. After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the literature in which this study is grounded. Chapter 3 is a description of the research method. In Chapter 4 the local communities and organizations that are the site for and contexts of this study are presented. The stories of the seven women who participated in the study are told in Chapter 5, largely in their own words. In Chapter 6, I discuss my findings and in Chapter 7 draw some conclusions in regard to the research questions and consider implications of this work.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

This review situates the study in the literature of adult education and to a lesser extent feminist studies and Appalachian studies. The first section presents the theoretical basis of this study in adult education. The second section examines feminist literature which grounds this study. The third section reviews several recent studies of Appalachian women.

Transformation/Conscientization

This study examines how women experienced learning and change as they participated in community organizations. While I do not attempt to prove or disprove any particular theory of individual change, my questions and analysis have been at least to some extent impacted by the work that has been done in the field of adult education on learning and change. In his review of the formal knowledge of the field of adult education Huey Long (1991) included perspective transformation as one of the six "major domains of knowledge" in the field. Two people in particular have written extensively on change in perspective. Jack Mezirow has focused more on the individual's transformative learning while Paulo Freire has written extensively on what he calls conscientization, a process that not only involves a changing view of reality but a belief in one's ability to change one's reality.

Mezirow and Transformative Learning

Jack Mezirow (1981; 1990; 1991; 1992; 1993)) has examined transformative learning that enables the adult to look at his or her values and assumptions and at the world in a different way. This process is intensely conscious and reflective. In his study of women returning to college he identified a process of personal transformation that began with a "disorienting dilemma," involved "a critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychological assumptions," and ended in "a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective" (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 168-169). This process is most completely explained in Mezirow's 1991 book, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*.

Mezirow's transformation theory of adult learning is based on Habermas' work describing three broad areas of knowledge: technical, practical, and emancipatory (Mezirow, 1991). Technical learning is concerned with control and manipulation of the environment, with empirical knowledge. Practical learning is learning to communicate with others, to understand and make oneself understood. Emancipatory learning is based on self-reflection, on understanding one's assumptions, values, meanings. Mezirow is particularly interested in the perspective transformation that occurs with emancipatory learning and how to bring about this kind of learning. Critical reflection and rational discourse are the catalysts for transformative learning.

> Transformative learning involves a particular function of reflection: reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that results from such reassessments....It may

involve correcting distorted assumptions--epistemic, sociocultural or psychic--from prior learning. (Mezirow, 1990, p. 18)

This transformative learning process often begins with a disruptive event in one's life, which forces re-evaluation of assumptions. New meanings are developed through rational discourse and critical reflection. "Learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1).

> Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 14)

Transformative learning theory assumes that a change in meaning perspective leads to a change in action. But Mezirow seems to see the transformation as occurring separate from action, although the critical reflection leading to transformative learning may be instigated by an action. At times Mezirow seems to equate perspective transformation with conscientization as used by Freire, but it does not have the political content, the recognition of the necessity for collective political action that conscientization implies. Hart (1990) has pointed out Mezirow's insistence that the educator foster critical reflection but not effect particular political action. For Mezirow transformation can come from reflection on epistemic, psychological, and socio-linguistic assumptions, while he asserts Freire's interest is limited to "critical reflection on oppressive social norms or practices

(sociolinguistic assumptions)" (1992, p. 251). So while some transformative learning implies social action, some may only lead to personal change.

Clark and Wilson (1991) have also criticized Mezirow for failing to take into account the context of experience and for focusing on "the decontextualized form of rationality that underlies the process of critical reflection central to perspective transformation reflection" (p. 75). They find that Mezirow fails to take into account the constructed (and contested) nature of self and of rationality. It seems that while Mezirow has a personal commitment to social justice, he may have difficulty in appreciating or at least expressing his understanding of the diversity of peoples' thinking (or definitions of rationality).

But if Mezirow himself has questions about the educator's role in political action some of those associated with his work do not. In a book edited by Mezirow in 1990, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, Mechthild Hart and Tom Heany and Aimee Horton make clear the connections they see between emancipatory learning and political action. Hart considers consciousness raising as practiced in the women's movement as transformative learning. She asserts that for consciousness raising to be part of a program of transformative learning, the work of the group must go beyond the expression of personal experiences to "forging socially valid knowledge" (p. 67). This transformative learning leads to action. "The full cycle of consciousness raising therefore includes the actual experience of power on the individual level, a theoretical grasp of power as a larger social reality, and a practical orientation toward emancipatory action" (p. 71).

Heany and Horton (1990) further emphasize the connection between transformative learning and action in political struggle. "Transformative learning accompanies historical struggles for change, such struggles being that toward which critical reflection bends and within which contradictions in the social order become apparent" (p. 89). The

transformative learning Heany and Horton describe may be closer to Paulo Freire than Mezirow.

Paulo Freire and Conscientization

Probably the best known and most influential "adult educator" today is Paulo Freire. From his work in literacy in his native Brazil and later in Chile and west Africa, he developed a theory and ongoing analysis/reflection on how people develop a critical consciousness or become conscientized. More recently he spoke of people coming to know better what they already know. "Knowing better means precisely going beyond the *common sense* in order to begin to discover the *reason* for the facts" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 157).

Freire's work is based on a belief in the ability of people to be subjects rather than objects of history, to learn to look at their own experience and situation and examine the underlying reasons. His approach to literacy and other education centers on an educator/facilitator engaging in dialogue with people around the critical issues, or generative themes, of their lives. Through this process the group comes to better understand the nature of their particular situation and more importantly to believe that their situation is not inevitable, not ordained by God or fate. They come to believe that they can take action to change their situation, to become subjects or actors in the world. They develop a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

Freire criticized what he calls "banking education" where the teacher deposits information in the student as domesticating. Knowledge is bestowed, the teacher acts, the student is passive, and reflection, analysis, and dialogue are discouraged (Freire, 1970). Instead of banking education Freire proposes an emancipatory pedagogy. "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information," (p. 67). This

"problem-posing education" occurs when teacher and student together analyze the conditions of their lives and discover or make knowledge. This process leads to the development of a critical consciousness.

> Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality. (p. 68)

While Mezirow's latest work focuses primarily on individual transformation not action, Freire is concerned with conscientization as a process leading to and coming from action and transformation of society. This is particularly true in his later books, which examine education and literacy in terms of social change and liberation. But this emphasis on action as part of conscientization is there from the beginning of his work. In a note to the preface of the English translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translator Myra Bergman Ramos defines the Portuguese *conscientização* used by Freire as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (1970, p. 19). This combination of reflection and action Freire calls praxis. "This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis" (p. 52).

While Freire has primarily been interested in the societal impact of conscientization, he did write about levels of consciousness or "historically and culturally conditioned levels of understanding" (1973, p. 276).

Mezirow (1991) summarized these levels described by Freire:

> The lowest is intransitive consciousness, the level at which people are preoccupied with meeting elementary needs and are unaware of problems other than basic biological ones. People at this level lack historical consciousness and are unable to comprehend their social cultural situation. (p. 136)

> A second level of consciousness is "semi-intransitivity" or magical consciousness....Life is perceived in terms of fate or destiny and seen as beyond human control. The oppressed internalize the values of their oppressors, resulting in emotional dependence upon them and self-deprecation. (p. 136)

> At the third level, naive or semitransitive consciousness, people engage in questioning their lives and can understand that sociocultural reality is determined by human beings. (p. 136)

This naive level is characterized by an over-simplification of problems, a nostalgia for the past, an underestimation of the common man, a lack of interest in investigation, and a fragile capacity for dialogue (Freire, 1973).

The fourth level, critically transitive consciousness, is reached when people are capable of dialogue between each other and the world and can intervene to change their own situations. It grows out of a "critical educational effort" (Freire, 1973, p. 19).

> The critically transitive consciousness is characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's "findings" and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive

positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and by the good sense not to reject the old just because it is old--by accepting what is valid in both old and new. (p. 18)

While some educators in the United States have criticized Freire for providing nothing new educationally (Griffith, 1972), others have attempted to transplant Freirean methods into this culture with mixed results (Jarvis, 1987). In some instances his concepts are misunderstood as "multi-functional pedagogical device[s]" (Giroux, 1981) by people who claim to use Freirean methods in, for example, corporate settings. But Freire is clear about the goals of his methods. "This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation" (1970, p. 33).

Elias and Merriam (1980) recognize this commitment to change when they assert that Freire's philosophy has relevance for groups concerned about such issues as "oppression, liberation, consciousness raising, and community political and social action" (p. 165). They also value Freire's questioning of the alleged neutrality of education and of the relationship between student and teacher, and they see a place for his ideas in literacy programs. But they find radical approaches to adult education limited in failing to account for the pluralism in American (U.S.) society with "...little room in his view for the painful struggling with different views and opposing viewpoints" (p. 153). They also find him idealistic, too abstract, and one suspects, too radical.

Phyllis Cunningham on the other hand embraces Freire's ideas. In a recent essay review entitled "From Freire to Feminism: The North American Experience with Critical Pedagogy" (1992) she condemns North American adult education as being primarily "learning for earning" (p. 180) and calls for a new vision for adult education informed by

Freirean popular educators in Latin America and Quebec. She sees two options for transformative education and chooses the latter.

> A personal transformative psychological interpretation which fits fairly easily into our psychologically based adult education practice, and may lead to social transformation; [or] a social transformative perspective which does not deny personal conscientization but recognizes that it must be confirmed in action. (p. 190)

Kathleen Weiler (1991) also finds connections between Freire and feminist pedagogy, which she calls a "critical pedagogy in practice" (p. 450).

> Both feminist pedagogy as it is usually defined and Freirean pedagogy rest upon visions of social transformation; underlying both are certain common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness, and historical change. Both pedagogies assert the existence of oppression in people's material conditions of existence and as a part of consciousness; both rest on a view of consciousness as more than a sum of dominating discourses, but as containing within it a critical capacity --what Antonio Gramsci called "good sense"; and both thus see human beings as subjects and actors in history and hold a strong commitment to justice and a vision of a better world and of the potential for liberation. (p. 450)

She also has criticisms of Freire and identifies problems with his pedagogy. Particularly she is concerned with his abstract use of the words *men* and *oppressed.* In real classes or any groups of people there are different forms of oppression experienced differently by different people. This is similar to the objection raised by Sharan Merriam.

And the teacher will also be different in ways other than having more power by virtue of position. Weiler points out that Freire does not deal with the tensions resulting from these differences in his calls for collective action against oppression. She believes as feminist pedagogy attempts to address these issues a more complex liberatory pedagogy may be developed.

In reviewing the various research paradigms of adult education, Sharan Merriam (1991) places both Mezirow and Freire in the critical paradigm. Critical social science has perhaps been applied to education most successfully by Henry Giroux. His work informed my thinking about both Paulo Freire and Jack Mezirow. Giroux (1983) writes about ideology as an unconscious system of meanings, values. To become conscientized, people need to become aware of the relationship between ideology and "real" conditions, to read the word and the world as Freire says. Critical theory affirms the work of Freire and may make easier to understand Freire's philosophical/theoretical base. But it also makes clearer Mezirow's tentativeness; he wants transformation without the necessity of action. "Perspective transformation" is not the same thing as conscientization. And conscientization is not a one-time event on the road to Damascus; it isn't being born again. One *develops*, continues to develop, a critical consciousness. There may be many perspective transformations, but there is also some growing understanding of action.

Feminist Theories

My research interests have grown out of my experiences working in grassroots organizations and teaching in a community-based program. Most of my students and many of the people most active in the organizations have been women. The concern for others, resilience, and spirit of these women have continually inspired me. At the same time I have recognized the limits on their options and our shared confusion about how to make changes

in our lives and communities. I undertook this research to try to understand more about how we can work more effectively to bring about change. Gender is clearly critical to an understanding of what is going on in these women's lives, and work and feminism and feminist theory informs this study.

The Critical Feminists

Feminist theory is concerned with the impact of gender on women, how gender matters in a society. By and large the practice came before the theory. The attempts to gain control of many diverse aspects of women's lives, and the resistance to these changes, led to the understanding that the movement was dealing with more than individual situations and solutions.

And as feminist theory grew out of practice, it remains concerned with practice, with change, rather than merely explication. However, feminist theory is by no means monolithic. "The capacity to theorize from the immediate and personal observation" (Rowbotham, p. 69) has meant theory that is both rich and diverse. This diversity can be looked at as three streams or varieties: liberal, radical, and socialist. While there may not be agreement on delineating these varieties (see hooks, 1984; Rowbotham, 1988; Weiler, 1988), they can be usefully described. Liberal feminism is about women gaining the rights of men, rights to employment, equal pay, equal education, control over their bodies. Radical feminism asks women to change their lives now as individuals, often by establishing lives separate from men who are seen as the enemy. Socialist feminism assumes that "capitalism and patriarchy are related and mutually reinforcing of one another" (Weiler, p. 29).

In *The Past Is Before Us : Feminism in Action Since the 1960s*, Sheila Rowbotham (1989) reviews the theory and practice of the women's movement in Britain over the past

twenty or so years. Her sources are primarily the journals and newsletters of the movement. The book is full of women's words and voices. It describes the amazingly broad and numerous issues around which women have organized. While a few of these issues are particular to the United Kingdom, most have been of concern here as well. These issues were the ones which aroused women to action, and they seem more relevant to women in the mountains than does much of what is discussed currently in academic feminism in the United States.

Rowbotham identifies herself as a socialist, conceiving of socialism as "a process of political creating formed from the movement of people against inequality, injustice and humiliation" (p. xi). She traced two predominant themes in her review of the women's movement in Britain: that class conflict is gendered, "the working class has two sexes" (p. 223); and that class and race as well as gender must be considered to "provide a full account of society" (p. 223). For the socialist feminist equality with men in an unequal society is not the goal; changing gender relationships means changing the society.

For the socialist feminist, gender is necessary to any analysis of society; consideration of production is not enough. But feminism not only makes possible a stronger analysis of society. Rowbotham also stresses the importance of the women's movement as a place where vision is encouraged, where people have been able to look beyond narrow definitions of what life is about.

> So, without idealizing women's role in the family, it has been possible to see women's dissatisfaction with family life as a *potential* for imagining how society could be better. The implication is that the purpose of life is not to produce; the purpose of production is to make life possible. (p. 33)

> The creation of a collective space to express need, aspiration and desire is a major achievement and has to be recognized as a resource, for it is all too easy to smother and crush the capacity to imagine. (p. 35)

> One of the strongest cards held by people with a vested interest in keeping things as they are is the ability to make people feel foolish and ashamed because they want alternatives. Part of their power consists in marking the boundaries of admissible goals. These boundaries can be moved when people take collective action in rebellion against a particular constraint. (p. 206)

This stretching of boundaries is one of the contributions feminism can make to socialism. As a 1912 textile workers strike banner expressed, "Hearts starve as well as bodies, Give us bread but give us roses" (Oppenheim, 1950, p. 70).

In *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/In the Postmodern* , Patti Lather (1991) considers the implications of critical theory and postmodernism for feminist research and pedagogy. Five basic assumptions guide her work: the "failure of positivism" (p. 2), the "value-ladenness of inquiry" (p. 2), the "possibilities of critical social science" (p. 3), the possibility of empowerment, and the challenges postmodernism poses to the previous assumptions.

While she does not call herself a socialist feminist, Lather writes from "three critical discourses" (p. 19), feminism, Marxism, and postmodern critical social theory, which can inform socialist feminism. She finds in feminist theory the force that in effect politicizes postmodernism. This happens in three ways. First, "Feminism is the site where the theory/practice nexus is being most creatively interrogated" (p. 27). Feminists including most feminist theorists are involved in practice that seeks to transform and are impelled by their practice to continual reflection and re-evaluation.

> Secondly, contemporary feminism is the cultural site most effectively disruptive of the alleged impotence of the subject in the face of social political forces and situations. While the varied strands of feminism can be categorized in many ways, all feminists appeal to the powers of agency and subjectivity as necessary components of socially transformative struggle. (p. 28)

And thirdly, "Feminism's long-standing tendencies toward self-reflexivity provide some experience of both rendering problematic and provisional our most firmly held assumptions and, nevertheless, acting in the world, taking a stand" (p. 29).

In *Women Teaching for Change: Gender, Class & Power,* Kathleen Weiler (1988) writes of the need for theory that can encompass both agency and structure, that can look at what empowers individuals to take action both politically and culturally, and at the material and ideological structures that inhibit agency. She finds this in critical educational theory with "its moral imperative and its emphasis on the need for both individual empowerment and social transformation" (p. 6). She goes on to describe a "critical feminist educational theory" (p. 29), which assumes that schooling is connected to capitalist class structure and that capitalism and patriarchy are interconnected and reinforce each other. "In other words, both men and women exist in interconnected and overlapping relationships of gender and class" (p. 29)

Women's Ways of Learning

Feminist writers who are not in the critical stream can also help us think about women's learning. In the early 1980s Carol Gilligan (1982) published *In a Different Voice,* an important work that found that women's approaches to decision making were

different from men's, but not inferior as Kephart and others had believed (Kohlberg, 1981). In their work*Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) built on Carol Gilligan. They based their work on extensive interviews with 135 women who were students or recent students in several colleges and in what they came to call "invisible colleges," programs to help women learn about parenting.

They identified five positions of knowing for women: silent women who feel they have no voice, have nothing to say, and believe they cannot understand the words of others; received knowers who learn from the voices of others, believe in their own ability to learn, but not in their ability to create knowledge or in their ability to speak in their own voice; subjective knowers who listen to and speak from their own inner voice; procedural knowers who use either the procedures of the academic disciplines or the "connected" procedure of empathy to understand other's meaning; and the constructive knower who integrates what she has learned from others with her own understandings.

The five positions are helpful in thinking about how women learn, but the book goes beyond this theoretical consideration of women's knowing to look at what kind of learning and teaching seems to work best for women. In listening to what the women they interviewed said about their own powerful learning experiences, the authors give us several guidelines to consider when developing education for women:

* A women "needs to know that she is capable of intelligent thought, and she needs to know it right away" (p. 193). Educational approaches built on creating cognitive dissonance may not work with women.

* "For women, confirmation and community are prerequisites rather than consequences of development" (p. 194). I found this to be true for women I interviewed who were students in community-based college programs. They reported that being able to

begin their college work with their peers in their community was critical. Only after they gained confidence and experience did they feel able to attend classes on campus.

* Women need "confirmation that they [can] be trusted to know and to learn" (p. 195). Being treated as competent adults meant that women coming to a children's clinic were willing to listen to and consider the advice they were given.

* Being able to tell, to write their own stories validates women's knowledge.

* Studying feminist theory gives women a language to express what they know from experience.

* Women at different positions have different needs for structure in learning experiences.

* "Women may benefit especially from systems in which the teaching function and the assessing function are separated" (p. 208).

Women's Ways of Knowing ends with a chapter on "connected teaching." The authors review Paulo Freire's rejection of banking education and support his notion of a teacher not as a model of academic reasoning, but as a partner in learning. Their metaphor for an effective teacher of women is the midwife.

> Many women expressed--some firmly, some shakily--a belief that they possessed latent knowledge. The kind of teacher they praised and the kind for which they yearned was one who would help them articulate and expand their latent knowledge: a midwife-teacher. Midwife-teachers are the opposite of banker-teachers. While bankers deposit knowledge in the learner's head, the midwives draw it out. They assist the students in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating it. (p. 217)

Such teachers focus on the students' knowledge, not their own. They use dialogue not in an adversarial manner, but to develop a community of knowers who support each other's growth. People (students and teachers) get to know one another as people. The teacher attempts to understand the student's knowing and confusion and works from there rather that from the material.

The work of a group of women immersing themselves in the words of women has produced a useful, provocative book full of theory and suggestions for practice, and also supports research based on listening to the stories of women.

> It was as if the voices of the women, their words on paper, and our own process of reading together and culling the interviews for meaning gradually and profoundly modified the lens we brought to the project. As we worked, we were aware of the gradual shifts in our perspectives of the nature of scientific inquiry, on feminist theory, on developmental stages and sequences, and on the nature of human adaptation and potential....In the end we found that, in our attempt to bring forward the ordinary voice, that voice had educated us. (p. 20)

Feminist Development

A third area of feminist theory that has relevance to this study is development as interpreted by Third World women. Since the United Nations Decade of Women there has been widespread recognition that women's economic contributions are a vital part of the economies of developing countries and that development schemes must involve women if they are to succeed. Economic development has often been defined in terms of increasing a nation's GNP. Feminist development includes meeting the basic needs of families but goes beyond economic growth to redistribution of wealth. Feminists not only want participation

in the economy, but want development based on the needs of their families and communities.

Feminists are calling for development that not only takes women's economic role into account, but that recognizes women's need to participate in society. Indian feminists Gita Sen and Caren Grown (1987) remind us that "Feminism has as its unshakable core a commitment to breaking down the structures of gender subordination and a vision for women as full and equal participants with men at all levels of societal life" (p. 79). In addition to meeting basic economic needs, feminist development includes opening the political process to women. "Changes in laws, civil codes, systems of property rights, control over our bodies, labour codes, and the social and legal institutions that underwrite male control and privilege are essential if women are to attain justice in society" (Sen and Grown, p. 81).

In addition to improving the political and social situation of women and making certain that economic growth translates into improved life at the base, feminists offer a vision of an alternative, life affirming development. In an article entitled "We Cannot Plan a Flower," Bhasin, Khan, and Menon (1988), describe this vision:

> For what is alternative development, anyway? Very simply, it is a people-based development in that not only the questions, but also the answers come from the people and their experiences. This means alternative development accepts that there is no one linear development model nor one path to progress. It accepts different logic systems, different idioms, different concepts of time and space. Feminism does all this too. At the same time feminism seeks to break down barriers between disciplines; between areas of work; between the personal and the political; between the emotional and the logical; between the natural and the physical; between relationships and roles; between them and us, between you and me. (pp. 122-123).

I quote at length because I think this is a wonderful summarization of what Patti Lather said in a much more cumbersome way--that feminism and feminist theory can give us new more open and creative ways of thinking together about the problems that confront us all.

Feminism in Appalachia

What does feminist theory have to say about the lives and work of women in Appalachia? In this preliminary and somewhat limited review I have found several connections, for myself as an educator and researcher and for women working together for change.

I have found in the writing of Weiler and Lather theory that informs both my analysis and method. As I reflect on the research I have done on the lives and education of women working in community groups in the mountains, their work clarifies several issues:

- gender matters
- education is a site of production as well as reproduction
- action for change can be both individual and collective
- the stories of individual lives can inform us
- culture is produced in both public and private settings.

Weiler suggests doing studies that combine description and theorizing: "We need to be able to encompass both individual consciousness and the ideological and material forces that limit and shape human action" (p. 3).

Across Appalachia women are working together for change. A few call themselves feminists; most do not. Yet we recognize gender as a category and are coming together as women. Feminist theory--some feminist theory--can contribute to our understanding of our individual situations and to our understanding of the work we are about. Many of the

issues Rowbotham described are issues for women in the mountains: child care, abusive husbands, unhealthy workplaces, and on and on. The theory of the socialist feminists can help us understand the forces that impact our work. Similarly, working for economic development in our communities, we want development that will enable us to support our children and will give them the opportunity to stay in this area as adults. Third World women have much to teach us. But this theory needs to be in language we can access and in reference to issues in our lives. African-American feminist bell hooks (1984; 1989) has written about the perspective of black women who view feminism from the margins. While racism does not oppress most Appalachian women, much of what she says is applicable. In many ways we are on the margins. She writes of a feminism that confronts the survival issues described by Third world women and that not only opposes sexist oppression but includes "a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires" (p. 24). This is not liberal feminism, but may make more sense to a single mother on AFDC or a miner's widow about to lose her medical card. In many ways Appalachia is a conservative region that never identified with "women's lib," but where, as women have come together to work for economic development, we have confronted the ways sexism has limited our lives.

Research on Appalachian Women

The scholarly research on Appalachian women is limited. Most notable are three recent doctoral dissertations by Fiene (1988), Maggard (1988), and Seitz (1992). A review of listings in ERIC, Psych LIT, PAIS, and Sociofile using the key words *Appalachian Women* revealed only articles written by Fiene and Maggard. Their bibliographies and the recent publication of *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change* (Fisher, 1993) provide a few more sources. The forthcoming book by Hinsdale, Lewis,

and Waller (in press) on community development in Ivanhoe, Virginia, promises to be an important addition to this literature. But research on Appalachian women is scarce.

There are a few nonacademic sources for Appalachian women's stories and life histories. Probably the best is *Picking Up the Pieces: Women In and Out of Work in the Rural South,* a book put together from stories told at a Highlander workshop (Lewis, et al., 1986). Beth Spence (1988) has done a book of women's stories, and the Women's Task Force of the Appalachian People's Service Organization occasionally publishes *Mountain Women's Journal,* collections of women's stories, poetry, and essays. There are also various autobiographical, biographical, and fictional works.

The three dissertations noted above are all qualitative works based on grounded theory methodology and as such document and listen to the stories of Appalachian women's lives. The studies were conducted from three different fields of study: Fiene in social work, Maggard in sociology, and Seitz in planning. The women they interviewed were from three different states, Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky. Maggard and Seitz looked at women involved in activism. I discuss these studies at some length because of their relevance to my research.

The Social Reality of Appalachian Women

In her dissertation Judy Fiene (1988) explored "how rural, low-status, Appalachian women perceive their social world" (p. 4). Her phenomenological study uses participant observation and unstructured interviews with eighteen women from Cocke County, Tennessee, to look at the social realities of women. She summarized her findings about the social processes that helped these women construct their world definition:

> 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 then 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 and control. (iv)

The women in this study had a traditionalist view of family relations, wanting to live in a nuclear family and accepting strongly differentiated sex roles. Most married early and centered their lives around their children. They defined a good father as one who tries to provide for his family and is involved with his children. While these women had a clear notion of how family should be, their own experiences were often more difficult. At least half had serious problems with their husbands' behavior and were separated or divorced. Only two of the eighteen participants completed high school.

Fiene examined how the women perceived their interactions with the larger community. She found three important social norms: "reciprocity, equality, and personalized caring" (p. 93), which the participants used to evaluate their interactions with others. In their dealings with people of "higher" social standing these norms were often perceived as violated and the participants felt "put down." But while they felt angry and injured by what they saw as unfair treatment, they continued to feel positively about themselves as long as they lived up to their own standards of behavior. If they do right by their children and are able to survive, this is a source of pride and self-esteem.

In her literature review Fiene provides a useful summary of various theories of poverty and family life in Appalachia. The cultural lag theory as expressed by Weller (1965) views Appalachians as part of a subculture that is poorly adapted to modern middle class life. In trying to explain school phobia in Appalachian children Looff (1971) used a culture of poverty model where overprotection on the part of mothers and over dependence on kin made it difficult for children to adapt to schooling. Both the cultural lag and culture of poverty theories have been challenged by several scholars including Billings (1974), Fisher (1976), and Lewis (1978) as failing to examine the social, economic, and political situations of the region.

Other writers (Gaventa,1980; Lewis & Knipe,1978; Lewis, Kobak, & Johnson, 1978; Whisnant, 1980) have explained Appalachian poverty as resulting from economic exploitation or internal colonialism. Women and families "became the refuge for the embattled mountaineers" (Fiene, p. 37). More recently Fisher (1993) has edited a collection of writings that examine resistance in Appalachia and the ways people have confronted the situations in which they find themselves.

Eastern Kentucky Women on Strike

Sally Maggard studied the participation of women in two strikes that occurred in eastern Kentucky in the early 1970s. The work both documents this participation and is "an effort to study the ways that class and gender interact to specify women's political experience, action, and consciousness" (Maggard, p. 4). Maggard had been present as a supporter at both strikes, one of hospital workers in Pikeville and the other of UMWA members at Brookside in Harlan County. She returned in the mid 1980s to interview participants of both strikes about the nature of their participation and their feelings about the

strikes. She had done extensive archival research about each strike before she began the interviews.

Maggard originally intended to examine levels of strike participation by counting the number of times participants engaged in various activities. But as she began to analyze the interviews she realized this counting of incidents, time involved, or money spent did not give a true picture of various women's participation. Using grounded theory techniques she devised a new strategy looking at the range of activities in which the women were involved, the duration of their involvement, and their level of discourse about the strike. She also looked at how gender and class structured these women's labor market status and family and household status and how these factors in turn impacted participation in each strike. She developed an unanticipated category of participation that she calls "emotional work" (p. 131) for the efforts strikers made to support each other through the hard times and to keep each other's spirits high.

In Pikeville the women themselves as hospital workers were on strike. In Harlan County the women became active picketers when the male miners were enjoined from having more than a few men on the picket line, and the company was able to bring in replacement workers. In both strikes, Maggard found that participation lead to changes in the women's lives.

The women in the Pikeville strike had worked outside their homes, often for many years in a variety of jobs. They had already devised ways to run a household and go to work. But during the strike they were involved in new activities including public speaking, traveling to cities outside the region to demonstrate, and organizing strike activities. They spoke of the strike as one of the most significant experiences of their lives. They gained a deepened understanding of class relations, "a sense of the power of women's collective action" (p. 211), and an identity as a member of that strike.

The women supporters of the Brookside strike were primarily not working outside the home when their participation began. They got involved in the strike to protect the jobs of the men they depended on financially. But as in Pikeville, their participation changed them. They, too, gained a "broader conception of class status and class relations" (p. 241) and participated in new activities. As well, "the gender relationships which had structured their lives came more and more into question" (p. 241). They spent time outside their homes and had to make arrangements for work at home to be covered. They took a public visible role in an often violent situation when men were forced to be much less visible. In some instances they challenged the union's decisions about how the strike should be conducted.

Maggard found that while a woman's class position has often been assumed to be an extension of the male wage earner on whom she depends, for the women involved in these strikes, gender and class intersected. "Furthermore, gender relations and gender ideology shape the form, content, outcome, and consequence of participation in the strikes" (p. 249). Class and gender happened together and interacted in participation.

While Maggard does not focus on transformation or conscientization, she notes that to become involved in the strikes required a "shift in gender consciousness" (p. 241) and that the involvement "changed the way they see themselves and their world" (p. 246). These shifts or changes appear to be processes of transformation and conscientization.

Women, Development, and Communities for Empowerment

Virginia Seitz (1992) conducted life history interviews with twelve women active in six organizations in southwest Virginia. Her research questions focus on how women are marginalized and oppressed on the basis of class and gender, how they understand gender and class, how they come together for social change, and how women are

empowered through their grassroots collective practices. Her findings centered on "conditions and positions of marginalization" (p. 14) that women experience and their activities and empowerment in various organizations.

While she found that the activism of the women she interviewed grew out of concern for family and was often expressed in terms of their roles as mothers, Seitz's findings about the family relations of these women is quite bleak. She describes their reports of growing up in mining families with an ever present threat of injury and death. The childhood memories she reports are of hard times. Ten of the twelve reported emotional and/or physical abuse in their marriages, several reported abuse from their fathers, and five spoke directly of abuse of their children by fathers or stepfathers. Either these women did not speak of or Seitz did not report happy moments in either their childhoods or current families. Other life stories of Appalachian women report hard lives, but include the positive moments of growing up and raising children. (See for example accounts in works by Lewis et al., 1986 and Spence, 1988.) Perhaps the women Seitz interviewed had not shared these positive experiences, or they are just not reported. It may be that the women who are most active are the women who are most angry.

The women in Seitz's study worked all their lives as daughters, mothers, and wives, and in paid labor. Three had been coal miners, four had worked in garment factories, and all but one had worked in service jobs. But these jobs did not provide security, and community institutions were also inadequate sources of support. These women stepped out of the usual family and community roles for women and became involved in "grassroots organizations for change." The six organizations included two community-based development groups, a community college vocational gender equity program, a sewing cooperative, a project to support women's employment in the coal industry, and a miner's strike support group. Seitz found that, "Participation in grassroots

associations can give women the opportunity to politicize their responsibilities for families and, perhaps, their positions within families as well" (p. 230).

As she considers the empowerment of women active in community organizations Seitz draws on Freire for definition. "Empowerment is defined in this study as a process through which marginalized persons can realize their potential for human agency through collective social action" (p. 234). She calls empowerment a "trickle-up revolution" (p. 233) challenging power relationships from the grassroots to the centers of power and "rejecting coercive power in favor of a creative and dialogical understanding of power that allows for self-development within collective development" (p. 234). Part of the process of empowerment is Freire's *praxis* and "reflective participation" and the development of a critical consciousness. Seitz concludes that the process of empowerment needs to be part of the collective agenda of groups if individual empowerment is to be sustained. "Women have shown the necessity of a collective context for empowerment" (p. 356). As for Freire, individuals are empowered when they recognize the need for and take part in collective action.

There are several similarities in Seitz's study and my dissertation. The geographic area is the same, the method is very similar, we ask similar questions of the data, the theoretical perspective is feminist and from the left. But there are several important differences. Seitz's field is planning rather than education. Her thinking and categories are more classically Marxist than mine. The six associations she looks at do not include the two sites I studied. She has tended to talk to the most active women in these groups. While we share use of WID (Women in Development) literature, these sources are central to her analysis, and much of her work is reflection on and critique of this literature. Although the WID literature, particularly the newer feminist Third World writing, informs what I do and both Seitz and my work may contribute to this area (hers much more than mine), I am not writing about development, but about adult learning and education. We share an interest in

empowerment and conscientization, but the only source we have in common here is Freire. She does not consider the critical educational theorists like Giroux and Lather and Hart, nor does she refer to Mezirow; rather she focuses on what has been said about women and the region by planners and exposes the fallacies on which much development work has been based. At the same time she uses the lives of the twelve women she interviewed to exemplify the kinds of challenges women in this region face in family, work, and community. I looked at two organizations closely to understand the kinds of experiences and context for learning they provided the women I interviewed. The questions I considered came from the education literature on transformation and conscientization--did involvement in organization make differences in these women's lives? What differences? What do they understand as the catalysts for these changes? What were the transformative moments or forces`?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD OF RESEARCH

How do women active in Appalachian community organizations define the impact of their experiences on their lives and learning as adults? What have they learned and how have they changed?

This study was designed to examine these questions. I used the methods of educational ethnography, the purpose of which is "to provide rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings" (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 17). The data for this study were collected from a variety of sources including life history interviews with seven women, participant observation and informal interviews at two community centers, collection and review of various documents, and group interviews with the participants.

The Participants and Sites

The study is based on life histories of seven women active in two community organizations in southwest Virginia. Convenience and some familiarity led me to choose the two sites. Both are within 50 miles of my home in the coal producing region of southwest Virginia. Both are community organizations that have been active for a number of years. In both organizations women have taken lead roles and are the most active members of the groups. I had some prior relationship with both organizations, but was not a member nor actively involved in either.

The research question began to define the participants, i.e., women active in Appalachian community organizations. The particular women who were participants were identified by other women in staff positions in the organizations. I discussed my project with them and asked them to suggest possible participants. I said I was interested in talking with women who are actively involved in the organizations but who were not the primary leaders. In both organizations I received suggestions and identified seven women who were willing to participate. I wrote the women (Appendix I) at one center and met with them in a group to explain the project. At the other center I talked with each participant individually by telephone and explained the project. Each woman signed a Letter of Consent (Appendix II). Each participant was paid $100 for her time. While I realize there is some disagreement about paying participants (Whyte, 1984), I believe that the value I have received from the participants far outweighs what I have been able to contribute to the centers. This payment was a way of acknowledging their contribution.

Research Design and Procedures

This research had three primary methods of data collection--individual life history interviews, participant observation, and a group discussion/analysis with the participants. The open-ended life history interviews with the participants were most important. The interviews were semi-structured and included questions covering:

family history

educational history

work experience

work within the organization

changes in her life since community involvement

future educational and work plans.

Each participant was formally interviewed twice with each interview lasting about two hours. These interviews were recorded on audio tape. I also talked more informally to the women at other times. I developed a questionnaire to guide the interviews, but each interview was different, following the interests and stories of the participant. (See Appendix III for interview protocols.)

The interviews were scheduled for the convenience of the participants. Most were conducted in a private space at the community centers, but one was at a participant's home.

I transcribed the interviews as they were completed, a process which deepened my understanding of what had been said and began the process of analysis. I gave copies of the transcriptions to the participants and in subsequent interviews tried to clarify any confusions. I also kept field notes following each interview, which included the conversations that were not recorded.

A second part of the study consisted of participant observation in the two community centers. I had done a case study of one organization and had interviewed women at both centers as part of earlier studies. I have also worked with both organizations in the Center for Literacy Studies Community in the Classroom project. So I had fairly extensive contact over time with both communities, and the centers agreed to this research. I talked with various people at each center and again kept field notes of my observations. This participant observation has allowed me to more completely and accurately understand and describe the context of this study. Review of documents such as minutes of meetings and newspaper clippings added to my understanding. The study is not about the communities or the organizations, but about the women and how they have learned and changed. But knowing the organizations and the communities in which the participants live and work contextualizes their experiences.

After I had drawn preliminary conclusions from the interviews, I met with the participants at each center in a group to discuss my findings and get their reactions. These

group interviews were conducted somewhat like focus groups with participants asked to comment on my preliminary findings, which I presented to them by reading a brief paper I had written for the 1994 Adult Education Research Conference (Appendix IV). The beginning questions for this discussion were "Does this make sense to you? Am I on the right track?" (Additional questions are in Appendix V.) This group analysis enabled me to test my conclusions and to enrich the analysis with the insights of the participants. In the group process we all gained new understandings of their work in the centers and how that work impacted their lives. As I discuss in Chapter 6, these group interviews also included discussion of future community center work.

Analysis

The method of analysis in this study follows the process described by Goetz and LeCompte (1984). *"Theorizing* [italics in original] is the cognitive process of discovering or manipulating abstract categories and the relationships among these categories" (p. 167). The tasks of this process are "...perceiving; comparing, contrasting, aggregating, and ordering; establishing linkages and relationships; and speculating" (p. 167).

As I transcribed each interview I noted questions, categories, or themes that occurred in several interviews. Categories were particular topics that were mentioned repeatedly, for example the women's attitudes toward and encounters with the welfare system in its various manifestations. Themes emerged as I asked questions of the data and wondered about relationships or connections, for example what was the role of outsiders in the centers.

As I identified a category or a question or theme I reviewed all the interviews for examples. In the second round of interviews I asked some questions to follow up on themes suggested in the first round. For instance some participants had spoken about

church and others had not, so in the second round I asked if they attended church. I believe that these questions in the second interviews did not have the impact on each woman's structuring of her story, which might have been the case if I had asked them during in the first round of interviews.

While the process of analysis began in some ways with the first interview and continued as interviews were conducted, a more focused analysis was conducted after all the interviews were completed and transcribed. This process was based on repeated review and comparison of the data looking for the categories and themes I had already identified and questioning the data for additional categories. I "listened" to the women's voices in order to hear their understandings of their experiences and learnings. I began to cluster the categories and pull out the various references each woman had made into a series of tables or charts. In many instances I was able to identify patterns; in some cases, on closer observation, there did not seem to be anything there. This process of repeated comparison enabled me to draw some preliminary conclusions as to what the experiences of the participants had been and what they have found these experiences to mean.

At the same time that I was pulling out and assembling the various categories of information, I wrote (or pulled together from their interviews) a life history of each participant. As categories of analysis and themes had emerged from the data, I realized that each woman had structured her story around an individual theme. These themes then were the basis of each individual story.

These preliminary conclusions were presented to the participants for their reactions and their responses as noted above. This process served as a check on their assessment of the validity of my conclusions as well as providing additional data particularly on the level of activism and political analysis among the women. I found I needed to modify my first understandings of their interest in social change.

The final step of analysis was to organize the various findings into four broad areas and then to re-examine the findings in light of the research question in order to draw conclusions and implications. At the end of this process I have not proved or disproved any theories, but I hope that new understandings have been reached both by the participants and myself. These understandings may impact our thinking and theorizing about our lives and may also serve to increase the understanding of others.

Bias Statement

I have been interested in social change in Appalachia since I was an undergraduate. Over the past 25 years I have been involved in various ways in various projects in the Appalachian region. I worked with the student organization Appalachian Volunteers, organizing and running summer recreation programs for children. I was on the staff and then board of the Council of Southern Mountains for several years. I was active in the anti-strip mining movement. For the past 10 years I have been a member of the community development organization in the community where I live. I have served on the board of the organization and been involved in the education program as a volunteer tutor and a community college adjunct faculty member teaching local classes. As I taught adults and learned of popular education practiced in Latin America, I began to see connections between my concerns about and interest in education and the community work going on in Appalachia.

I continue my work with Appalachian community organizations in the work I do with colleagues at the Center for Literacy Studies. We work with ten community organizations including the two that are the sites for this study. This work has made access to the organizations easier, although I had known people in both organizations before working at the center. While I am aware that my familiarity with the groups means I will

need to check my findings both with participants and colleagues, I believe on the whole I have better data because I am known and know the contexts of the organizations.

Reliability and Validity

In examining the reliability of this study, the extent to which it can be replicated, I look at both external and internal reliability as discussed by Goetz and LeCompte (1984). They suggest that external reliability, whether other researchers would generate similar results in similar settings, in this type of study is particularly difficult (or perhaps impossible). The phenomena are complex and the interaction of researcher and participant are not replicable. I have attempted to make clear my approaches to the five points that Goetz and LeCompte indicate enhance the reliability of ethnographic research: the researcher's status position, informant choice, the social context, analytic constructs, and methods of data collection and analysis.

Internal reliability, whether multiple observers within the study would agree, can be increased by employing five strategies (Goetz & LeCompte): low-inference descriptors, multiple researchers, participant assistants, peer examination, and mechanical recording of data. This study is based on mechanically recorded interviews, and verbatim quotes are used throughout the report. The participants and others at the centers, while neither assistants or researchers, were involved in the research process. The staff at both centers reviewed for accuracy, the part of this report that described their centers and communities. The seven participants responded to preliminary findings and their individual life stories. My husband, Rich Kirby, who shares much of my experience teaching and in community organizations, and my friend and colleague at the Center for Literacy Studies, Connie White, served as a kind of peer review team serving to at least increase the internal reliability.

While it is difficult to establish reliability in qualitative studies, validity is a major strength (Goetz & LeCompte). Several factors lead me to have confidence in the validity of this study, that what is presented is an authentic representation. This research was conducted over a period of two years during which time I had repeated contact with participants in the sites. There were two sites and seven participants, which does not mean that this study can be generalized even to women working in other similar organizations, but does increase its usefulness. Triangulation of data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes (Lather, 1986) further strengthens the validity of the study, as did checking my preliminary results with the participants and attempting to always be aware of my own biases and assumptions as I analyzed the data.

Lather proposes that in critical feminist research one must pay attention to catalytic validity (Brown & Tandon, 1978; Reason & Rowan, 1981), "...the degree to which the research process re-orients, focusses, and energizes participants" (Lather, 1986, p. 67). Determining the catalytic validity of this study might well involve more research, but from the responses of some of the participants to telling their stories and from the two group interviews, which both included talk about future work that each group might undertake, I believe there is at least some indication of re-focussing and energizing of the participants. And the study has certainly had catalytic validity for me.

CHAPTER 4

THE COMMUNITIES AND THE CENTERS

The data for this dissertation come from the lives of seven women. Their stories, what they have learned as adults, is the core of the work. But as in any study using ethnographic methods, understanding the context is critical. This may be particularly true when the context is a region somewhat distinct and isolated from the mainstream. While they never referred to themselves as Appalachian, the women who participated in this study did talk about being from "the mountains." In a later section I present their observations on how that has made a difference in their lives, their impressions of what they have seen of other parts of the United States, and how they name and understand the region's problems. Here I examine briefly the regional context and then describe the communities and community centers that are the setting for this study. Some material in the following section and in the Two Sisters section beginning on page 49 was previously reported in *Alpha 94: Literacy and Cultural Development Strategies in Rural Areas,* edited by Jean-Paul Hautecoeur (1994). The chapter ends with a description of the participants as a group.

Southwest Virginia

Virginia is a long state, more that four hundred miles from Washington, D.C., or Norfolk to the Cumberland Gap. In most parts of the state, coming to Roanoke or Blacksburg is coming to southwest Virginia. But the sites for this study, Lee City and Hamilton County, are another one hundred and fifty miles west, west of West Virginia,

nearly due south of Detroit. The women in this study live closer to the state capitals of Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio, Georgia, and North and South Carolina than to Richmond. And the seven counties which border Kentucky and Tennessee in the "far" southwest are different from, isolated from the rest of Virginia by more than distance. These are the coal counties, counties where as much as 60% of the surface land and nearly all the mineral resources are owned by outside corporations (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, 1981). From these counties billions of dollars worth of coal have been mined. Yet this region of immense wealth is one of the poorest in the state, impoverished educationally, in social services, in housing as in income (Kraybill, Johnson, & Deaton, 1987). Official unemployment runs at over 12%, and per capita income is $7,837 in one county and $8,067 in the other (1990 census). Population in both counties is falling as people move away to look for jobs.

Quality of life is impacted in various ways by the economic situation of the region. In a 1987 study looking at Virginia's coal counties, Kraybill, Johnson, and Deaton concluded that quality of life in these seven counties was "below the state average in most respects" (p. 1). Per capita income in these counties was 68% of the rest of the state. Residents of the coal counties had two-thirds more poverty than the rest of the state, were 61% more dependent on transfer income, were two and a half times more likely to be disabled, and were three times more likely to live in mobile homes. While the suicide rate was 50% higher, the crime rate was only 29% of that of the state as a whole.

Education is impacted by the economy. Kraybill, Johnson and Deaton (1987) compared the seven Appalachian coal counties of Virginia with state wide educational accomplishments. Table 1 presents some of their findings, which give an indication of the situation of education in the region. In 1990 in the two counties that are the sites for this study the number of adults with a high school diploma had increased to nearly 50%, while the percentage with college degrees remained virtually the same.

Unemployment rate in these two counties regularly exceeds 12%. Actual joblessness can be assumed to be much higher. The region has been dependent on coal mining, and the profits from the mines were rarely reinvested locally. A weak economic base and limited infrastructure has made the current situation desperate. Large mines are either closing altogether or converting to highly mechanized "long-wall" systems that require few employees. Small tracts of minerals are leased to marginal operators who have ignored safety laws and paid poorly (Yarrow, 1990). While most of the rest of the country is recovering economically, "Virginia faces an endless slump" (Headline, *Mountain Eagle,* June 8, 1994).

Table 1: Education in Virginia's Coal Counties

Educational Indicator 1980	Virginia	Coal Counties
Adults with high school diploma	62.4%	38.3%
People with 4+ years college	19.1%	6.3%
Drop-out rate, grades 8 - 12	5.3%	6.3%
H.S. grads. going to college	52.8%	38.7%

But while the people of the coal counties have been economically impoverished, they have maintained a rich heritage. Despite the ravages of the mining industry on the environment, the region maintains much of its natural beauty. The hills are forested; at least some of the major rivers remain relatively unpolluted; the mountains are more a refuge than a barrier. Southwest Virginia has a rich musical tradition and was home to many of the pioneers of traditional country music including the Carter family, Jim and Jesse, and Ralph and Carter Stanley. Traditional crafts--quilting, wood carving, gardening, and canning--are still a part of many people's everyday life. As we hear later from the women in this study, this is home, a place few want to leave.

The participants are active volunteers in two community centers and live near the centers. Both centers were founded in the 1970s with the support of religious workers who moved to the community as part of their ministry. The centers are not religious organizations and are not affiliated with any particular denomination. However they do receive occasional financial support from congregations from outside the region, host church volunteers, and religious workers continue to be involved in center activities. The leadership these workers provide is discussed in Chapter 6.

The following sections will describe Lee City and the Lee City Community Center and then look more closely at the Two Sisters Center in Hamilton County. These and other local place names are fictitious as are all person's names.

Lee City--A Community in Action

Founded around the turn of the century as the coal reserves of the region were being bought up and mines opened, Lee City was incorporated in 1912. The booming independent town was surrounded by smaller coal camps, communities built and owned by the coal companies. At one point the mines around Lee City employed more than 5,000 men. Susie, one of the study participants, told how her mother remembered Lee City:

> *She was talking about the town, you know how the town used to look. She was talking about it was unbelievable. They had like 20 some different businesses around here, and dance halls and movie theaters, street lights. And you know I thought, "Well gosh, I can't believe that!"*

> *I'd sit and I'd listen to my mom talk about [Lee City] town and I've seen some old pictures you know, back in olden days. And people come into this town now*

wouldn't believe that it was the same town. I mean they was street lights, they was theaters, they was dance halls, they was bars, they was barber shops, they was... I mean anything you could think of was all right here! And now you look at it, we got one, one business operation as far as grocery store. And then just the community center and the clinic and the post office and a little old waterhouse. And the sewing factory, it just got started. But I would love to see the town get built back up the way that it used to be. I mean just by looking at the pictures. I didn't know anything about those things, but you know, I would just like to see southwest Virginia just build up just as big as...North Carolina, you know.

Beginning in the 1950s, mechanization in the mines and a saturated coal market devastated the town. Today there are only a few hundred people in town and one or two businesses.

Lee City is on a dead end road. People say that you have to want to come to get there; nobody passes through. The town is in a narrow valley with a creek on one side and the railroad on the other. The "downtown" consists of a block or two of brick buildings including the community center, a sewing factory, a restaurant, the post office, and the union hall where the United Mine Workers local has its meetings. A new clinic building is at the upper end, the elementary school at the lower end. Both above and below town are houses, some churches, and other little towns. Former coal camps go on up the creek until the road ends at a mine. One small grocery store sells milk, bread, and snacks. The restaurant is only open for lunch when the elderly owner feels well enough to cook. To buy gasoline you must drive back to the junction with the highway. Grocery stores, clothing stores, the library, and the county's two fast food chains are in a town 10 miles away. The school bus is the only "public" transportation.

The town is hard hit, but the people who live here have worked and continue to work to save their community. By working together in a variety of configurations the town

has gotten access to public money and with a lot of their own efforts have kept the community alive. In 1976, a community clinic was built using money raised through bake sales, dances, and door-to-door solicitation. Today the clinic is controlled by a community board, and two doctors and other staff see several thousand patients a year. The Lee City Development Authority works with the state and federal government economic development efforts and initiated the town's rehabilitation of dozens of houses, the removal of several burnt-out buildings in the middle of town and the development of parking lot. A sewing factory is owned by Lee City Enterprises, a for-profit subsidiary of the non-profit Development Authority. The operation is leased to a private operator who hires 20 to 30 people.

The town also has a volunteer fire department, a water authority and an active town government. The town and the development authority share an office on the second floor of the former jail, a concrete block building next to the creek. I conducted several interviews in this office. The rooms are paneled and warm. There are various items on the wall including plans for the redevelopment projects. A drawing over the copier appears to be a young pretty woman from one direction and when turned upside down is an old tired woman. The captions reads "Before Marriage" and "After Marriage."

The Community Center

Started in the mid 1970s as a site for educational, recreational, and other programs, the Lee City Community Center is in an old store building in the middle of town. The space has been painted and furnished with used furniture, including tables and chairs for the adult education and community college classes that meet here, some comfortable lounge chairs, and shelves along the side for books. There is a small kitchen in the back. The back wall is decorated with a painted mural of mountains. A new Even Start family literacy

program has provided eight computers to the center.

A room for used clothing sales has been walled off from the main room. These clothes come from churches outside the mountains. The proceeds from the clothing sales are used for the center's operating expenses, which run approximately $150 a month for lights, water, the phone, and janitors. The center is used for various community functions as well and rent is charged for some--$5.00 for private parties and showers and $15.00 for fund raisers. CLEAN, an environmental group, meets here, and senior citizens hold various functions at the center. The staff who maintain the building and conduct clothing sales and other events are all volunteers. The part-time adult education teacher who is an active center board member is paid by the county schools. She also serves as the town manager.

The Lee City Community Center is the social center for the many community development activities occurring in Lee City. It seems to be the point of entry for people needing assistance of various kinds--food, clothing, emergency help, education. As we will see later, people who come for help often stay to help. In the next section we look more closely at the workings of the other community center.

The Two Sisters Center

"Me and my wife have been in this a year and a half and never [found] anything bad in it." This is how one man talked about the Two Sisters Community Center and the Walker River Community Development Commission. The center is in Hamilton County, one of the poorest and most isolated in Virginia. The terrain is rugged with long ridges and narrow valleys and hollows. More than half of the land is owned by the outside coal corporations which dominate the economy. Official unemployment runs around 15%, reduced from 20.2% in 1985 by out -migration. Nearly 26% of families lived below the

Federal poverty level in 1989. There are only a few miles of four-lane highway in the county, and the nearest college is an hour's drive. The county seat and largest town has a population of 1542 in a county of 17,620 people.

While Lee City is an incorporated town, the Two Sisters Center serves a series of little communities in the eastern half of Hamilton County. The Two Sisters Community Center is in a large one-story block building squeezed between the road and the river. There is enough room in front to park a row of cars; in the back is a stretch of weeds before the river bank. From this building the Walker River Community Development Commission operates its programs. The double glass front door opens into a large light room with a tile floor and painted walls. Tables and folding chairs are rearranged in the room according to what activity is occurring. Off to the left are four smaller rooms, a windowless office, women's and men's restrooms and a storage room. To the right is narrower extension of the main room with a kitchen on the end; through the kitchen is another office and more storage.

The walls of the main room are decorated with photographs and seasonal decorations. Hand lettered signs encourage good behavior and announce center activities:

> *Intoxicated persons will not be allowed to participate in Center activities. Disruptive or destructive behavior will not be tolerated. Please refrain from using profanity or abusive language .*
>
> *Thank you for your support and cooperation in helping us maintain a peaceful atmosphere of the center. We value your participation in center activity.*

Collages of snapshots on poster board document center activities. There are group photos of center staff. The largest photographs are of the two women for whom the center is

named, a missionary who came to the area in 1915 and a women miner who was active in the community before she was killed in a mine explosion.

Activities at the Center

The center is the location for many varied activities. Some like parties and baby showers are held by people who rent the building for the occasion. Some are special events sponsored by the center, for example a vigil held on the eve of the war in the Persian Gulf and an effort of many months providing meals for miners active in a long strike. However, most of the activities are part of the development commission's efforts to meet the needs of the people in their communities. These ongoing efforts include SHARE (a food program), GED classes, a pre-school, aerobics classes, Saturday dances, and educational/volunteer activities for groups of college students. Two women, Edith and Martha, work part time as staff members, and there are many volunteers.

SHARE

SHARE is a national effort to distribute low-cost food and encourage community service. The food is obtained regionally and is distributed by local groups. The center takes part in SHARE and distributes food once a month. Anyone can buy a "share" for $13.40 for which they receive $30-$40 worth of food. The center is responsible for collecting the money or food stamps, ordering the shares, arranging for the food to be picked up at a warehouse, and handling distribution.

I helped with a SHARE distribution in February, 1992. I arrived at the center at 9:30 on a sunny Saturday morning. There were about 10 cars parked in front, and four or five boys were running around playing. Inside the tables were arranged in a square open at one corner with two tables on a side. Five men and 15 or 20 women were standing around

talking and waiting for the food to arrive. Clara and Helen were sitting at a table to one side signing people up for the next month and handing out tickets for this month. A jar was on the table for people who wanted to donate extra to help cover the gas costs of bringing the food over fifty miles from the warehouse. The center's distribution system was well thought out and worked smoothly. It seemed to be a combination of official forms and their own ideas. Each person got a bright yellow tag for each share they had bought and these tags were pinned on their shirts. Several people were already wearing the tags.

A little after 10:00 Martha returned from the warehouse with the food. Men and boys from a local church and from the center unloaded the food while the women told them where to put it. The food was distributed around the tables and one person gave out each item. The share this month included five pounds of chicken legs, a pound of ground turkey, a pound of chicken patties, a pound of beef "for fajitas," two pounds of onions, four pounds of potatoes, three pounds of apples, six oranges, a head of broccoli, a pound of pinto beans ("belly bangers" Clara called them), a head of cabbage and lettuce, a frozen bean casserole, two pounds of sweet potatoes, and a cake. This day 50 people picked up 90 units or shares.

For each unit or share someone walked around the tables with a box or bag or laundry basket and was given each item. After they got the last item they turned in their ticket. If they had bought more than one unit, they went around again. People helped each other, going around for the ones working or for older people. The distribution started at 10:30 and by 11:00 the 90 shares were distributed. After all the shares were distributed, five or six people from the center cleaned up and rearranged the tables and chairs to get ready for the dance that night.

As people distributed the food and went through the line there was a lot of visiting. Martha later told me she thought people volunteered to help because they liked to visit. The

talk I heard covered many topics: the war, quilt making, fishing, why I was there. Various people talked about the food and what they did with the more unusual items, for example boiling the fajita beef to make gravy for sandwiches.

The SHARE distribution seems to help people stretch their food money, gives people a chance to visit, and is a way to involve people in the work of the center. It is a fair amount of work; but at least here, the work is well-organized and "shared."

The Pre-School

The pre-school is the most ambitious project run by the WRDC. It has been in operation for eight years. The program is run by Edith with the help of volunteers, primarily mothers of the children in the program. A van picks up the children each morning and brings them to the center. They arrive around 9:30 and stay until 12:30. The day I visited there were eight children and three mothers.

The pre-school meets in a little frame house next to the center. The house is used for various things including a bunkhouse for visiting volunteers. But it is set up as a pre-school with a low table and benches for the children, a toy room, and a bathroom with low fixtures. The walls are covered with posters and charts, some commercial, most hand made. The rooms are bright and cheerful, but quite small. The toy room has carpet and contains an array of toys, many of which were probably donated. The furniture looks handed down as well, except for benches around the walls, which serve as seats and storage.

The pre-school program is designed to prepare the children for school by teaching them academic skills including saying and recognizing the alphabet and the numbers from one to ten and naming and recognizing body parts and colors. They are taught to follow directions and behave in a structured classroom setting. The day is scheduled without a lot of free play. The children are encouraged to write the letters and their names and to use

scissors, but there does not seem to be much art or science. The children's work, which was displayed in the room, were worksheets to match letters or numbers and their colored pages from a Ninja Turtle coloring book.

The day I observed started with free play until everyone arrived. Some children worked puzzles or colored, and some watched a Superman video on television. Several children talked to me. At about 10:00 the TV was turned off and one mother called, "Young'uns, come to the table." The children sat around the low table, and the three mothers sat near. One asked, "What do you want to sing?" and they replied, "If You're Happy and You Know It." They stood and sang the song with the various gestures, clapping their hands, stomping their feet, and so forth. Next they sang "Jesus Loves Me" and two more religious songs. Edith, who had been delayed, came in during the singing.

After they sang and had orange juice, the children moved their chairs into a semi-circle around a bench under the "Sharing Calendar." Edith sat on the bench and called the roll. She then conducted a lesson that involved her asking questions of the group or individual children. First she asked what month it was and they answered with some prompting. Then she held up cards and asked "Who knows what color this is?" One of the children who answered correctly put the card into a pocket in the calendar. Edith prompted, "Can you say thank you to _____?" and they did. When a child answered "purple" to a pink card, Edith said "Shame on you," but then gave her several more opportunities to answer correctly. After colors, the children named the days of the week and the numbers. During sharing time, four children who had brought toys sat on the bench one at a time while Edith asked questions about the toy -- "What is it? What color is it? How many wheels does it have?"

After sharing time the children returned to the table and said the alphabet while a mother pointed at each letter on a poster. They then had art, which consisted of coloring printed pictures labeled "Paul in Prison." The picture was of the apostle Paul, but one child

thought it was Jesus. There was no discussion of the picture. Each child's name and the date were written on the paper. A boy who scribbled was given another sheet to do better. Around 11:00 the children, who were still coloring or working puzzles, were told to wash their hands and then sit back at the table for lunch. They did a finger play while they waited for Edith to bring the food from the kitchen in the basement. They had beef stew, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and milk served by the mothers. The adults all ate, too. The children brought their dishes to the adults and then played or watched television while the parents met with the teacher. They sometimes have individual lessons after lunch.

The parents' meeting primarily focused on the upcoming graduation and how to pay for it. There was also some discussion of some special parties for the children and volunteers. The graduation, held every year in May, is an important event with trophies for the children for various accomplishments--for valedictorian, salutatorian, most creative, most likely to succeed, for participation and for improvement. The trophies this year cost $216 and the money was being raised from donations, a raffle of a quilt, and cakewalks at the center dances. There was discussion of a fund-raising roadblock when the weather was warmer. There was some controversy about the trophies, possibly about who got which one, but it seemed to be settled without specific discussion.

GED Classes

The GED classes held at the center are taught by an Adult Basic Education teacher paid by the county. The class meets twice a week for three hours and has seven or eight students. The class seemed entirely focused on the GED test. Each student worked independently in a GED preparation book. Students who were not at that level worked with the teachers in children's textbooks. I observed no group instruction and no attempt to create group feeling, for example by introducing the new student who came that day. At the same time the students were treated respectfully and seemed to feel comfortable. Three

students were involved in other activities at the center, two as active volunteers and the other as a pre-school mother. Two others only learned about the center from attending classes and were not involved in other center activities. At break time the students talked and visited some, but quickly got back to work.

In addition to the GED class, adult reading instruction is provided by one of the nuns and other tutors trained in the Laubach method. Tutoring is done privately in another building. Some students do both, having individual tutoring in reading and working in class on math. In neither of these programs does the curriculum seem integrated with the rest of the center's work.

Other community centers in southwest Virginia hold community college classes, but Walker River has only done this once or twice. They explained that most people aren't ready for college classes yet, but that they will hold them when there is a demand.

The center is involved in another kind of educational work through their student volunteer program. During summer and school holidays groups of high school and college students from outside the area come and stay at the center and do volunteer work in the community, for example repairing houses. While this is helpful to the community, it is probably even more valuable to the students who get the opportunity to visit and learn from people in the community.

Other Activities

On most Saturday nights the center hosts dances, which are fund-raising events for their work and provide recreation. Local bands, both bluegrass and rock, play and the tables are set up like a club. Admission is around $5.00, depending on the band. Aerobics classes for women meet on Thursday nights. Bible school is held in the summer. The center also hosts many visitors interested in their work.

The Strike

While most of what happens at the center is directly related to the immediate needs of the community, there is also involvement in issues beyond those on the river. In 1989 southwest Virginia was the scene of a long, bitter strike when the United Mine Workers struck the Pittston Coal Company. The struggle involved many people including miners and their families and other supporters, both local and from outside. The center is located near many of the Pittston mines and became the site of a support center for the miners. The strikers used the center as a place to meet and rest. Hundreds of meals were served every day and the center was both a haven and a source of support for the strike. The effects of this involvement continued after the strike was over. This is discussed in the section on the women of the center.

A Vigil

In response to the Gulf War the center helped sponsor and was the site for a forum on the war. A vigil was held afterwards. And while the war was occurring far away, the impact was quite local as Edith's son was one of the many people from the mountains who were sent to the gulf.

The event, held on a snowy evening in February, was organized by southwest Virginia members of the Appalachian Development Projects Committee (ADPC) of groups funded by the Commission on Religion in Appalachia. The program began with a panel discussion by ADPC members on the reasons for the war and the effects both immediate and long term and ended with a vigil held inside because of the weather.

About 20 people sat in rows facing the panel members. After a welcome by Martha from the center the program was moderated by a women from a women's organization in a nearby county. Edith was on the panel along with another woman, a man, and his teenage daughter. The audience, many of whom were from the religious community asked

questions and had comments. There was support for the people who were fighting as individuals. "I've never heard the boys saying we're doing the right thing, only doing what we had to do." And there was recognition that being in the service or the National Guard was a decision based on economics for most. "There's equal opportunity in the military." But in general people thought it was a war for oil and were opposed to it and pained by it.

After the forum, refreshments were served--chips, cookies, vegetables, coffee, and pop. Before the vigil began, a few people left. The rest stood in a circle in candlelight. Several people took turns reading from a statement on the war written by ADPC members. An older woman from the Center prayed in a traditional style. The group then sang "This Little Light of Mine" and "We Shall Overcome." By the end several women were in tears.

The Board Meeting

The development commission is governed by a Board of Directors, which meets monthly. I attended a meeting in March. There was not a quorum, but the group met to talk and plan even though no official business could be conducted.

The meeting was held in the afternoon in the large room with people sitting around a U of three tables. Present were five board members; two staff members; and three "resource" people, two nuns and a priest. When I came in Clara told me to get a seat at the table with them. The agenda for the meeting was written on newsprint and placed where all could see. The topics to be covered included:

-Minutes and a treasurer's report

-Staff reports on the pre-school program and on building maintenance

- Old business including the dance schedule and a report on college groups coming spring break

-New business including plans for a visiting church group, a court case arising

from trouble at a dance, use of a house owned by the commission, and requests for use of the center.

The meeting was conducted by the president, Betsy, a women who has been involved in community as well as union and political activities for many years. She did not always follow strict parliamentary procedure, but seemed concerned that everyone got a chance to speak. The meeting was cordial and well-organized. At one point when the group was bogged down on a topic, Clara turned over a page of the agenda as if to move the meeting along. The meeting began with a reading of the minutes and treasurer's report. This included a new form, which Clara, the treasurer, had developed to more clearly show on which projects money had been spent. There were 21 different categories. She had also prepared a more standard income/expense form.

The meeting followed the prepared agenda fairly well. There was some discussion about distribution of free SHARE food by the center following a question. The pre-school report concentrated on preparation and financing of the graduation program. A report on upcoming student visitors was followed by a discussion of a supper to meet a church group that had supported the center. Clara teasingly warned Edith to be on her best behavior to which she replied, "What we do, we do. They can like it or not." Board members were encouraged to go to court in a case where apparently a man had been abusive at a dance. Betsy volunteered and pointed out that it was important that the case not be between the man and Martha but that all the center be involved. There was also discussion of fixing up a rental house the group owns and planning for committee meetings.

Quite a bit of time was spent in discussion of two requests for use of the center and whether this group could decide without a quorum present. A shelter for battered women wanted to use the center for a fund-raising dance. Edith was concerned that some of the people involved "like to drink," although Betsy stated that "If they can get one person out where it's safe, it's worth it." Another request came from a local deputy sheriff who

wanted to use the center for martial arts classes. The discussion centered on how much to charge, and seemed to hinge on how much he was charging students. There was recognition that it made sense to try to work with the sheriff's department if possible. It was not clear to me if decisions were made in these cases or if they were deferred. The meeting ended as people came in for aerobics classes.

I have described briefly some of the more structured activities that take place at The Two Sisters Center. There is also a lot of sitting around and visiting as well as the day-to-day work of running the office and maintaining the building. In all these activities people work together, supporting each other, and attempting to meet the needs of their community. We will look more closely at how the individual women who participated in this study are involved in Chapter Six.

The Women in the Study

While I talked to many people at Lee City and Two Sisters, seven women participated directly in this study. These are the women whose life stories are told in the next chapter. Here I want to briefly present them as a group. Elaine, Susie, and Mary are from Lee City; Helen, Gloria, Karen, and her daughter Tina are from Two Sisters. All the women are active in work at their community centers, but they are not the most prominent members. They were all born in southwest Virginia and have lived there most of their lives. Table 2 summarizes demographic information about their lives. In the next chapter they tell their stories.

Table 2: The women in the study

	Elaine	Susie	Mary	Helen	Gloria	Tina	Karen
Age, 1993	40	29	23	50	40+	22	40
# of siblings	2 sisters	3 sisters 3 brothers	1 sister 2 brothers	3 sisters 3 brothers	3 sisters 4 brothers	1 brother	2 sisters 8 brothers
Father's work	miner	miner	miner	farmer, miner, road crew	miner	carpenter and mechanic	miner
Mother's work	cleaning	cleaning	factory work	house and farm	cleaning	restaurant	home maker
Education	high school, some college	high school, in college	high school, in college	10th grade	high school	high school, some college	7th grade
Father's education	1st grade	3rd or 4th	Not sure, not h.s.	7th grade	"not much"	some college	not much?
Mother's education	8th grade?	5th or 6th	high school graduate	7th grade	high school	7th grade	?
Work experience	literacy tutor, book keeper	sewing factory, book keeping	nursing home, post office, secretary,	restaurant work, store	chicken plant, furniture factory, custodian	restaurant tobacco warehouse	restaurant
Current family	divorced	divorced	never married	married	never married	divorced	married
Children	2 sons, teen age 1 daughter, teen	1 daughter, age 5	none	3 sons, married	2 sons, 1 married	1 son, age 2	1 son, age 19 1 daughter, age 22
Living with parents or grandparents		***	***		***	***	

CHAPTER 5

LIVES OF SEVEN WOMEN

This study is based on the life stories of seven women. In this chapter I present the women's lives and their stories. In these stories the women tell of their lives and speak about the things that are important to them. In the following chapter I present findings from these life stories--the themes which I have found in the data and what the women had to say about these themes. Elaine, Susie, and Mary are from Lee City. Helen, Karen, Tina, and Gloria live in Hamilton County.

I began this study because I believe that we can learn from women who are working to change their lives and communities. We live in a world of rapid change and increasing interaction between peoples and regions. Learning about each others' lives *from* each other will increase our understanding *of* each other. So while it is important to analyze the data, to pull apart and reassemble what we can learn from these life stories, it is also important to have a sense of who these women are, to hear their words. Marjorie Shostak (1989) noted this in her article on the life of a Nisa, a !Kung woman from southern Africa.

> No more elegant tool exists to describe the human condition than the personal narrative. Ordinary people living ordinary and not-so-ordinary lives weave from their memories and experiences the meaning life has for them....It is just this tension--the identifiable in endless transformation--that is the currency of personal narratives, as they reveal the complexities and paradoxes of human life. (p. 239)

As I transcribed these interviews I realized that while the women were responding to similar questions, each woman chose to build her story around a different theme. Members of the Personal Narrative Group (1989) and Heilburn (1988) had similar experiences in conducting life history interviews. While to some extent these individual themes reappear in the more general analysis, they are important here as the unique way each woman structured her story.

Elaine

Elaine was born in Lee City in 1953. Her father was a miner, and her mother cleaned houses for extra money. She has two younger sisters. When she was growing up, her family lived on land they owned "way back in the hills." While their own schooling was limited, education was important to Elaine's parents.

> *Mainly [Dad] was a coal miner. He never got an education, even though his parents, which I didn't find out till just lately...his dad had graduated high school, but he didn't care to see that his children did. And Dad never got beyond the primer, what they called the primer when they was going which was like sort of Head Start today. He never got beyond that first grade. But now my mother went to, I think she said either the tenth or the eighth grade, I'm not real sure, before she quit. So education to them has been very important, especially to my dad because he's real bitter that his own dad didn't try to help him you know go on and finish school.*

> *My mother has worked ever since I can remember. She is a housekeeper, a professional housekeeper, cleaner or keeper which ever. And I remember she used*

to go and clean people's houses to get me clothes and instead of taking money she would work for me a new school outfit to be in school with or for school clothes for me and my other sisters.

Her father's parents lived in Lee City, and so Elaine lived with them so she could attend high school more easily. Her grandparents did not get along and seemed to have fought for her attention. She tells of having to eat two dinners, one prepared by her grandmother and one by her grandfather. She also had to contend with the attentions of an uncle who "liked to play games." Her childhood memories are pretty vague, and Elaine suspects that there is a lot she is suppressing. Her last year in high school was spent in a newly consolidated school in the county seat.

I hated my last year. New school. I had all these friends, you have these certain friends you know that you develop in your high school, you just go all through high school with them. So when I got to Addison there were like I think four different classes of seniors, and not one of my friends was in the class that I was in. So I ended up going through the last year of high school by myself.

She did graduate however and went the next year to Kentucky to study nursing at a hospital in Harlan. After a year and a half in the program she quit to get married. Her husband was a miner from Harlan. Elaine described how particular he was, everything having to be kept "sparkling." If she didn't meet his demands she was abused emotionally and physically. Her life was centered in her home around his demands and caring for their three children, two boys and a girl. After 16 years she left with her three children.

It got to the point where I said either I die or either I leave. As a mother you think, "Well my children need their dad." And you get caught in that. I mean you don't love your husband no more, but you love your children and you think, "My children need their dad," cause that's what you know you grow up with. And that's what I thought . Then one day I realized that he's either gonna kill me or either I leave. And it was better off for my children to be away from him, I didn't want them growing up like he was, I had began to notice that my oldest was beginning to have some of the same personality traits that he had, and I didn't like it, and when I began realizing that I knew I just had to get out of there, regardless. So we left with the clothes on our back and went down a railroad track to a church and had a friend bring me all the way over here to Virginia.

Back in Lee City, Elaine and their children moved into a little house behind her parents. She soon became involved in the community center.

I came down here looking for clothes. And Sarah [ABE teacher and center coordinator] nabbed me and said, "We need volunteers down here. Would you like to volunteer since you don't really have anything serious, you know you don't have anything particular in mind to do at this moment. Why don't you come down here and help us some?" I mean I don't remember any specific job that she gave me to do, just in and helping and cleaning and everything.

Elaine soon got interested in the college classes that are taught at the center. She was not able to enroll at first because she had not lived in Virginia long enough to be eligible for financial aid. So she sat in on classes, and the center provided paper and pencils. When she was able to, she enrolled, first taking home health classes, which were

taught at the center and later attending classes at the college to study accounting and small business management. She also was assigned as a work study student to the center and learned how to become a literacy tutor. She continues to do that now both as a volunteer and as a part-time job while she is establishing a bookkeeping service.

For Elaine, the theme of her story is her journey toward control over her own life and her struggle for the confidence to set and meet goals. The following passages from the interviews illustrate this journey. She begins telling about the time after she left her husband.

> *As it happens my parents had a two-roomed house out behind them, and I lived in it til I could get on ADC....And I lived there awhile until I could manage paying bills and managing, you know, learning how to work with money and how to...I already had a good idea from having to work with my ex-husband because I always had to keep an account of everything I spent down on paper, and I had to account for every penny so I knew how to deal with money. But you know you have to learn how to deal living by yourself, being the sole parent. And work out problems like where, how you're gonna get your kids school clothes, things like that you have to work out. And it took me awhile and then I managed to move [to an apartment].... I wasn't getting too much, but I managed it, worked it out where I paid him a hundred twenty-five a month and paid all my utilities and then the social services gave me, let me have food stamps. And I worked from there. And I think that's about the same time I decided I wanted to get back in, go back to school. I knew that just a high school education wasn't gonna get me nothing. That's about the same time I made that decision, too.*

I had to have something in my life, I had to have a goal to work, to work toward because my ex-husband was keeping me -- I said it was like being on a roller coaster , up one day, down the next, up one day, and I had to have something for myself, a goal to work for, to accomplish something even if wasn't no more than just being able to go to class. And, and I wanted, I wanted at that time to be an accountant -- but it just didn't work out that away. And I had, like I said I went a year just setting in on classes and taking tests, and moving along with the rest of them, and without any kind of books or anything. And then as soon as I was able to I got into the classes, and registered and became a "legal student." But I accomplished that much. I set that goal -- if I get through this year and maintain a high grade level that would be one goal for me. I didn't set long term goals cause at that point in time it was just too much for me to handle. So I set short term goals and as I accomplished them I would write another goal and go from there.

I think the thing that surprised me most that I could do was that we had a girl come in here and she was working in college. At that time I was not in college. I was just in general [studies], and just in here in general. And she needed help with second grade algebra, or second year algebra, college algebra. And she was stumped. She, she's just ready to kill. And it just so happened at that time others in here couldn't work it either. And Sarah said, "Elaine ain't you had algebra? Why don't you go back there and see if you can help her." And I sort of muttered under my breath "I can't do this. What's she think I'm doing?" And I went back there and I looked at the problem and thought on it a couple of seconds and said, "This is the way you do it." And as I finally ..she had an answer sheet and pulled the answer up and pulled the problem out and it, it worked. It was right. And I go, "I'm not stupid! If I can do second year college algebra there's no way that I'm stupid!" And

it had never occurred to me because of all those years that I'd been married that I actually did have some intelligence. Cause when I worked it and nobody else could, I thought, "I'm not stupid."

In the final passage, Elaine talks about her goals now.

I still don't set real long goals, you know long term goals. I set maybe a year, a year's goal, what I'd like to be doing a year from now. I don't go beyond those years. Things change too much, the world changes too fast. And what I set for maybe three years down the road, I want something entirely different. So I set one year goals then I work toward them. And at the end of the year I see what I've accomplished and what I've not and try to figure out why I haven't accomplished it--if it was just cause I didn't have the skills that I needed or if it's just that I wasn't interested in doing it. That happens some times. But I've pretty well accomplished what I wanted to do. The only thing I set some personal goals like for the end of this year like by the end of this year I'd like to help my mother pay off my dad's truck. And the only way I can do that is if my business, if I get more and more people into my business, more clients, and to do that I've done right now all that I can do except going and making personal visits. That's, like I said my business is one of my main goals and the success of it intertwines with like helping my mother pay off her car, or dad's truck, and other things. They're all intertwined with my business. That's one reason I think life is a circle cause everything comes back to you one way or the other.

Although her life continues to be filled with conflicts and setbacks, Elaine now meets them with an increased sense of confidence and optimism.

Susie

So I had a rough life, but I'm bound and determined to make everything work out for the best.

Susie was born on the Virginia-Kentucky border in 1964. She is the fourth of seven children.

Well my dad, he used to work for the coal mines until he got hurt and then he was disabled, you know, to work. And then my mom, she always cleaned house for people. She always did a lot of house cleaning in order to buy us kids clothes, cause they was seven of us growing up at the same time. And with an income, you know, it was really just Daddy's Social Security was not enough to raise all of us. My mom got out and walked in the snow and everything to get to clean house to make money.

Susie was the only one in her family to finish high school. She read a lot as a child, and her parents encouraged her schoolwork.

I was determined to finish. I just, I just always liked school, I mean you know. Days that I missed the bus or something I'd get a taxi and go to school in a taxi. Mom would get me a taxi to send me to school. I mean I just always enjoyed going to school.

After she graduated from high school Susie considered going into the Air Force, but got married instead. She and her husband moved to Kingsport, Tennessee, where he did restaurant work. He wanted Susie to stay home, which she did. Their first child, a boy, was born prematurely. He spent seven months in the University of Tennessee hospital in Knoxville before he died. Susie lived in the Ronald McDonald House while her son was hospitalized. She went back to Kingsport, but her husband left her when she was pregnant with their second child.

Well, I was... Our main problems started I believe was when my little boy died. I had a little boy that was seven months old when he died. And then I think, you know, my marriage from then just started pulling apart. And then I got pregnant with my little girl and I had a real rough time a carrying her. And I don't know if it was just too much pressure on him to thinking that maybe we was gonna lose this one, too, or what it was, but he got mixed up with another woman...and that was it.

Susie went home to Lee City and stayed with her parents. They helped her through her pregnancy and helped her care for her daughter. During this time she was reconciled with her father, an alcoholic. She talked about this time and her memories of her father.

Yeah It's just like it's--you can't forget, but you want to forget. And you try to block it all out. And at the same time while you're blocking out the bad memories, you're also blocking out the good memories. Which me and my dad, we was never really close until after I had... well when I got pregnant with my little girl. Well when my little boy was in the hospital and stuff, Dad would come to Knoxville. Which my little boy was in the hospital seven months in Knoxville before he died.

And Daddy would come down there every now and then. Him and Mom would come down, and we sort of got a little bit close then. But then we really got close when I got pregnant with my little girl and had to move back home. And you know he was there for me. He did anything he could do for me. He was too much afraid to get out and get drunk because he was afraid something was gonna happen to me and they'd have to rush me to the hospital or something. And then after I had my little girl, she started calling him "Daddy." And that just...I mean my little girl was a big help to my dad. Because he had just about completely stopped drinking. Because he would say, "I can't , well I can't get out and get drunk because of [Susie's little girl]. I don't want her to see me that way."

I believe that my dad, he tried to make up through his grandkids what he missed out on us. You know he'd always get out and do things with the grandkids and always buy the grandkids stuff and....But you know, it don't take the hurt away from us, you know from his kids. But at least he'd show the grandkids that he did love them. And my dad hadn't been drunk for like, it'd been like three or four months. And one night he decided to get out and get on him one, and he got run over by a train. Right down below the house. He was on his way home.

Susie went to work in a local sewing factory to support her child. Soon after she started work she hurt her shoulder. The injury became worse, and after about a year and a half Susie quit work. She had not reported the injury because she was afraid of losing her job and could not receive workman's compensation.

Well...what happened was, I had just started working. And I needed the money. I mean I was a single parent having to raise a kid, getting no child support or anything. So I just didn't say anything. And I just kept on working, and kept on

working until, you know, I couldn't go back and say well you know I did it at work, because I didn't turn it in. So I just messed myself up. But you know I was afraid to say anything because I was during the training part, and I figured well they'll get rid of me. And the only thing I was thinking about was money to be able to raise my child. I toughed it out for a year and a half and then it was like I said, either quit or lose the use of my arm. So I had to quit.

Her mother, who had gotten her GED after taking classes at the community center, urged her to go back to school. Susie first considered going to classes at the center, but decided if she was going to go to school, she might as well get a degree and so enrolled on campus.

Then after I quit Mom kept saying, "Why don't you go to school? Why don't you take some classes up at the community center?" And I kept saying, "Mom, I can't handle that." Which you know, I mean I always wanted to go college, too. And then I thought, well, this is an opportunity of a lifetime. So I went to [the college] and got registered and started going. This makes my third year.

She studied accounting and finished in May, 1994.

The story Susie told was of her efforts to gain the confidence and skills she needed to take care of herself and her daughter, a theme similar to Elaine's. But Susie's story includes a strong need to establish for herself a sense of her own worth. As a child she had had to defend her interest in school, and as an adult she has felt the need to prove her worth to her family.

My brothers and sisters they used to get mad at me cause like in the wintertime I wouldn't get out and play in the snow or anything. I'd always stay in the house with my nose in a book and they'd get so mad. It's paid off. I mean I did finish high school, and now I'm going to college. I'm trying to better myself.

Her early dreams were side-tracked by marriage.

Well my big plans really when I was in high school was I wanted to go into the Air Force. It was just something that I always had my mind set on doing. Cause I thought about going into the Army. Well I had two brothers, they both served, my two oldest brothers both served. One served six years in the Army and one served three. And I thought maybe going in that direction, but then I thought, "No, I'd rather go into the Air Force." I would like to have been a pilot. I'd like to have drove those big planes. Which I had went and took two of the tests and I only lacked one more to complete, to go in and do it, but then...I decided, "No, I want to get married, " so....

She spoke of low self-esteem and negative attitudes and of finding the energy and courage to stay in school and strike out on her own.

[I have lived at home] five years. But which I worked a year out of that . And I said it made me feel so good about myself. You know to be out and work. Because, I guess it's where, Dad, you know, the way he drunk and everything, he never give us no compliments on nothing, you know. "I'm proud of you for doing this or doing that." And I guess that's where my negative attitude sort of came in.

Low self-esteem, you know. And then, when I was married, you know, it was the same thing from my husband.

That's like when I started working for Gertrude over here at the store. And the first day I went in for a job interview, you know, Mom was there. And which it was just an informal interview. I just walked in the store and we got talking one day. And she asked me how fast was I to catch on to things. I said, "Well you know, I can catch on to things pretty fast." It's like it didn't take me no time to catch on to the cash register. But Mom she said, "I can tell you, out of seven kids she is the smartest one." And I mean I liked to died. You know I thought, "Well Mom." It made me feel so good because it's like I never heard her say anything like that and it's like I couldn't believe it.

Yeah and then like I said, my ex-husband, he was always, you know, when he got ready to leave, you know it was just like--"You'll never amount to nothing." You know and everything and I guess it's just drove in. Sometimes I get the thought "Well maybe you won't 'mount to nothing." Then, "Well I'm gonna try." Anyway...But I believe I can do it if I just set my mind to it.

When she went back to school she continued to struggle to maintain her self-worth. She was helped by her mother and other women from the center where she was employed in the summers and also volunteered and by her concern for her daughter.

I really felt a few times like just, just quitting. Just giving it up because it was so hard. And I'd get depressed, which I still do. But I've talked to Elaine quite a bit. You know, she'll say, "You stay in there Susie. You go on. You go get it!"

Which that has really helped. And plus my mom. My mom has been... which she's the one that got me going in the first place and you know I feel like, "Well, I'm just going to quit," And Mom'll say, "Look how much time you've already put in up there. You better go on, you better finish." Then the more I think about quitting, I look at my little girl and I think, "Well gosh. What is she gonna do? How am I gonna raise her if I quit?" So that just keeps me pushing, keeps me going. Yeah, cause I know I can't quit because I know it's gonna be me and me alone that's gonna have to raise her. She's my responsibility I look at it you know. She's my responsibility so....

I guess it's just seeing Mom have to go through all the trouble she had to go through with. You know getting out and scrubbing floors and cleaning houses and cooking for people and doing their what I call dirty work. There's just no way that I wanted to be like that.

I try. I mean there's times that I feel like just giving up now. It's just, "Give it up and forget about it," But you can't do it. You want to make anything out of your life, you got to keep going.

When she finished school Susie's goals meant facing another challenge.

Yep, I'm gone. I got to. I gotta get away for awhile, if it's just for awhile. I've gotta get away for awhile. I need to get out on my own and prove some things to myself, plus to my family. "You're not gonna do nothing. You're the only one that graduated out of seven kids, but yet you're the only one that didn't have a job,"

back at that time, you know. And it was just....I said I'm gonna prove them all wrong. If it's the last thing I do!

I mean there's no jobs around here. I mean you can't, a single parent can't make it around here. You're either living off of welfare or else you're living with your mom and, and....Because I'm just gonna go where the jobs you know is more, the job market is more higher, you know. That maybe I can get a good job to be able to support my child. And to give her things that I didn't have when I was growing up--a lot of things. The most important thing would be love. And then, I want her to have a stable home. I don't want her to have to be drug from here to there. I want her to have a stable home. And I'd like her to have clothes. I've always had to wear hand-me-downs from my other sister or where people'd give us clothes and stuff like that.

I'm just scared that I can't make it. It's just, I don't know, I guess it's where I've lived around here and you know. I hate to leave my family. And I'm just... I guess when you're raised up in a little community like this you're just scared to get out into a bigger place. I mean, you know the crime rate is so high in other areas whereas here in these surrounding counties, [this] county and around here, I mean your kids can get out in the yard. They can play. It's not like living in a city where you watch television, you hear this'n's getting kidnapped or this guy's went crazy and he's out on the street and he's killing kids and you know or killing people. I mean a place, the surrounding areas around here is a great place to raise a family. If only the job market, if only they was jobs here that you would be able to support the kids that you've got!

I said you know I feel like if I had gone out of here when I was younger that, then maybe I wouldn't be so scared to leave....But it's like being here all these years then all of a sudden making this big change in my life. But I got my goals set and I'm gonna work toward them. And I'm gonna accomplish them one way or the other. If it kills me or not, I'm gonna get up there. I'm tired of being down.

She has moved to North Carolina both for her financial well-being and for her sense of self worth.

Mary

Mary is the youngest woman in the Lee City group. She lives with her grandparents in Lee City where she works part time in the post office and as a work study student with the development authority. She helps her grandparents who are in poor health and spends as much time as she can with her two-year-old nephew. During the winter I interviewed her, she and her grandparents were caring for a four-year-old cousin whose parents were in jail. She also attends the local community college. She is on the community center board and volunteers there when she can.

Born in Addison, the county seat, in 1970, Mary has two older brothers and a younger sister. Her dad was a miner and an alcoholic who abused her mother. When Mary was five, Mary's mother left her husband and moved with her children to a trailer next door to her parents in Lee City. This is where Mary grew up. Her mother worked in a factory in the county seat, and her grandparents helped raise her and her brothers and sister. Her mother has now remarried and lives nearby on a tobacco farm.

I asked Mary about the good and bad times growing up. She remembered:

Good times,...well, well there was some. My mother worked hard. I mean it was a minimum wage job raising four children. She paid for her trailer, and we didn't have a lot of stuff all the time. We got clothes for school clothes. We worked summers when we got old enough and each, my oldest brother worked two summers and bought everyone's school clothes. And then my middle brother did the same and I did the same and then my sister did the same. So we helped buy our school clothes.

Christmases were fun. We didn't have a lot, but we're just not the type you know...we like being together than you know placing a lot on the value of what we get. But we used to sleigh ride a lot. We always had sleigh riding. And played soft ball, we always were involved in sports--basketball, softball, Brownies, and Cub Scouts. My mom always made sure we got to do stuff like that. Going to football games. We stayed, she worked night shift for 10 of those years so the only time we got to see her was on weekends, because we didn't get home from school 'til 3:30. She had to go to be at work at three and she got home at midnight so we were already asleep. And we didn't wake her when we got up to go to school at 6:30 so. I miss that; we didn't have a lot of time with her, but we--it brought us all closer to our grandparents.

They're just like second parents to us. They'll say, my grandfather will say, he'll want to me do something, he'll say, "Well, go tell your mom to do this," meaning my grandmother. And everybody in this community, they'll say, "How's your dad, today?" They mean my grandfather.

So and bad times was, my father was violent. Two or three, we had a lot of problems out of him. He would try to break in on us and kill my mother, pull guns on her. He had shot her before, but I don't remember that. He shot her in the foot. She lived like that for maybe three or four years and then she just, when she got the

chance to leave, she did. I mean people say why do you stay in stuff like that, and I even asked "Well why did you stay?" I mean but she did what she could for us and then when my grandfather, he got his black lung come through, she knew he could help us then. So we moved up to be with them.

And we've been there just, well, I've been there. I stay there with them. They don't like being by theirself and my aunts, they all have big families, real big family. So they're off with their children and stuff, so I'm always there with them. I don't like leaving them by theirself. I'm afraid my grandmother'll fall or something'll happen to my grandfather. Cause he has a heart problem. He had, a year ago in August he had two heart surgeries and a year and a week later he found out he had cancer. So we just all take turns staying with them.

Course I stay at home all the time, just about, if I'm not at work or at school. But I just, I like, I stay in. I go places, but like most teenagers--well I couldn't say I'm a teenager. I'll be 23 next month. Most teenagers and stuff get out and go to parties and you know run around and do what they want and you know, run the roads and stuff. But we never did. My mother didn't allow any excuses for why we didn't do something. We were, we all graduated. We were expected to do our home work. We were expected not to get drunk, do anything like that, and we didn't. My brothers did one time and they will not forget it. They were teenagers and they got spanked! So she spanked them and it was just like "Oh my goodness." She just, she told them that she worked hard and she didn't, we were not turned out on the street or beaten up on the street or having drug problems or anything like that.

Mary finished high school in Addison, even after a traumatic year when she was being harassed by an elderly man who attended her church. She attended the vocational

school and studied data processing, but after she graduated she worked briefly in a nursing home. She did not like the job. And when her grandmother broke her hip, Mary quit work to take care of her.

And I worked at the nursing home before that and I just, it made me sick. I shouldn't say that, but it's just working in a nursing home is so emotional and it just kept my stomach tied up in knots cause I was afraid I was going to hurt somebody. And you have to be really fast at what you do. You have very little time to deal with each person. It's just like you got three to four minutes and that's spending a lot of time with each person and that would make me... if you don't get your work done, the head nurse will yell at you and stuff and I just didn't like it. I got nervous and I quit. I couldn't take it, that's all I've ever quit at.

She went back to school at the community college to study small business and accounting. She has bought the house across the street from her grandparents. For now she rents it, but she plans to fix it up and live there some day.

I don't know, I just... That's what everybody asks me, "Why did you buy the house for?" I just wanted it, I like it. It's a two story house. It needs some work on it, but I just liked it and I wanted to have a place of my own, you know, for when I move out, or do what I want.

I like it up there, I mean. It had a big yard to it and I just, I don't know, I just love Lee City in the summer. Or in the fall I love it when the leaves change. And it's just a lot of trees around and I love it when it's just about 80 degrees and the wind's blowing and you can sit on the porch and the sky's real blue, I just love it!

As she told her story, Mary expressed a remarkable mix of dedication to her family and determination to be independent and in control of her own life. She is ambivalent about having her own family, but loves little children. She longs to be on her own, but is dedicated to her grandparents. She longs for what she sees as a missed youth, but wants to be on her own to discover herself. Her words reflect this theme of mixed hopes and dreams.

I have my nephew. I treat him like my child, like I would my child. I buy him clothes and toys and everything. And I have my cousin. That's enough for mothering for me. I don't think I'm patient enough with children I don't think I would be and...I may get married later when I'm about 35 or something. I told Mom I'd be at least 35. Because I see a lot of people, they get married and just throw any chance they've got of getting anything away, by having children, in this area, because their husbands don't work and they end up on welfare and food stamps and.... I don't think there's anything wrong with that, I mean I don't judge anybody, but I want to see what I can do. I can take care of myself. That's just, my mom raised us independent.

I mean I don't care to help anyone else to do anything, but I don't want to have responsibilities for everybody else's welfare put on me. That's, I don't know if it sounds stingy or what I just want to -- for myself, for awhile. And just see what I want to do, and not you know, do what I want to do and not worry about everybody else.

And when I was growing up I had all that to do and it's like I never had time to do what I wanted to do. But I'm gonna make myself time to just go where ever I want to go when I can, when I'm able to.

No, I don't want to get rich! I don't care about stuff like that, I mean just... having what I need. You know, if I want something, being able to get it. But just being able to have a nice home, that I own, that I'm not responsible for anybody else for where I live.

I have a lot at home I have to do. I have to do the cleaning and take care of [her cousin]. I have to make sure somebody's there to take care of her. And my grandparents, I don't leave them by their self because I'm afraid something will happen to them. And when it does it's just going to tear me to pieces because I haven't really thought until lately well, when they die. I mean I always thought they'll be there forever, but I've never had anyone close to me die. I just.....

I have conflicting opinions, my mother says. I mean I do. In one way I think.... I see people with babies and I just love to look at them and I'd just love to have one and then I thought, "No. No I wouldn't," when I have to get up in the middle of the night. I don't want.... Well, I like doing stuff and helping people, and I like to help my sister. My brothers and I all do. But I just, want to be able to do what I want and not have to tell anybody where I'm at or worry about when I get home and what's gonna, what kind of mess is going to be waiting on me to clean. I just want to be ...find out who I am. I mean I ain't never had a chance to do what I want. I always have to think about everybody else first. So... I mean that doesn't bother me and I love my family. I could move out if I wanted to but I don't. I'd be

lost. I tell my sister when I move into my house she's gotta come and move upstairs because I cannot live by myself because the house has four rooms upstairs and seven downstairs. I'll be lost!

I never got to think, "What do I want to do?" It's just, "What can I do with what I'm doing now? What can I do to fill my time up to make myself better, while I'm helping my family while I'm staying there with my grandparents?" I mean I just, I love my grandparents. I mean... I don't care if they're there until they're a hundred, I'll take care of my grandmother and them. But in a way I can't wait, until I can just think, "Well, what do I want to do today?" or "What do I want to do this weekend?" and not have to worry about who's gonna cook dinner or anything like that. I feel older than I should....I feel too old towards stuff than I should. I feel older than I am. I've never been a teenager yet.

Mary has dreams of traveling, of seeing California and Rhode Island, but for now she plans to keep working in Lee City when she graduates.

Helen

Helen was born at home on Long Fork Mountain in Hamilton County in 1943. She has two older brothers and three younger sisters. Her dad and mother farmed on land which had belonged to his father. Her childhood was not easy, but she remembers a good life.

Now times were hard, you know. We wore hand-me-downs. Mommy took little chop [animal feed] sacks and made little dresses for us ...but back in them days

there wasn't that much going on, you know. So I guess that's the reason everybody raised most of their food, what they eat. And they had a old grist mill, they ground their own corn meal. That and then other people would bring their meal in for them to grind, you know.

But I said it wasn't nothing for all of us to get out in the hay field, oat field, tie oats, stack hay, and all of that. I never did plow, now! Couldn't do no plow! We had horses. We had horses that we plowed with. We had these old harrows, you know, with the spikes down through it to harrow it up after you plowed it. And then we had the old hay rake, you know, that....I know you've seen it. Yeah we had all that stuff. But now, we raised everything like that, all of our meats, and everything you know. Never did have to go to the store to buy meats or nothing like that.

It was fun cause we all got out, you know, and done it together. Me and [my brothers] ride the old wooden sled. We'd go load the sled up and put it up in the hay barn or either stack it on the little pole, you know, that went up and stacked it up. But really, it was, you know, if you worked together it was fun. But now, I'm going to tell you my oldest brother pulled some good 'uns on me. Daddy would send us out to the garden to hoe the garden. And he'd say, "Now, you do half of it and you let your brother do half of it." So we'd go out there and I'd count the rows off, you know. So I was a real fast hoer, you know. But I'd get mine done and I'd go to the house. Daddy'd say, "You go back out there and help your brother finish that!" And him made two of me. [laughs] But now he was good to pull some good ones like that on me. Which brothers is good for, I guess.

Her dad also mined and then went to work for the state road crew. She grew up attending a one room school and helping on the farm. When she was 15, her mother was hospitalized for a time for mental illness, and Helen quit school to take care of her younger brothers and sisters. She didn't go back.

And, let's see, when I was in the 10th grade in high school - this is how come me, I had to quit school--Mother had a nervous breakdown, and Daddy was working for the state department. So I had to stay home and send all the rest of the kids to school. My older brother left home at 17 and went to Ohio and got him a job. So I quit school and started my baby sister in school then and the two boys. Milked the cow, fed the pigs, fed the chickens. Did everything, you know after they all, got Daddy off to work....So that was a rough time, you know...trying to get all the kids in, up and in to school, wash their clothes and cook all their meals and everything.... But I made it through it.

After her mother came home and got better, Helen went to take care of her grandmother and then her aunt. Her family moved off the mountain to Bradshaw, a town on the river.

And then I come down here and I took care of Mommy's mother, the only grandmother I ever knew. She had a stroke. It was down here on the creek. And then my aunt come in from Michigan and took care of her, and I went back home. And then I had to go take care of Daddy's sister and her old man when she had a stroke.

When she was nearly 19, Helen married Lee, a young miner who had grown up in a coal camp nearby. They had a son and a few years later twin boys. Helen worked briefly in a restaurant with her sister-in-law, but decided to stay home with her children.

> *I worked in a restaurant. Let's see when [the twins] were little me and my sister-in-law took over, you know, the Old Inn down here? All right, I got a babysitter to take care of the kids for so many hours a day 'til I could go down there and do like the morning shift and my sister-in-law did the evening shift. And the babysitter didn't turn out too good so I had to let my part go and take care of my two babies. And I have done some work in little stores back years ago. I was about eighteen year old. But otherwise, no, I ain't done nothing but housework and raise babies and garden and....Which is work, it is work, that's right. I said anybody does raise kids this day and time, honey, and raises them the best they can, they're doing good.*

The boys attended Edwin High School and graduated. All three boys were active in sports and stayed out of trouble. After they graduated each married and moved to Texas to work for an international construction firm. Helen has three grandchildren.

Lee retired from the mines eight or nine years ago. He and Helen live close to the Two Sisters Center and are active volunteers. Helen has been on the board for several years and helps with the SHARE program, the Christmas party, and other projects. One of her sons has recently moved back to Hamilton County with twins of his own and hopes to get a job in the new prison. Helen is now taking care of Lee's uncle in her home because she did not want to leave him in a nursing home.

Helen's story is built around "doing" for people--her sisters and brothers, her mother, her aunt and uncles, her children and grandchildren, and the children and old

people of the community. She structured her story around the theme of care. But as she talks about taking care of people, looking out for them, she talks of strength and commitment, with a deep sense of the importance and value of care, not of an unwanted duty or a sense of exploitation. She was raised with this ethic.

> *But I said we was lucky we never went hungry, you know, growing up. We always had plenty to eat. I said I did know some kids didn't have food in the house. My daddy used to take our neighbor, always took him big middlings of meat and stuff, you know, to keep food in their house, where they didn't have anything to eat.*

Helen takes pleasure in what she is able to do for people. She talked about the work the center does to provide Christmas treats.

> *But I enjoy working for the Christmas. Now it is hard work the last couple of months anyway, November, December is really hard until after we get that over with. But I enjoy it. I said I'm a doing for kids, for old people. And I enjoy that.*

While she is happy to help children and older people, those who can't help themselves, she has little tolerance for those she thinks could do more.

> *But I tell you a lot of them, it goes into beer, dope. They let their kids go. Now a lot of people are like that , but.... And I don't see letting the kids go for something like that. But I said I'll help anybody that'll try to help theirself. But, you know, if you see a person out there ain't a trying to help theirself, I don't care whether I help them or not.*

People can do certain stuff for theirselves, and they won't try to do for theirself. As long as somebody's gonna hand it to them or do for them, they ain't gonna help theirself. Now some people's like that. They take and take and take, and they don't give nothing. I'm sure you've knowed people like that.

She has neither tolerance nor understanding for people who don't take care of those for whom they are responsible. And her definition of care and responsibility is a stringent one. She has taken her husband's uncle into her home because of her respect for his life and needs. As she talked about this decision, she expressed her outrage about others whom she sees as abandoning their family.

I can't see old people working all their lives and ending up with nobody, you know what I'm saying? They's people that take these old people over there and they put them in these homes and they never go back to check on them.

People, kids and old people's gotta have somebody to care for them you know. I don't know, maybe I feel sorry for them. The way a lot of them's treated. You go over there in at [the nursing home] and you see all these old people laying there and a lot of them their families'll just bring them in there and put them in there. I talked to some of them nurses over there, they brought this one man in there and put him in there. And he'd been in there for six or seven months when I got [her uncle] out and they had never been a soul even called about that man. He had kids, he had a wife. There had never been a soul even checked on that man. And I mean he had a good mind. He had sugar and they had to take one of his legs off. And I can't do that....It ain't in me to do something like that. I can't understand how anybody can

just bring somebody in and throw them down, you know, your own daddy and mother. I can't see that ! But it's getting awful anymore. People don't care anymore. I don't know what it is but people just don't care any more.

Too many people any more is for theirself and theirself alone. And what they want to do, they want to do. You know, they ain't no give and take there. There's got to be give and take.

For Helen, walking away is not an option.

Karen

Karen lives next door to Two Sisters Center and spends a lot of time there volunteering and visiting. She was born in Hamilton County in 1953. Her parents had eight children when her father was killed in the mines. Her mother moved the family back to Illinois where she had grown up. There she remarried and had three more children. When one of her sons died after a tractor accident, the family moved back to Virginia, living in Hamilton County and in Bristol. Karen grew up playing with her brothers until they decided she was too old. The good times in her childhood were overshadowed by tragedy.

Well, the good times was just having my brothers, just being a tomboy, I guess. And get to run. They'd have set up things like they was those that run track and jumping over those hurdles, you know, and a big thing you'd jump off, act like we was swimming. And getting to ride in a old car top we made into a boat and got on the pond. And then the bad time was when I fell off and the pigs was trying to

attack me on a big pig farm we lived on out there. Then my little brother, when he got hurt and I had to see it. That was bad times, and staying sickly.... I was a very sickly child. I had to walk on crutches when I was in the first grade, failed the first grade cause I had to stay out of school so much. And they thought I had a touch of the rheumatic fever cause my nose would pour out blood at school and I'd pass out and stuff. The teachers still wouldn't get ahold of my mom and then I'd have to sit there all day 'til it was time to go home. Then my best friend, a girl that was older than me that helped take care of me at school, she died. Drunk some chocolate milk or something and got sick and died that day, food poison on chocolate milk. That's out there in Illinois.

When she was in seventh grade she quit school to help her mother take care of the younger children.

I didn't get to go to high school. When we lived at Bristol I got to go to junior high, but I had to quit school so much with my little sister....Mom always staying so sickly with tumors and stuff, having to take....I was the only one that could take care of my sister with Down's syndrome. Cause all the older boys was gone away from home at work, and I had to take care of the younger children and her.

At 16 Karen married Tom who was in the navy. While he was overseas she lived with his family. After a miscarriage and a difficult pregnancy, her daughter Tina was born.

Well after that, I wound up married and [to a man] which was in the navy and I lost my first baby. My first was a little boy. I had fell from a swing, a swing on

the porch and hit concrete and a few days later I lost my baby. I was going on five months, it was very -- liked to died from hemorrhaging.

Karen, Tina, and Tom moved to Connecticut for Tom's last years in the service, and their son was born there. After he was discharged, Tom moved the family back to Virginia, living in Hamilton County and in Bristol and Staunton. He worked as a mechanic and station manager. Karen took care of the family, which usually included one or more of her or Tom's family. She has worked outside the home only briefly.

I tried first time a working at [a fast food restaurant] in Staunton, Virginia. I worked three days there. I got sick and too aggravated and I just stopped. And we moved back down here. My husband was in a car wreck, and he had to have back surgery and he was running back and forth, and he's down here going back and forth to Abingdon. And I's up there trying to take care of a big 14 room house with everybody, no water, no power in the house and I'd have to carry the water and stuff. And I just got sick and tired of work and stuff, which I was a real good worker. He [the manager] said he wanted me to come back to be their hostess and I didn't go back. So that was the first job I ever tried for pay.

When Tom became disabled, the family move back to Hamilton County. They lived in an apartment under a garage next to the Two Sisters Center. Karen's son in his last year of high school and Tina and Tina's two-year-old son, Zeke, lived at home. Karen volunteers at the center and hopes to get her GED, but is having a lot of difficulty with math.

Karen has the bleakest story of this group. Her theme was one of survival and of a continuing struggle to keep going. She has dreams but not much hope. When her

daughter, Tina, talked about writing about her life, Karen replied that she doesn't want to write about her life, that it was too hard. Still Karen sees changes in herself and values these changes. When she talked about her future plans, her tone was wistful.

> *I was going to try to take nurses aide training and it was hard--getting back and forth and I couldn't go to take it. But I'm hoping later on I can or some other kind of...maybe child development thing, take training to help child development, maybe that. I'd like to try.*

> *Well I'm hoping maybe when things like I said gets straightened out maybe taking nurses training...if I could ever get up with the math...learn the math like I need to learn...maybe taking some classes at college, sometimes that's what I'm hoping for.*

Studying for the GED test has been a challenge.

> *[My grandson is] pulling and a tugging grandma, crying "Grandma" ... But seems like this last year I just couldn't, set into the hard, working really hard. There's so much stuff going on....Like my mom had that open heart surgery. First was my stepfather and then he had you know triple bypass and then Mama turned right around after that and had hers. And then after that, we had to turn around with Tom! [It's] very hard to concentrate. And the grandbaby stays sickly with tonsillitis so much, and his ears is...*

I don't have enough confidence. Gail said I need to build up my confidence about myself, my teacher does. I don't have enough confidence in myself --that I could do.

At the time of the interview Karen's husband had not been able to work and needed surgery but had not received any financial assistance. He had medical bills from previous surgery.

That's why I'm hoping that some way we'll get some kind of help because we have to pay them all. They call all the time aggravating you to death, the collection agency. They turn it over to them, but when you can't do anything, you can't do nothing....Nerve racking. I just want to sit and cry sometimes...

When we talked about being a woman and whether she would rather be a man, Karen gives an indication of how she understands the problems in her life.

No, I just wish sometime I was never born, you know with things. I don't think I'd ever want to be a man. No way. Cause I've seen [what] men do. I wouldn't want to be one, and all the problems and stuff they put on a woman.

I guess that's what they say about with the women, too. Being a woman like you have a lot of problems. Like your health, your children. To me it's just a lot of problems that you're born into.

So many problems going on with my life. My family, really it's my family.

But while Karen sometimes is nearly overwhelmed with all she has to deal with, she keeps on trying. She supports her family as they deal with the problems in their lives, she volunteers at the center, and she continues to try to pass the GED test. She has not given up on her life.

Tina

Tina, Karen's daughter, was born in Hamilton County in 1971 while her father was in the Navy. The family moved several times while she and her younger brother were growing up, living in Connecticut and various places in Virginia. But they spent a lot of time in Hamilton County, time she remembers with fondness:

> *I guess time I spent with my grandfather which was most of the time during the summers. We'd go fishing together right down here behind the center or behind the house where I live at now...Back then nobody lived there and this was a store. And we come up here and he would buy us soda and stuff, and we'd go down there and we'd set on the bank and we'd fish. And that was an everyday thing for me and him....Basically that's about the only fun times I can remember besides going camping the whole time with the family for two or three days at a time. I always got into mischief at those times. And I guess when the kids used to go up in the mountains above Grandma's house and throw rocks at each other and stuff and play war. It was always boys against girls. We'd roll them down the hill, we'd always get up there before they would. And basic things that kids do that get them in trouble sometimes with their parents.*

Yeah, they were fun. Building club houses and one group would ransack the other's and the others would have to get even and ransack the other group's. Just whatever we *could find to build them with, we'd build them.*

Tina talked about moving around a lot as a child:

Well once you got used to friends... you'd move one place and you'd have to make new friends. And there's times when you weren't always accepted and sometimes when you went to these schools that the kids' families had more than your family did, more money and they were able to have, you know, better clothes and stuff and your parents had to buy what they could afford. So sometimes you weren't accepted due to that fact. But Dad always tried to make sure that we had pretty good clothes.

She finished high school at Edwin High School in Hamilton County. The day she graduated she married Doug.

I quit in the 11th grade, in the middle of the 11th grade year. I do not know why I quit. I guess it was because of a boy. But I went back at the end of that year and went to summer school. When everybody else was out of school, I went to summer school and I finished it up. And then I went to my 12th grade year and I stayed in school then and I graduated vocational school. And on the day that I got married, I graduated vo-tech. And then I got married that night and the next night I graduated high school and I went for six more weeks of summer school to get my diploma.

The marriage was a disaster for her. Doug used drugs and was an alcoholic. He rarely worked and the couple lived with his family who were always on the move. He became physically and emotionally abusive. Tina described her marriage:

I was 18 at the time and I had no idea my husband was a drug addict and a alcoholic, cause he was drunk occasionally while we were dating. And then after we got married, moved to North Carolina after my summer school was over with. He was supposed to be down there working and he was sleeping around on me even at that time. And we hadn't even been married six weeks. I didn't know about it. I got down there and we'd been married four months when one night he come in drunk, and he was really high and I didn't say nothing to him, but he retch out and he knocked me across the back of the couch, and I started bleeding the next day for some reason I didn't understand. I went to the hospital, and they said I had been three months pregnant and I had lost the baby, miscarried. And the doctor asked me if you want me to tell my husband, and I told him. "No." Cause I didn't know what [he] would do after that. And I didn't know what he might accuse me of, so I didn't say much about it.

We never had our own place. We were always from one place to the next, his mom and dad's or his brothers and sister's or my mom and dad or up at my grandmother's. And he went from one job to the next, always quitting it, never staying with it. We never had much to call our own. His family never had much food. I went from 110 pounds to 89 pounds in three months' time.

He took the money that he would do for odd jobs and buy drugs and stuff with it instead of giving me money to help pay for the cab fare to the doctor or anything like that or getting something to eat on. And if I had money where I had for

myself, if I didn't give it to him when he wanted beer and drugs, I'd get beat up. And it was never done in front of my family, I mean he'd smack me in my face in front of my mom and stuff, but he'd try to act like we were playing, but he was serious. But every time my parents' back were turned or something he would, he would hit on me and....I used to drink with him and when I quit, that's when everything started going down hill. He would take off for two or three days at a time, and I wouldn't even know where he was at or who he was with or what he was doing..... He never called or anything. When he did come home, it would be like 2:00 in the morning or sometimes later. And he'd expect me while I was pregnant, to get out of the bed at whatever time he come in and fix him something to eat. And if I didn't, well, he'd make me anyway.

So, it's not much and ...our marriage sort of went on like that from one place to the next, from North Carolina to Virginia to [towns in southwest Virginia], wherever his family lived, he'd always drag me around there. I had a job when I was married to him over to the tobacco warehouses in Abingdon. Made real good money and he decided....I was going to the warehouses where they were not heated, different ones. He was in one warehouse that had heating, all he had to do was cut strings and pull them off the tobacco bales. He thought that was too hard so he made me quit my job, too. We were living with my grandparents. And told me he had a job in [a small town] where his parents lived. Got over there, he had no job. All he did was set around or go to jail for drunk in public. Or disorderly conduct. But it went on like that until I was eight months pregnant, and he tried to kill me, and we separated that same night and I took a warrant on him the same night that he tried that.

But...although the marriage only lasted a year and a half, it was a year and a half that was wasted, I think, except for my son which is the only good thing that come out of it. That's about the only thing I can think of that really was worth it.

After her son was born Tina started volunteering at the center, which was next door to her parent's home where she was living. The women there "adopted" Zeke, and Tina says she got her confidence back. She started attending community college and plans to go back in the fall of 1994.

The theme of Tina's story resembles that of Susie and Elaine. But it is also the story of a young woman gaining maturity as she gets out of her marriage and develops her ability to care for herself and her child. Her commitment to him provides a focus for her life.

It's just basically trying to straighten myself out. Try to find out what my priorities are and right now my priority is being a good mother to my son and a decent person.

She seems to make decisions based on his needs -- to work at the center, to temporarily stop going to college, to try to get a job.

And my son is always welcome up here [at the center], so I don't have to worry about leaving him at home and locking him behind doors and stuff with my mom and dad. He's always welcome up here, and he has free run of the place. He likes it and the people like him.

It [college] was hard. I liked the people up there. The teachers were really nice. I failed my algebra class, which depressed me, tremendously. I got very upset over

that, because I couldn't learn it, no matter how hard I tried. But anyway, I'd leave my house at 5:00 in the morning when my little boy was still asleep, and he didn't get to see me. And I wouldn't get home 'til 5:00 in the evening or after five. So it was like 12 hours a day I spent away from my child, that's the only part I did not like.

Depending on the money situation, I'd like to be around here. This is where I grew up a lot of my childhood. But if it came down to being able to support my son, if I thought that I had to relocate, I probably would.

When Tina talked about what stands out for her in her life and about what relationships she has learned from, again she talked about her son.

My son's birth for one. You know that was... it could have been a bad thing if you know if the complications had of killed him. But when he come out healthy and I lived through it, then that was pretty--miraculous. I was, that's one thing that stands out, that's my favorite memory was the first time I got to see my son.

I learn a lot from my son. You know you look at him and he's so trusting, you know he trusts everything you do for him. He doesn't have a bad thought about it. And you know how many times he falls down, he gets right back up and tries it again. And I mean children, he can be hurt and he gets right back up and tries to go right back at it again. And when you think of it, that's something you got to do in life, too. You may not want to, but you look at that little child the way he keeps trying, then I think maybe you'd see well you have to do the same thing. And ten out of nine chances are he succeeds when he goes back and tries it again. So I've

learned different things from him. Just--he learns me to be patient. Some time it's hard, but he learns me to be patient. And he learns me a lot about love, selfless, you know, all giving. He's learned me that. And he learned me how to actually really, really care about somebody. Cause I care about him more than I do anything in this world. So, I have to say I care more about him than I have anything else in my whole life. You can learn a lot from a small child.

Tina still lives with her parents and depends on them a great deal. But she also contributes as she can to the household. She has a vision of being on her own and supporting her son.

Gloria

This story is a little longer than the others because Gloria's story was built around a theme that was unique in the group. She is the only African American, and as she talked about her life, she returned again and again to the impact of racism in her life and that of her sons. It is a story she believes needs to be told.

Gloria was born in a coal camp in Hamilton County in the early 1950s. She has an older sister, a younger sister and four younger brothers. Her dad worked as a miner after he moved to the area from Alabama. Her mother cleaned houses for people. Gloria and her older sister, Edith, took care of their younger brothers and sisters.

When I was six years, five years old...we had to learn how to wash dishes, and I...remember dragging a chair up there and they put you to the sink and you washed dishes and you....When I was about 10, I could clean the whole

house...and take care of the kids, we learned how....I don't know it just, I guess you grow up fast. That's what you did, just growed up....

Times were hard, but hard work kept the family fed.

We did a little bit, we did a little bit of everything cause when time for can, cause like I said, Mom, she used to can. We had this big old shelf in our house--I remember my uncle built it before he died - and she used to can, and she used to, had to do it the old-fashioned way; she'd wrap everything up in ... cloth and put it outside. You know, have the big old tub and sit it out, that's the way she used to can. And we used to have bushel and bushel of green beans, ...apples, and peaches, and I used to about all go crazy. And I remember when I was young, when I say young it's between like 11 and 12, me and my brother, my older brother--I'm a year older than he is--we used to go up in the mountain, up in the woods, and we'd pick blackberries. And she used to can all, then sometimes when she didn't have money, we'd pick like a gallon and we'd sell them like for 75 cents because it was a lot of money back then. And they's just--lot of ways we'd have extra money like that, but we didn't have much money.

Oh yeah, we had good times, too. I guess, let me see, on Christmas holidays, Christmas, Easter, we always had things, besides one year, my father he, he didn't get to work that year. I guess jobs was pretty bad back then. It was never -- I don't know anybody else, but when we was coming up, older people always let their husband eat first. But my father would never eat until we had ate. So if there wasn't nothing left there, he'd be the one to go without. So we always ate before he did.... And well they both, I guess they love us, but it was just, just sometimes

we just [inaudible] because you just didn't have anything to give the kids. Like if we needed something new, we didn't get nothing new. She went to a used clothes store and bought our things and then there might be time when she might could buy us something, once in a while something new. We got a pair of shoes twice a year, until we got older, til you know you got to be on the job. Because my father you know, he had to work. If they were in the coal mines and they were loading up rock all day, they didn't get paid for it.

Gloria started school in a one-room school for African American children in her town. She entered high school the year after the Hamilton County schools were integrated. This experience was a difficult one for the black students, and Gloria was glad to get out of school. She graduated, as have all her sisters and brothers, but she believes her experiences limited what she was able to learn, and she is now in GED classes in order to improve her reading and math skills.

Gloria has two sons, both now grown, and three grandchildren. When her sons were first born she lived at home with her family, but she left them with her mother for a few years while she went to North Carolina to work in a chair factory and for Holly Farms Chickens.

That is hard work. Assembly line is hard work. So if you can do anything better than working on the assembly line then you need to try to go to school or try to get a training so you won't have to do that work.

When she came back to Virginia, Gloria worked as an elementary school custodian and helped her mother who was raising several children besides her own. She started helping at Two Sisters where her sister Edith was on staff. After she has improved her

basic skills, Gloria hopes to attend a local community college and train as a child care worker. Her sons live in a small city about 100 miles away, and Gloria thinks she might like to live closer to them. The chances for a job are also better there.

> *And besides the kids is all grown so I felt like, well I did my part as a parent, so I got them through school, so I feel like I'm gonna better myself some. I got time to do this.*

Gloria's story centered on the effects of racism on her life, particularly as a child and young person in a newly integrated school and then later going through similar struggles with her own children. She ponders and ponders and keeps her faith in people, somehow. She spoke extensively about her own experiences and her analysis of what has happened in her life because of racism or prejudice, the word she uses. Yet there was lot she did not tell, that seemed too painful. Here is some of what she said, first about her own experiences.

> *And I don't know, it was just...wasn't too much for black people to do. And I remember when I was coming up I was, I had to be about t10 years old I remember I wanted to go to -- we used to have a drug store down there where we--and one white woman, she was so hateful. And I remember the other, she was real nice and she always tell us, she said, "You all, when you buy your, you know, you ice cream," said, "You're not allowed to sit down," cause it's like, you know, a restaurant. Said, "You have to go back outside." So that was kind of hard for me to deal with, but then I....*

When she talked about her difficulty reading now, Gloria remembered her early schooling.

I guess it would probably come where I went to school with the black kids and then we had, I guess we say adapt to going to school with all white kids. And when I started school there were about 26 or 7, and we had, everybody went to school in one class from first to sixth grade. Most of what you learned you learned on your own. You didn't have the special teachers or if you didn't know how to read or didn't know math or something, somebody to take time out to help you with it. You had to get it on your own. And then when we went to school with the white kids it seemed, it kind of like, we was so far behind. I would say they would had more like a head start I would say. Maybe 500 years a head start in reading and math and things. So that was a big change.

In addition to starting high school with poor academic preparation, Gloria and the other African American students had to live with the pressures of integration.

[When] I started Edwin, I was 13. I was in the eighth grade. And I went to school at Edwin and that was the second year that any, second year for black kids going to school up there....But I went to school, and I felt like it was a lot of [inaudible] and a lot of what, stress...going to school up here. Because there was a lot of prejudice. You had to try to catch up with the white kids, cause they had so much advantage by the time you went to school. And then you had to deal with the teachers, had to deal with the kids. Some of the kids, I guess just what the parents taught them, and I don't know what was the teachers' reason why they was so prejudiced. We had maybe one or two...that you know, didn't care what color you

was, but... it was in the class when it's kind of hard to, what I want to say, it's kind of hard to concentrate on your lessons...under stress like that. And I look back at it today and I say I wonder how many, if it was first, around how many white kids would have stuck, you know, would have stayed in school and on to school. But as far as I know all the kids that went to school, everybody graduated, maybe one or two black kids, but everybody else graduated from high school.

We had some teachers.... My first year in high school lot of them just quit. They refused to teach black kids at all. So I guess...and then what I'm saying, I had to deal with it in classroom. It's hard to try to learn when you have to cope with that, too.

I don't know it's, I guess it's a lot happened in school that we really could, if we think about it probably could go on and on talk about it. But it's a lot of things I just put behind. I don't even talk about it. Because the principal, I thought he was very prejudiced, Mr. Addison. Eventually he quit and then we had Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith from Hamilton. And he was, to me he was fairer, you know he didn't take one side against the other. He listened to the issue and then he made a decision. Where if we got into it with the white kids, the first thing they would do is blame us for it you know --Cause I never forget, we was at school, my cousin had got a fight with Thelma Green....They had some words and they got into it, and she swore up and down that we all had double-teamed her. And some of the people that was there, but they told him "No." But I'll never forget, he was saying, "Well we didn't ask you all to come up here." The principal say that. So I'm saying it was kind of hard to try to learn and deal with everyday problems, too. So I said when we finished school, I guess it was a relief, just getting out of high school.

Where the other kids looking forward to going to college, and we didn't even think about going to college. And another thing, the guidance teachers, they never told us you know that this money is out here for kids, which I wasn't even thinking about going to college, but it's a lot of kids wanted to go to college, but they never told "There's money out there to go to college." You know how they're helping out when it came to the white kids, they was there to try to open doors so they can get a education.

And [my cousin] was saying, last summer she was talking about it, I said, "Well you didn't tell me that." Cause like she was in the 12th grade and I probably was in the ninth grade when she graduated. She said, "That always stuck with me, " and she said, "I always wanted to go to college and they always told me there wasn't no money, wasn't nothing there."

When Gloria's sons entered school, the struggles began again. She was determined to confront discrimination in her sons' classrooms, and eventually she and her sister moved their sons from Edwin High School to Hillston, a school which while not in their district, was closer.

That's when I was going to school. But see I know how I was mistreated, so when my children said something went wrong in the classroom or they took somebody's side because they was white or something, that's where I stepped in. I didn't listen to my mom or nobody, yes, I just went on because once you been there you know how the system works.

No, because I felt like this was the black, as far as being black, I always bent over backwards trying to get along with white people. I always felt like "Hey I can't do

nothing wrong, they always think the worst of me." And that's what my mom always taught us. You know you be on your best behavior because they always think that black people don't have this ability to do this and that so...But like I said, when I got my kids up some, you know, got them going to school, I felt like, "No, I've done bent backwards. I'm not gonna do it for my kids."

I'd go to the school. Yes. Because when my mom didn't go she always say, she always felt like that, I think that she was brought up that grown people always are right, no matter what, what color they was....She said, "If I had to do it all back over I'd be into the school, the way they mistreat you all and everything." But my kids, when they'd tell me something, I'd go. I'd go down there and check it out. And then you know like that. Like I say, it was kind of hard to deal with. And the kids, right now my kids can't understand, you know, why can't we go where we want to go, you know. We all came over here, but maybe in different ways, but we all came here.

And then my kids, they used to come home and tell me little ways they would make the difference between them in class, didn't matter who knew or what. And I think that when you feel like that you shouldn't be in teaching. That's no place for that. And I have talked to some of the white kids I went to school with and they would say, "I know you guys went through a hard time," said, "I couldn't even begin to deal with." At least--in school, so. We had a hard time, I said nobody don't know the hard time we had though. But that's the reason why I can't see why the kids have to go through the same thing.

But what I'm saying is...the agony, I say agony I went through struggling for my kids. It's nothing changed up to Edwin, everything's still just prejudice down there and everything. And then my nephew, he goes to school down at Hillston. He's the only black down there, but what I'm saying, the kids down at Hillston they never had to deal with black kids going to their school. And my oldest son and my youngest son, they went to school down there. But anyway, my oldest son and my sister Edith, her oldest son, they was the first two black ever went there. And they felt, you know, at home. And what I'm saying, we went to school up to Edwin and they still don't accept the kids, you know, up there. It's still, the same! Nothing ever changed!

What I was saying like...where I had to deal with all their little nasty remarks or prejudice against the teacher, the teacher had a lot of prejudice, and I feel like everything I went through, my mom went through, well just say both parents went through it. So they made a way for me. And then when I came going to school, when I started going to school and when I graduated I felt like, "Hey, my children shouldn't have to go...." I felt like I paid the price for them. They shouldn't even have to go through this.

Both Gloria's sons have graduated. The oldest is married and lives and works in Radford, Virginia. Her youngest son, Carl, has attended community college in Radford and hopes to come home to attend college. Although they are through school, Gloria's concerns are not over. She worries about their safety and about their attitudes.

And then I was telling my mom that I couldn't believe that right now the kids, some places they're going through the same thing. That some place even though they say

you can go into different place and but things, but still, I don't know. You can feel it in the atmosphere that, you know, you're not wanted there or something like that. And I told Mama, I said, "In a way," I told her, I said, "I wish the kids hadn't went to school with white kids." Because they got this idea, "Well I went to school with white kids, then I have the right to go any where I want...." You know they feel like they can do just... and there still is a certain line that you can't cross over. Because like my youngest son, he dates this white girl...and they got a baby gal and yet and still some places I feel unease where he appear because they might not ...accept the idea of, you know, mixed race or something like that and then... But he don't look like, look at it that way. He said, "Well I'm Carl. This is Missy. And we have the right to talk to each other." But I told him a lot of people don't accept that idea and they might cause trouble, you know. Cause a lot of time he just goes to her house and things. They live [a distance away] and I used to worry about it until he get home. Cause I know people that is still out there that have this prejudice so....

Like I said, my kids they was raised up with white but yet and still, I don't know. Their attitude changed a lot, too, when they was coming up, you know. I guess when you're small you don't look at it things but one way you know, we're all human beings. But they have this attitude problem, too, and I told them, that ain't the way to be in life. Cause you're always gonna find some people out there that's ignorant, that's stupid. But, like I said, when I was coming up, we had a hard time. And lot of things you don't talk about, but I guess when you sit down and realize it really happened to you and it ain't been that long so when....And I try everything, try to prepare my kids for life outside cause even ....I sent Carl to another college, he still may find the same thing down here though. I guess I don't

want him to go through what I had to go through. And then Missy and him got the baby together, and I say she probably have a hard time....

Yeah, cause she said, sometimes people call up to her mom's house and say little smart remarks....And I always told her that I felt like, I always told her I felt like more like white people just go out of their way put their nose in other people's business, than blacks did. I told her I think black people accept idea of mixed couples, I guess cause where they gotten mixed up in slavery there. But I expect, I told her that [the baby] might have a hard time cause her daddy. And society sometime can be very cruel.

When her younger son was not hired for a summer job, Gloria believed he had been discriminated against and confronted the man who was hiring for the state road department.

I try to get my son a job, and I got so upset. And then I guess, and then it came back I always felt like it was racial thing. Cause he [the employer] said it wasn't, and I told him he was telling a lie, it was. We tried to get him a job with the state [highway] department. Said they have to go to Wise for interviews. So they narrowed in down to 21 kids or 20 kids they interviewing. And come to get a letter say he wasn't qualified for the job. And they hired some new kids. And I said, "Well what do you have to do to be qualified?" See, he worked for construction. All they're doing is flagging out there. That's all they do, flag, most of the time. Or putting down tar or whatever. And he said, "Well I don't have anything to do with it." Said, "Somebody else screened the kids and they bring the applications, the ones they thinks is qualified for it." And I wrote to [her Congressman] and he

said that he'll look into it and then he [with the highway department] said that... they got, they just have so many positions for kids. So much money? And they try to get the ones that was qualified, the ones seemed like they were interested in the job. That's the way he put it.

And my brother was talking to it. He said, "Gloria, I know it's some guys been on there for five or six years, working on this program." And said, "These programs are for kids that are trying to go to school." But yet and still, he said, they know, he knows their parents, the man that's doing the hiring, said he knows their parents real good and they're still working. Remember I said the money be mishandled. They can do just what they want to do with the money. So I felt upset cause I told them...they hired 12 kids. Only two blacks got on. Were just two blacks last year got on. And this girl... they hired this black girl. This year's her first year, and [her brother] said they hired her because she represents the minority on women. That's the only reason she got hired. And I said, I got very upset. But [a friend] was telling me that it was up to Carl to complain. But I said if you got a child never dealed with this then you have to step in. I said, "He never, he don't deal with nothing like that." And she said, "Well he's grown ...." I said, "I know he's grown, but yet and still. He don't know how to call people, tell them I feel like I've been discriminated against and all that." And I was upset and I said, I said, "At least why can't you just give six blacks a job, and six whites, if you're gonna hire twelve people?" Why can't it be like, why it always have to be ten whites and two blacks?

But I was telling my mom, I said, "I'm calling. I'm calling everywhere I can." I said, "Carl might not never get a job but maybe the next black kid, they'll get a job." I said, "Maybe make a way for somebody else."

While this seems to be a support for affirmative action, Gloria said that what she wants is for people to be hired by their qualifications, not their race.

That's when I said I feel like, looking at him, where my mom and dad went through, and what I went through, the kids shouldn't even have to go through it. You know they should be able to get on and get off and get a job. Everybody asks, "What race you are?" And I said that's another thing, no application--they need to do away with those applications. As far as race thing, it shouldn't even be down there because we all human beings. Race--human being--that's what should be down there.

A lot of things, they have little hidden code things and they can --you're black, we're not gonna hire this person. And then a lot of --white people get to feeling like blacks takes their jobs because they're black, but I don't know.

But they do it a whole lot. So I say let's get away from it and go by you know, what a person qualifies to do.

In these interviews Gloria reflected a lot about the effects of racism in her life and in the lives of her parents and children. She seems unsure if the situation today in the mountains is better for African Americans. She clearly prefers living here, but recognizes that a lot has not changed.

When I said, tell my kids things we went through, they always, they can't believe this, "Ahhh, no, no, no, no." And then I tell them that things really happened, like

my mom said things happened to them, but what I was telling her, I said to me things, they're not that better back here.

Everybody mostly to their self, you know what I'm saying, but there's a lot of people that I grow up with and that I know, but then there're some that always gonna say things, you know, no matter what. They always, always gonna be out there.

Then a lot of things, they be hollering "It's no prejudice. It's nothing there." But they don't deal with it. You got to go into your banks, go try to get a loan, try and get things on credit and you'll see the difference.

And they always holler, "It's a white thing," but I tell them, "It's a black thing, too." Cause when I get away from here, you know, they have a different attitude. black people and white people. I think both are --when you're away from here. Both race are very rude. Around here people are, when people know you, they got -- I'd say respect for you. Away from here they don't care what color you are, they're rude to you.

As Gloria talked about these experiences she expressed pain and anger, but not hate. She does not deny the realities of racism in her life. She says she'd go crazy trying to understand, but at the same time she maintains her faith in people, both black and white, her ability to laugh and forgive in the face of this reality.

Summary

This chapter is an introduction to seven women, a way to hear their individual voices as they talk about their lives. Karen's story is one of survival and a continuing struggle on the margins of society. But in it are moments of good times that she seems to cherish. Mary tells of her struggle to be independent and in control of her own life. She's lived a lack of control in her father's violence, her mother's hard work, her experiences of harassment by an elderly man, and in her commitment to her family. At the same time she has dreams of independence and has clear plans of how to achieve it. Helen tells her life as one of enjoying and doing for others, valuing her family and community. Gloria tries in the telling to come to terms with the prejudice she has seen and experienced. She is determined to face it, but not lose her belief in people.

Three of the women talk about getting their lives together after disastrous marriages. Tina talks about getting out of her marriage, about gaining the confidence and skills to care for herself and her child. Susie, too, talks of getting her self together, building her confidence, gaining the skills and degree she needs to take care of herself and her child. She is struggling to build a new sense of herself. Elaine's story is about coming out of abuse to strength. It is a story of strength pulled from faith and support to become who she wants to be.

In the next chapter I examine the themes that run through these life stories: family, community work, learning, and the various issues that concern these women.

CHAPTER 6

WORKING AND LEARNING IN COMMUNITY

In the previous chapter we read the profiles, the life stories of seven Appalachian women told in their own words, developed around their own themes. In this chapter we return to the original research question:

> *How do women active in Appalachian community organizations define the impact of their experiences on their lives and learning as adults? What have they learned and how have they changed?*

In order to discover answers to this question I have looked at various areas of the women's lives as they told them and listened to what they had to say about their families, their marriages, their children, and their schooling and formal adult education. And I looked and listened closely to what they had to say about their involvement in the community centers. From this analysis of the women's stories, various patterns and themes emerge that help answer the primary research question. I present these in four sections:

1. Family
2. Schooling and Learning
3. Growth and Change in Community Organizations
4. The Region and Its Problems

This chapter ends with a discussion of the results from two group interviews during which the women discussed my preliminary conclusions. In the final chapter I examine implications of these findings about learning and change for the field of adult education.

Family

Family is very important to the women in this study. They spoke of growing up and of their own children. They mentioned grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws as they talked about their lives. Most of them come from families which seem large by today's standards--five children on average. All the women continue to see their parents or siblings often, sometimes daily, even when they do not live together. Mary's family gathers at her grandparents on Sundays. Helen's sister and mother live just down the road. Elaine's parents live close by. Susie has several sisters in the same county. Gloria sees her sister nearly every day. Karen wishes she were closer to her mother who lives 50 miles away. While these women had memories of hard times, of fear and abuse in their families, the primary theme I have identified is an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982).

Childhood

Each of these women described their childhoods as some version of "hard times." They used words like "not enough to raise us all," "a minimum wage job raising four children," "now times were hard," "now that was kindly rough."

They grew up in families with limited financial resources. Mostly they were coal miners' daughters living with the devastation that mining often brings to people's lives--disability, intermittent work, the stress of ever present danger, low wages in non-union

mines (Lewis, 1970). Karen's mother moved her family to Illinois and remarried after her husband was killed in the mines. Susie and Mary blame their fathers' disabling accidents for their alcoholism. The same may have been the case for Elaine's husband.

Most of them had the strong mother Lewis (1970) found in mining families. Four of their mothers worked to supplement or provide the family income. They were strong forces in their daughters' lives. Mary, Susie, and Gloria particularly talked about the strength and influence of their mothers:

> *She was strict, but we all love her to death. I mean she just, she let us know her expectations and she did not allow us, you know just to do what we wanted like most...You know, her working, we had a time to be in and we were in. If we weren't, she didn't put up with it. She knew. (Mary)*

> *Yeah, she went to school up here [at the community center]. She got her nurse's aide certificate up here. And she tried to come get her GED and I think she went twice and failed it just barely though, I mean but which my mom, she only went to like the fourth grade in school. So I was very proud of her because she worked, and she worked third shift and as soon as she would get off from work she would come up here to school. And then you know plus she had to deal with my dad and it was really rough on her, but she toughed it out and she kept a coming until, like I said she didn't get her GED. But she did get her nurse's certificate and she's working out at the nursing home. (Susie)*

> *Cause I guess she was always there, if I went astray she was always there you know, to find me or something, to bring me back. So I think my mother, the reason I say my mother is because my father wasn't in the church and my mother*

always been the head of the household. Where my father constantly worked all the time. (Gloria)

As the mothers worked, so did the children. Gloria, Karen, and Helen talked of the work they had done as children--cooking, cleaning, caring for younger children, canning, hoeing, helping to put up hay. For Helen at least these memories were not necessarily bad, but she acknowledges her schooling ended when she stayed home to work. Gloria talked about a childhood spent working, of being made to get up and re-do a task not done to her mother's satisfaction.

We had to learn how to wash dishes, and I...remember dragging a chair up there and they put you to the sink and you washed dishes and you....When I was about 10, I could clean the whole house...and take care of the kids, we learned how....I don't know it just, I guess you grow up fast. That's what you did, just growed up....(Gloria)

Mary and her sister and brothers had work to do growing up, but these chores were fit in around school and homework. But Karen, too, quit school to take care of younger siblings and her sick mother.

When I asked them, each woman identified some good times as a child, mostly playing with cousins or siblings. But only Helen and Mary spoke of their childhoods in a positive tone, even as they identified problems. For the rest, even these descriptions of good times were plaintive in tone. Karen spoke of the end of fun:

I was a tomboy as you'd say. What they [her brothers] did, I did. If they acted like they was running track out in the yard, they'd fix a thing, I'd be there.

Jumping over the hurdles and stuff. I did the same thing with them. Until they thought I maturing, and I couldn't do it with them. And that hurt. They said, "She'll get hurt. You can't play like this no more."

Susie's good times were connected to school, but she felt cut off from her family:

Yeah all my brothers and sisters they used to get mad at me cause like in the wintertime I wouldn't get out and play in the snow or anything. I'd always stay in the house with my nose in a book and they'd get so mad.

From these descriptions of growing up we do not get a picture of happy carefree childhoods. There was disruption, hard work, a feeling of separateness, of good times missed.

Their Children

Children have an important place in the lives of these women, and they hope their children's lives will be easier than their own. Susie, Gloria, and Mary all talked specifically about wanting to keep their children (or nephew) from having to go through what they did as children--racial prejudice, an unstable home, poverty. Six have their own children. Three have grandchildren as well. While Mary has no children of her own, she helps care for a nephew and a cousin.

Raising children takes care and luck. They believe you try to give them values, everyone agreed. But as to how much this is possible, there were some difference. Elaine, Susie, and Helen all spoke of particular approaches they have used. Elaine has three teenage children living at home and has set rules for them. They have to be home by a

certain time, and they share the housework. Helen was clear about the importance of both spending time with your children and setting limits when she told about raising her sons. Now she worries about the children in her community:

> *I know they get ignored, they don't get no attention like we did, either, when we were growing up. The parents has just turned them loose, and I guess, well a lot of them raise their self, you can say, anymore.*

Susie thinks about how to be a good parent for her daughter:

> *I want to be a mother to her, but I also want to be a friend. I want her to be able to come and talk to me about anything. I don't want her to be scared, you know. Because I'm willing to sit and listen. I'll try to see things her way, you know. But then I look at "Mom knows best."*

Mary is struggling to find a way to handle her young cousin who is in foster care with her and her grandparents. They try to follow the social worker's advice to use "time-out," but even though she recognizes the child's anger may come from a disrupted home, Mary is frustrated with her. "She needs a spanking is what she needs."

While four of the women are quite deliberate about child raising, the other three, Gloria, Karen, and Tina did not talk about particular approaches they have used. They do talk about giving their children love, and they continue to be concerned about their well-being and offer them support. Tina disagrees when her parents wonder if she could take care of her son on her own, but she did not really talk about what the reality of that might be. Gloria and Karen continue to help and advise their grown children and talk about the importance of a loving home. But instead of mentioning particular ways they taught

values, Karen talked about trying to have "a good Christian home," and Gloria said her sons were "raised in the church."

Approaches to gender issues with their children also varied. When Susie said, "I intend on her [her daughter] to grow up knowing that she can do anything that she wants to do if she just sets her mind to it," Elaine warned her to watch out because she has an intelligent daughter. Helen is ready to take her sons on if they abuse their wives. Gloria, while troubled about the possibility that her sons might hurt their wives, seems unwilling to confront them directly. Mary values what she sees as her mother's efforts to be sure her sons could take care of themselves and do housework. Karen remembers her losses when she was deemed too old to play "boys' games" with her brothers. For the most part they recognized that boys and girls are often raised differently, that boys are waited on around the house, but some of them have challenged this in their own lives with their husbands and sons and others have not.

Marriage

For most of this group marriage has been experienced as something to escape from, to recover from, to get beyond. Only two participants were married at the time of the interviews. Three were divorced and two had never married. Table 3 summarizes what they said about marriage, both their own and marriage in general.

The women's comments about marriage were primarily negative. While they seemed to think good marriages were possible if you could find the right person, only Susie and Helen offered suggestions about how to take active steps to make a marriage work. Susie took an oral communications class in college and said that she believed that if she and her former husband had been able to communicate, to talk about their problems, their marriage might have been different. Helen talked about how she and her husband

Table 3: Thoughts on Marriage

Woman	Thoughts on Marriage
Gloria	Then older people, they just always fuss, you know. Seem like my mom couldn't never do anything to please him, he always had something to fuss about and something. I always said well if marriage's like this I didn't want to get married.
Elaine	When I was married all my time was concentrated on keeping the house a certain way, keeping the children a certain way, keeping myself a certain way. Because I knew that if I didn't I was gonna have to pay the consequences. I had to be aware of what he expected me to do and how he expected me to be. But this time I'm very, I am very, very cautious. One of the first things that I do check out is their faith. Next I want to make sure that they own their own homes and that I don't have to support them. [laughs] And if their personality doesn't clash real violently with mine. But I haven't really found anybody yet...that makes me want to get married.
Karen	I guess just try to stand in there, take it from one day to the next, for me. I've had my ups and downs with my husband. We've about split up once or twice but just held together. I guess being friends, be able to talk and just loving one another, for that's all I know. It's held mine together so far! A lot of the husbands think they're ready to settle down and they hain't. They've just got to sew their wild oats some more or something, the way her husband was. One woman just wasn't enough.
Tina	I was 18 at the time and I had no idea my husband was a drug addict and a alcoholic, cause he was drunk occasionally while we were dating, and then after we got married, moved to North Carolina after my summer school was over with. He was supposed to be down there working and he was sleeping around on me even at that time. And we hadn't even been married six weeks. I didn't know about it. I got down there and we'd been married four months when one night he come in drunk, and he was really high and I didn't say nothing to him, but he retch out and he knocked me across the back of the couch. I thought that I cared about him, and....But when I look back at him, his attitude, he was a not a very nice person and probably never would be. People tried to warn me, but I didn't listen, and so, the way I figured it, I'd made my own bed so I had to lie in it. And I'd... even though my marriage was bad, I didn't want my parents and them to have to know about it cause I didn't want them worrying about it, so I sort of kept all the bad stuff hidden.

Table 3 (continued)

Woman	Thoughts on Marriage
Mary	I may get married later when I'm about 35 or something. I told Mom I'd be at least thirty-five. Because I see a lot of people, they get married and just throw any chance they've got of getting anything away, by having children, in this area, because their husbands don't work and they end up on welfare and food stamps.
Susie	Our main problems started I believe was when my little boy died. And then I think, you know, my marriage from then just started pulling apart. And then I got pregnant with my little girl and I had a real rough time a carrying her. And I don't know if it was just too much pressure on him to thinking that maybe we was gonna lose this one too or what it was, but he got mixed up with another woman...and that was it. He was, he was the boss. I mean that's just the way it went.... Well I think marriage is what people make of it. But I think it takes two people to make a marriage work. One person cannot do everything, and try to hold it together. It's just impossible. Cause I tried. And I think it takes, you know, sitting down and talking problems out. Not just arguing and fussing and going on all the time. You need to sit down and communicate with one another and talk your problems out instead of just fussing about them all the time and burying everything on the inside, not letting it out.
Helen	We have always been close, you know. We get along good. He goes his way, I go mine, when we got something to do. He don't say, "You can't go," or I don't say, "You can't go." It's just 50-50, that's all you can say. That's the only way a marriage is gonna work this day and time. Or that's the way I look at it. You've got to work at something if you want it. And you want it to last. Too many people any more is for theirself and theirself alone. And what they want to do, they want to do. You know, they ain't no give and take there. There's got to be give and take. But now when we was first married he was a little jealous, but and back then it was "You can't do this and you can't do that," but I took care of the money and everything. But you know, after you tell them off a few times, say, "I don't want to do this," or " I don't want to do that," he gets over it.

have worked things out over the years and that she pretty much does what she wants while maintaining what seems to be a good relationship with him. Later in the discussion when we look at how this group of women defines and approaches the issues in their lives and communities we will examine their thoughts on women's roles and rights.

Abuse in Families

While families are a site of care and refuge, they have also been a source of fear and abuse. At least two women were sexually abused as children by relatives. Two others grew up with alcoholic fathers who physically abused their mothers. At least two had been physically abused by their husbands until they believed their lives were in danger. Another told of being harassed by an 80-year-old man while she was in high school.

This finding parallels that of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986). Their study was not designed to look at abuse, physical or sexual. The method of locating participants did not take this into account, yet they found 38% of the women they interviewed in schools and colleges and 65% of those contacted through social agencies reported that they had been subject to rape, incest, or sexual seduction by a male in authority over them. In my study I located women on the criteria of participation in a community organization, yet in this small group found what seems to me an astounding incidence of sexual and physical abuse.

The women reported this abuse not because of any direct questioning, but in explanation of some other point--the nature of their marriage, why they read so much growing up, why they no longer attended church, why there were things they did not discuss. Several women talked in some detail about their experiences and speculated about how they were affected at least initially. There may well be long term effects as well for each woman who was victimized

An Ethic of Care

An ethic of care, of doing for family, is a primary theme in these women's lives. Carol Gilligan (1982) used this term to describe the approaches to morality she identified in women. "The ideal of care is thus an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connections so that no one is left alone" (p. 62). This interconnectedness particularly with family is very much part of the lives of the women in this study.

As adults, each of these women has either been cared for by her family or has been a caregiver to other adults and children who were not her own. Helen had perhaps the most experience, dropping out of school to care for the family when her mother was hospitalized, taking care of her older infirm relatives as a young woman and keeping her husband's uncle. But the same sense of commitment can be heard in Mary's intentions to stay with her grandparents as long as they need her.

> *I mean I just, I love my grandparents. I mean... I don't care if they're there until they're a hundred, I'll take care of my grandmother and them.*

And in the extension of this concern into the community.

> *I'm a family kind of person. And then I do stuff for people in the neighborhood, the older people. I stop by and we check on them and make sure they're o.k. and see if they need anything from town or from Addison or anything like that. (Mary)*

Gloria and Susie, as well as Tina live in their parents' home with their children. Karen has had some member of her own or her husband's family living with her most of

her married life. Elaine, Susie, Tina, and Mary's mother were all able to get out of abusive marriages because they had the support of their parents.

> *They were ears to listen, shoulders to cry on, guidance if I needed it. Protection when I needed it because there were times when I did need protection. They were there and got me through it. (Elaine)*

In Mary's case, her mother felt she was able to leave her husband when her father (Mary's grandfather) received compensation for black lung disease. At that point she knew he could give her some financial support until she got on her feet financially. (Getting on her feet meant moving a house trailer next to her parents and working for minimum wage in a factory until her children were grown.) Mary now spends time and money on her nephew and in taking care of a four-year-old cousin whose parents are in prison.

When these women talk about caring for family members they do not speak with resentment. Rather it seems that they see this as part of what one does in families--take care of them. When we look at reasons for being involved in community work, this same theme of care reappears. Helen articulated this ethic in the strongest terms, as we heard in the previous chapter. Others also talked of caring within their families. Susie spoke regretfully of the necessity of her grandmother living in Oklahoma because her Virginia relatives were not able to keep her at their homes. Gloria told of her father describing their home as a hotel because so many relatives stayed there, including the children Gloria's mother helped raise.

> *Yeah, she took him in and my dad always hollered, "We should've built a motel, all these kids." He always said, "I thought we was through raising kids. Here we've*

got more kids to raise." My mom, she just had enough love for everybody. She didn't care.

Mary, too, spoke of love and concern when she talked of the children in her life, even when she is exasperated by their behavior.

When they were asked to describe themselves and their strengths, all but Elaine used words that indicate they see themselves as caring people, concerned about and involved with others: *tender-hearted, caring, loving, helpful, a good listener, get along with people.* Three of them described their weak point in terms of hurting others by their anger: *emotional, moody, easy to anger.*

So while we hear of struggles for independence in individual stories--independence from family and from feelings of worthlessness that remained after destructive marriages - we also hear a continued commitment to connectedness. Life decisions are made around needs of family, either extended family in Mary's case or children as for Susie, Tina, and Elaine. And when they talk of making a move, of going to another community, the move is still connected to family - going to where an uncle lives, or a son. Family is the point of reference in these seven women's lives. And care of family is a primary motivation. We see this motivation again when we examine their work in community.

Women's Rights--Issues of Gender

Throughout the individual interviews issues of gender were addressed to some extent, in talk about marriage, abuse, child rearing practices. While none of them raised the issue, gender would seem to be an important factor in the caregiving in their lives. It was Karen and Helen--not their brothers--who quit school to care for their younger siblings.

I asked each woman in the individual interviews what being a woman meant to her, a question from the *Women's Ways of Knowing* interviews (Belenky, et al., 1986). In several interviews I got a limited response to that question and followed it up by asking if they would rather be a man. Table 4 presents typical excerpts from their responses to these questions.

Table 4: Being a Woman

Woman	Responses
Gloria	Being a woman mean to me taking responsibility, for being a mother and a father. Being I guess like a teacher. Time when you have to say "no" and time when you had to set down, well I guess when you just had to take--on everything. Time when I cried, time when I was smiling, time when I laughed, and time when I was sad. It was part of I guess being a human being, too, so....And I guess they just, 24 hour job being a woman.
Elaine	I love being a woman. I love, just I guess I love being who I am. If I'd been made a man I'd probably would have loved being a man. I love what I am now. Took me a long, hard time to be able to love what I am now. I know that it doesn't matter how many times I try to make stuff the way that I think they should be, it doesn't matter if they don't come out the way they should be. Cause at least I've tried. And that's what being a woman is. I just, I just love being what I am. And to me cause I'm defined as a woman I guess that means being a woman. I love, I love being what I am. I just enjoy being a woman. I love doors being opened for me, and you know, all these little things that men do for women, I love those things. That's why my sons open the door for me. They walk me if I'm going to church or going to a building, they'll walk with me. My hand on their elbow and stuff like that. I love those things!
Karen	I guess that's what they say about with the women, too--being a woman like you have a lot of problems. Like your health, your children. To me it's just a lot of problems that you're born into. Usually every time something goes wrong, a woman's the downfall if you ever notice a lot of them. Like if the marriage --, "Oh, it's the woman's fault." That's what a lot of the men say, "It's your fault." I don't think I'd ever want to be a man. No way. Cause I've seen [inaudible] men do. I wouldn't want to be one, and all the problems and stuff they put on a woman.

Susie	I was reading something or other, this essay somebody wrote and said that they was gonna get them a--it was a girl writing the essay--but she wanted her a wife. You know, to cook, and to clean, and to take care of the kids. And she would get out and pull a eight hour shift if she had a wife to do everything at home....I just think it's rough on women. It's like a woman's got more responsibilities than a man does. I mean they go out and they work, yeah. But then they come home and they don't have all the responsibilities at home that a woman does. And if a woman - which now it takes two people to work to make a living--and if a woman's out working she's still got all this stuff to do when she gets home. I don't know, I think men's got it a little bit easier made than women. Maybe I shouldn't say that.
Tina	Being a woman means to me? Uh, well, you know, I'm not really sure. I just think that it requires you to be stronger because I think in ways women are more vulnerable than men so you have to be stronger. Sometimes you have to be more mature or wiser than them because sometimes they're not going to be for themselves and I think being a woman means you take on responsibilities that most generally men do not.
Helen	Well I like being a woman.
Mary	OK you can have children and then, that's something that a man can't do. And you can educate yourself just as good as a man can. You can do any job that a man can and you can be just as strong. And you can be just as dependable, you know. A man takes care of his family. A woman can, too. And then, well possibly it would be easier for a woman to be a single parent, but I don't know. It's hard on both sides, but I guess a woman could take care of them better, take care of a child better, in some situations. Oh....Well I wouldn't be expected to work as hard as I do. I said a woman could do anything they want--I wouldn't want to have to work in a coal mines or anything like that. Stuff expected of us is like desk jobs and things like that, being nurses. I mean there's not many male nurses around here. And then there's just as many women doctors as there are males, so.... I don't think that they should have to work in factories. My mother did that, and I hated it for her because it totally almost killed her raising us. I don't think that they should just have to be expected to do something like that. I mean if that's all they can get, I'd hate to have to do that all my life. But I would if I had to. I don't think, well.... I don't know any other....

The theme here is responsibility, women taking primary responsibility for family. Only Helen and Elaine did not talk about the responsibilities women face. And they both take their responsibilities to their families very seriously. They both also say they have taught their sons to take care of themselves, to be able to cook, clean,

Beyond this theme of responsibility it is difficult to be certain about how this group of women approach gender issues. None of them said they would rather be men. Most

seemed to think being a man might be more difficult--for various reasons including the expectation to be strong. Gloria believes she has a better chance in the world as a black woman than a black man. Karen doesn't want to be the kind of person she has seen men be.

Susie and Mary both talked about believing that women should not work in the mines or do heavy factory work, but it seemed to be because they think that women should not have to do that kind of work, not that they cannot. In fact Mary's beliefs come from seeing her mother do factory work. Tina and Gloria both mentioned service in the armed forces as something they did not want to have to do.

In the group interviews I raised the question of women's rights and responsibilities directly. The group discussions around women's rights centered on home responsibilities and if these should be shared. All agreed that work at home should be shared, but their conversations indicate that has not necessarily been their experience. In Lee City:

> *I thought a lot about that when I was married, this is women's work. And because I'd been brought up that way I thought it should be that way. Til I got out and left him and figured, "Hey, I don't have to do this crap. This is me. I can do what I want to do now."(Elaine)*

> *Yeah a lot of the men's attitudes are changing, but there's a lot that's not. And there's a lot of women's attitudes, too. The way some women is raised, they stick to that. My job is to keep the inside and his is to keep the outside. (Susie)*

> *Huh. There's only so much stuff to be done outside. That's why they're always on the couch.(Mary)*

And at Two Sisters:

I think most of them back here, they've got their husbands pampered. (Gloria)

They baby them too much.(Karen)

Well you'd be surprised the things women say they have to do for their husband. I guess God did me a favor when I didn't get married because I'd probably be crazy. Cause my mom be waiting on my dad all the time. Cause I won't do it. (Gloria)

Sometimes you want to pull your hair out of your head.... (Karen)

But I've about broke Lee. Used to every time you'd turn around he'd holler, "Bring me a cup of coffee. Bring me a cup of coffee." But honey I've go so I tell him, "Go get your own." (Helen)

The Two Sisters women went on to talk about abuse and the community's attitudes about marriage and what is and is not acceptable. They said attitudes are changing, but that many people, men and women, still believe that a woman should stay home and man should work outside the home. In light of the changing economics and work force of the Appalachian region (Maggard, 1992), I believe this attitude is no longer functional.

The centers are community centers, not women's centers. Yet women are the most active members and do most of the work. And the programs seem to meet the needs of women more than men, although both are involved in the dances and SHARE at Two Sisters. But women are clearly the strongest force in the organizations. All of the board members at Lee City and most at Two Sisters are women. Women are the adult education

teachers and most of the students. The mothers are the parents most involved in the pre-school. Perhaps this is because the women have more free time or because many of the activities of the centers meet needs traditionally defined as women's concerns or are social events attended by women.

But I also observed open easy relationships between men and women in both communities. At Two Sisters while cleaning up after the SHARE distribution everyone did all the tasks. There was a lot of joking, but also a serious discussion about how men become "mama's boys." Helen was about to visit her son in Texas for a month. When her husband was teased about whether he would be able to get along without her, he said, *"She's had an open road for 28 years, and I'm not going to shut the gate now."*

In Lee City the women from the Community Center work together with men from the town council and development authority. Mary had some thoughts about why men were not more involved in the center there:

> *Yeah and that's with the clinics, where they're gonna renovate a building and the road and stuff. That's OK for them. Demolition and stuff, they go in for that. They'll come out in full force to watch!*

These women do not seem to have thought a lot about what might be called "women's issues." However, their various comments both in individual interviews and in group discussion indicate that they believe that women should have equal legal rights, that home responsibilities should be shared, and that women should have support either from a spouse or from the community as they take responsibility for their families.

Schooling and Learning

All the women in this study have taken part in some sort of formal adult education. They talked about these experiences as well about their earlier school experiences. They also mentioned other potential sources of learning--reading and watching television--though not usually as a source of knowledge. For several, religion had an important impact on their thinking. This section explores the women's educational experiences.

K-12 School Experiences

Experiences in public schools seem to have been interpreted in two ways by the women in this study. For some of them at some times school was a place of learning, a place of connection to the wider world. But most of them described school as a place where their differences from their schoolmates in class and race were keenly felt. These differences were especially important in high school.

Susie was generally positive about school as we have heard in her profile. Mary also seemed to have liked school, although she did not say much about it. Tina had mixed feelings. She moved a lot and that was difficult. But she described some schools as "really fun" and said at one point that she "loved her grade school years." But she, Karen, Elaine, and Gloria all talked about times when school was painful.

> *I was a very sickly child. I had to walk on crutches when I was in the first grade, failed the first grade cause I had to stay out of school so much. And they thought I had a touch of the rheumatic fever cause my nose would pour out blood at school*

and I'd pass out and stuff. The teachers still wouldn't get ahold of my mom and then I'd have to sit there all day 'til it was time to go home. (Karen)

It was all right...just I got made fun a lot of you know though, because where I didn't get to stay in school a lot and I didn't have the, you know, really nice things that other kids...do the best you can when you've got a big family, and your mom's doing the best she can... so I, and missing so much and you know you couldn't learn the stuff that you needed to learn. It was hard to catch back up.... (Karen)

Tina also raised the issue of clothes, of who wore what to school:

I didn't care for high school too much because a lot of the kids were really cruel. ....They didn't understand why I didn't have all the expensive name brand clothes and everything, and like I said, my dad was unemployed for a while and....I mean they just kept up with the fads. And some kids who could not, you know they just couldn't keep up with the fads. They couldn't afford things like that. I know one of my cousins, she wears leather shoes and expensive outfits and stuff cause her mom goes and buys them for her, to keep up with the fads. But some of us, you know, with parents who have just reasonable, you know, low-paying jobs just barely above minimum wage, you couldn't live like that. So. There was a lot of a difference.

School clothes were important. Susie and Elaine both talked about their mothers cleaning houses to make money for new school clothes. Mary's brothers worked summers to help pay for the family's school clothes. I have heard many families talk and worry

about paying for new school clothes. Clothing is important because it seems to define, to make evident, class differences among students at school. By buying new clothes, parents try to be sure their children "fit in."

For Gloria the issue in high school was race. She spoke of the anger and pain of the experience of school integration in the early 1960s. And she not only suffered the pain of rejection based on race. Gloria identifies her current reading difficulties as a result of poor schooling before high school.

The group told of their own school experiences. They also talked of their children's schooling or their hopes for their children's educations. Gloria, Helen, and Karen, whose children were through high school, had mixed reviews of the schooling their children had received. They shared many parents' frustration at believing there were problems in their children's schooling, attempting to make changes, and not being sure what success they had had.

Helen's three sons all graduated from high school and were active in sports. The younger two did well academically, but the older one had an experience in the third grade, which his mother believes affected the rest of his school career.

> *The oldest one, well something funny happened to my oldest one when he was in the third grade and it ruint him the rest of the way through school. He was a making straight As and some way another they lost his report card, and they had to make him another one. They couldn't find the record of his grades and all this and all that and they changed his grades that was on his report card. And it really messed him up! He didn't care where he had anything or not. He just quit, you know, putting effort into it. He done enough to get by and that was it. That's all he would do after they done him, you know, after they changed his grades on the new report card. There wasn't nothing we could do about it, cause they claimed*

they didn't have the records of the grades and you know all teachers supposed to keep the records of the grades. But they didn't have them.... (Helen)

It is instructive to look at how Helen and Gloria dealt with their sons' school problems. Gloria decided early on to question her sons' teachers and challenge the school when she felt they were mistreated. She moved her sons to a school where she felt there would be less discrimination. But while she was quite deliberate and assertive about their schooling, she did not talk much about what she did at home with her sons, how she raised them, except when she discussed how she tried to help them deal with racial issues. Helen on the other hand, while identifying a problem with how her son was treated in the third grade, said there really was not anything they could do about it. However, she talked a lot about how she brought up her sons at home--expecting them to work, to be in at a certain time, to stay out of trouble. Later we look again at when and where people decided to take action in their lives.

Adult Education

All of the participants in this study took part in formal adult education, either a GED program or community college classes. Their reasons for going were primarily related to hopes for future employment. Their comments and feelings about their formal adult education experiences are summarized in Table 5. Several of them had a lot to say about their adult education experience. Others discussed it only it when I asked. While attending school and accomplishing a goal was important to the group, the actual adult education experience seems to have limited impact on their thinking for all except Susie and Tina.

Table 5: Adult Education

Woman	Comments about Adult Education
Gloria	- GED different from school; can take your time - teacher tries to do things by the book - Mom and Sr. Janet from the center encouraged her - feels stronger; feels real good - never too late to learn
Karen	- teacher says she needs to build up her confidence - hard time with math, hard to keep it in your head - rough trying to learn stuff I never had
Helen	- enjoyed being with others in GED class - quit, too much to do, no need of it
Elaine	- "High school education wasn't gonna get me nothing." - had to have something in her life - teachers let her sit in, center provided paper and pencils - set goals and accomplished them - not in class now, enough's enough - tough trying to have high grades - being with younger students not comfortable
Tina	- community college teachers nice - made new friends, girl with similar marriage who gave her support, she learned from her; shared lunches - depressed because it was so hard - didn't like the 12 hour day away from child - on nerve pills, tension from keeping up with school work and her son - "Practically made a whole new start." - nice place - talked to teachers a lot
Susie	- always wanted to go to college - Mom encouraged her - rough, a lot more time consuming than h.s - Elaine, Mary and Mom supported her - thinking of her little girl encouraged her to keep going - funny at first with younger students - thought she wouldn't be able to do work; proved herself wrong - got depressed because it was so hard - gets nervous with computers, aggravated - conflict with mom taking care of house and child - teachers in it for the money - confronted teacher about how he was teaching - teachers counted off when she didn't use standard English
Mary	- didn't know anybody - in the middle age-wise

GED Classes

Helen, Gloria, and Karen have all attended GED (General Equivalency Diploma) classes at the Two Sisters Center. These classes are taught by an Adult Basic Education (ABE) teacher hired by the county. Over the years the teacher has become more involved in center activities, but she lives in another part of the county. The classes are at the center, but are not a center program. In the class students work individually, usually in GED workbooks. The program is not integrated with the other work of the center, for instance by using local issues or materials to develop reading and writing skills.

Helen attended the GED class for a short time but quit. While she enjoyed coming and being with people, she saw no need of the diploma.

> *Everybody says, "Now Helen you need to go on and take the test, you can make it." And I say well there's no need of it. Cause I'm not trained for any work, unless it's restaurant work or something like that you know. So I guess if anything happens to Lou I'll just have to make it on what I draw. No, I said this, these veteran's people are so unfair. See as long as he is on this veterans he cannot, I cannot make a penny.*

Karen does want the diploma and would like to attend community college classes to become a nurses aide or child care worker. Her biggest difficulty is with math, and she has not been able to pass the test and has difficulty finding the time to study. Gloria has a high school diploma, but noted above, she does not read as well as she wants to and is taking classes hoping to improve her skills. She, too, hopes to attend college and become a certified child care worker.

The three women spoke positively about the GED classes, but the classes do not seem to be an important source of change in their lives.

Community College

Four of the women have attended community college. Elaine, Susie, and Mary have all studied accounting and small business administration. Tina was at first interested in a career in health care, but now plans to go into law enforcement. For Elaine and Mary college has primarily been a way to learn skills and get credentials. On the other hand both Tina and Susie did speak of classes that had impacted their thinking in important ways. Susie took a communications class that helped her understand the failure of her marriage and the impact of her father's drinking on her own sense of herself. She now tries to be sure to talk and listen to her five-year-old daughter and recognize her daughter's achievements and dreams. Tina was supported by a teacher to use writing to help sort her feelings about her abusive marriage:

> *And I learned a lot from my teachers and my counselor. You know they gave me a way to let my emotions out like when I was thinking about what to write, and I wrote that paper. My teacher said, "Write something that means something to you or something you really know about, not something that you don't know about." And I learned a lot through that because I could put my feelings on paper and therefore it helped me release them.*

For Tina and Susie college not only offers the possibility of gaining skills that may lead to employment, but has provided transformative experiences (Mezirow, 1991). They both seem to have changed the way they understand their lives and experiences. But for Ellen and Mary, college seems to be only a source of skills. Neither spoke of any significant learning or relationship at college. They both talked of getting their support from other women at the community center. And for Susie, too, her support in the

challenge of going to college while raising a young child is her mother and her friend Mary. Only Tina spoke of significant friends met at college.

Other Sources of Learning as Adults

All the women I interviewed were readers. In most instances they described themselves as "loving to read," reading "constantly," having "books everywhere," or as Helen put it, "Sometimes it's good just to lay down with a good book, just lay there and read." Their tastes vary widely. They mentioned reading romances (three), horror (two), history (two), Indian culture (one), science fiction (one), mysteries (three), and the Bible (four). Gloria, who says she doesn't, "Read like I should," reads less that the others, but she, too, mentioned reading the Bible and "little" books. Their reading may be primarily for escape (which Elaine clearly indicated), but is important to them.

For the most part television does not seem particularly important to the women in this study. They talked about watching "stories" (Mary and Susie) or mysteries (Helen) when I asked. But only Gloria, the least skilled reader, seems to use television as a major source of information and learning. She mentioned several programs that have had an impact on her, particularly those presenting black history.

> *I watch Discovery....They have a lot of black history and type of thing. Cause I was looking at the black buffalo soldier. That was very interesting. I feel like when I went to school only thing they taught us about our race is that they was enslaved, you know slavery. And then there's a lot of history behind different things about blacks. And when I was watching that it seemed like it made me feel good you know that even though they were put down in history, that they took their part in the West.*

Religion

In the Appalachian region religion is important. There are little churches, usually several varieties of Baptist, in every rural community. The more mainstream Protestant churches -- Methodist, Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, occasionally Episcopal -- are in the county seats and larger towns. Most counties have one or two small Catholic churches, often operated as missions. With the possible exception of Susie, the women have been participants in the region's religious life. But even for those most involved, religion seems a source of support more than an area of learning and change.

Two of the women in this study, Elaine and Gloria, volunteered information about their church and religion as they told the story of their lives. For them it was clearly an important support, and they are active church members.

> *Yeah, I'm very involved with my church. At present I'm assistant youth teacher, and I'm in the choir....Anything I can get into in my church, I'm into. That they'll let me into. I was there...my church is sort of like my refuge I guess you could say. (Elaine)*

> *We was doing meals-on-wheels, Mama Angels or something like that. Me and Edith and my mom generally fixed the meals and let different ones take turns taking them to people, the ones that couldn't get out, the elderly like people, or anybody that couldn't get out. And then, when we have Bible school, when they need kids for the nursery, stay with the small ones, we take like a month of doing it. And vacation Bible school, we take part in that. Yeah, I... and we have like different dinners, we have a ladies' meeting on Tuesday, we go on Tuesday. And I feel like,*

I feel like everything I got is through the grace of God, you know like, every time when I was sick and couldn't even go to the doctor I just kept asking God to let me feel, you know help me from one day to the next day. And I felt like He was there, really was. And church meant a lot when--well church is just a building, but God, Jesus Christ meant a lot to me. Cause when I tell my kids that they lean towards Christ and always stay towards him, and they'll never go astray. (Gloria)

I asked the rest directly, and their answers varied considerably. Karen said church was very important, but she cannot go as often as she would like. Helen goes to church, but talked more about how churches have changed, how people are less concerned about each other, than about her own involvement in religion. Susie and Tina did not have much to say; church and religion did not seem to have an important place in their lives. When I asked Mary, she told about how she had been harassed by an old man in her church and had quit going. She still saw religion as important and thinks she'll go back someday, but does not know a church where she thinks she'd be comfortable.

Growth and Change in Community Organizations

In this section I consider the themes that are closest to the research question, what the women who participated in this study said about their work and involvement in the centers:

- Why did they start working at the centers?
- How are they involved? What work do each of them do?
- What difference has it made in their lives and in the community?
- What factors contributed to learning and growth?

Beginning at the Community Centers

The women got involved in community center work for various reasons. Elaine had just left an abusive husband and came to the center looking for help with clothes for her children. She started sitting in on classes, and when she enrolled in college classes, started tutoring as a work study student. Susie and Mary both worked in the center as summer youth workers and stayed on as volunteers.

> *Well one summer I cleaned. Me and another girl, we cleaned, we painted all these ceilings, we took all the tiles down and we had to paint every one of those and put them back up. And we did the walls like this. We painted and feather dusted the walls, which was my idea. (Susie)*

The Two Sisters women were encouraged to come by friends or relatives. Karen's good friend who worked at the center encouraged Karen to help when the center was cooking for hundreds of striking miners. Karen agreed to help because her father and brother had been killed in the mines. She and other women at the center encouraged her daughter Tina to volunteer. Once they were there all found they had something to contribute.

> *I wound up in the center through Edith. She kept begging me, which I was kind of shy like at the time. Then I got involved in the community center. And I started out with the clothes sale, and she used to have pre-school and she asked me just to come be at the sale. And I was doing it by myself and then I just got involved in everything that's going on here. So whenever they need me I had the time, most time I had the time, I would come and work at the center. And sometime I*

wouldn't have the time, but I would do it because I didn't want to see the center shut down. (Gloria)

Well I just started coming down here and they started asking me to do this and do that and so. I just come right on into it, you know. I didn't have that much to do at home and the kids gone and everything. (Helen)

Well, Edith and them, they needed help and stuff, and they're always looking for volunteers. And my mom was telling me about it, so I went over there one day to see what they did. And I liked it so I just started going over there, and I began working at the center when the Christmas program came around where we give out the gifts to the kids and stuff and the packages. And I started helping with that and before I knew it, I was hooked. I didn't want to get out of it. (Tina)

None of these women included working for change or even wanting to help the community when they talked about their reasons for initially getting involved in the community centers. For some their reasons were pragmatic, either because they were assigned to work at the center or because they needed a service the center offered. Others came because of personal ties to women already working there. Only after they spent time working in the centers did they seem to develop a commitment to the kind of work the centers were doing.

Working at the Centers

Cleaning, tutoring, cooking, bookkeeping, selling clothes, soliciting funds--these are a few of the community center activities of these seven women. Table 6 lists the different "jobs" the women reported they have done as center volunteers.

At each center some work is done primarily by a particular person. However most work is organized on an *ad hoc* basis with people doing jobs, "According to what's to be done," as Helen put it. The important thing is getting the work done. Who is available at any given time to do it is affected by health, family commitments, school, and rarely, paid employment. Each person has volunteered for many different jobs. Karen is typical.

> *Well I help with the dances, used to help with the dances like setting up for dances. Sometimes I would help work inside to help sell the food.... Now I clean, and I do the bunkhouse when groups come in and then we talk with groups and we have the dinners, and I help with the things for the kids for Christmas, you know get things together that we have for the children. That's about all.*

The work can be categorized in three broad areas: project work, board work, and what I have called support.

Project Work

Much of the work is in carrying out center activities and projects: the Christmas programs, which provide gifts and food to community families; the dances at Two Sisters; SHARE food distribution; summer programs for children and the pre-school at Two Sisters; literacy tutoring at Lee City. Helen described how they organize their Christmas program which in 1993 gave gifts to over 400 families.

Table 6: Work at the Centers

Woman	Work at Center
Elaine	tutoring clothes sales help with parties bookkeeping cleaning board member
Karen	board member sell food at dances cleaning help with Christmas project vacation Bible school help send appeal letters
Susie	cleaning painting bookkeeping board member sold clothes
Gloria	clothing sales board member cooking for volunteers work on water quality
Tina	help with pre-school board vice-president and president help at dances vacation Bible school office work--answering phone, mail, solicitation settling disputes set up Black History Month display help with Christmas program
Helen	check on building, furnace help with clothing sales SHARE record keeping help with dances pre-school volunteer board member SMELL water quality group "according to what's to be done"
Mary	board member help with Christmas project cleaning clothes sales summer youth program

We fix blanks for them to register for it. And they give their sizes and all of that you know. So we know approximately what the kid can wear, and what it can't, and it gives their age. So we know all of that about them. And then we have to go through them and put them in alphabetical order. And then we have to go through them and go buy stuff for what we ain't got in. I think we bought close to 3,000 dollars this year. Plus what people shipped in to us you know.

If we got it, we give clothes and a toy. But if we ain't got it we give like a toy and a big treat bag or clothes and a big treat bag. Like pencils and papers for older kids and then give them a toy or a piece of clothing or....

In addition to distributing clothing at the Christmas program (which Lee City also holds), families in crisis are helped with clothing whenever they need it. And clothes sales provide revenue for the center electricity and upkeep. Each of the women has worked in clothing sales at one time or another.

I sold clothes for the community. I would put the clothes out that came in and get rid of the clothes that was out that I didn't think that was gonna sell. I boxed all those up, which they supposed to ship them somewhere in Kentucky. And I put all the new clothes, you know, all the other clothes that had came in out, priced them and sold them cause the community center uses that money in order to pay the electric bill and to keep the building operating in order to have school and to be here for the families around like for clothes. (Susie)

An important part of the work at Two Sisters is working the dances. One or two Saturday nights each month the center hires a band, usually bluegrass, and holds a dance. The dances provide recreation for the community and raise money for the center.

> *I did do that [take up tickets at the dance]. Now I work the concession stand, the snack bar, and we do it in swing shifts--me and my cousin [and other women]. So, we just basically, you know, one person floats if another person wants to dance they go back there and take over. Then they come back from the dance and go back to work again. And you're provided with a free drink and your food while you're working, and that pretty well takes care of any time you might get hungry or anything. But it's fun. (Tina)*

The maintenance work for the center programs includes both record keeping and upkeep. Susie, Alice, and Tina all have helped with bookkeeping and office work. Helen keeps records for the SHARE program. And everyone helps out with cleaning and maintenance.

> *I live right down here about three or four houses on the left. I don't live that far away. If I have to I can get up and walk out here, you know, if it's bad or come out to check the furnace in the winter time, stuff like that. But, now I work clothes sales here at the center, and I work the SHARE program. I used to work the dances. I don't work that many dances any more. I help Edith over in pre-school sometimes. And just do different, you know, different stuff. It's just according to what's to be done. (Helen)*

The women do a wide variety of jobs, many which are new to them. Both Susie and Gloria spoke of learning how to set up clothes sales. Karen talked about being surprised that she could help write solicitation letters for their Christmas program. Elaine learned to be a volunteer literacy tutor, a skill she has since used in a job .

Being on the Board

The centers are governed by boards. The boards are chosen from the members of the centers. All seven women have been center board members. Some have been quite active; others have had a more limited role. But for nearly everyone this was a new role, one that was not always comfortable. For many grassroots community groups combining the experiences of having power, even if only over the tiny resources of a very small organization, and operating democratically is difficult. Board members have often had little or no experience with parliamentary procedure. But these two centers seem to have been unusually successful in developing ways to conduct their business with a minimum of conflict. Helen talked about her approach to working in groups:

> *Now if you've got a problem you need to set down and discuss it. And work it out. Among, you know, if it's me and [my husband] or if it's me and the girls, among ourselves. That's the way it ought to be. That away you don't go out here into this little place and that little place, "This one said this and that one said that." That's the way you end up with a lot of problems.*

Gloria, too, talked about problem solving on the Two Sisters board:

> *I can work with anybody, but sometimes you have to voice your opinion, you know. You got to say things. Then some of them get a little upset if you don't*

agree with everything they say, but sometimes you have to take a stand. You can't say "yeah" to everything.

Lot of times it tears it down when it gets like that. Like sometimes we can't agree on, not the board, like me and [another woman] might have some words or we're fussing about something. Instead of bringing it to the board, we have like an emergency meeting and see if we can straighten it out. Then if we can't, they'll bring it to the board. Instead of bringing it to the board, you like have [a committee]. Yeah, just listen, see what they can come up with, something like that. That's the only way, instead of bringing it to the board, cause you know the board might say, "Hey, that's not even worth our time. Let's go on to something else."

Tina has served as vice-president and then president of the Two Sisters board. She is younger than most of the women, but had been involved in clubs in high school. She credits this experience and Janet's help with her apparent ease at being a board officer.

Just--I run the meetings and I help get decisions made. I bring things up before the board that need to be brought up.

But I always have my agenda written up, what's going to go after one time to another, each step. And so that way everybody knew what we was going to be talking about and we didn't have to get off base or anything, so....Janet helped me a lot with that, planning my agenda and stuff and she got me to where I know what I was doing with it. And during my 4-H years at school, being an officer in there, I pretty well knew how to run a meeting, so...And I was a vocational school officer in the FHA hero chapter. And I held that office for two years, so I knew pretty

well how to do things, how to go about, you know, doing the meetings. I am the youngest board member. And nobody on our board wants to run a meeting. So I just took over then. That was my job, so I did it.

The Centers Doing for People

A third area of work at the centers is support--the work of listening, of being there for people. The centers provide support to community members, particularly women who are having difficult times in their lives. This support includes listening and often encouragement to change. While none of the women identified this support as work they do at the center, several of them did speak of it as something they did. Two of the women spoke directly of how they recognize an ability to support other women in themselves. Ellen told how she had learned to listen from the woman who teaches at Lee City, and how she now listens to abused women who come to the center:

Cause now I'm running into people who had the same kind of problems I did. And sometimes there's not, there's no easy answers, I don't care who you are and what you've been through, there's no easy answers. And sometimes the only thing you can do is just listen. And so I've learned, I just sit and listen.

Susie talked about how she was helped:

And as far as working in the community center, you get to talk to a lot of people. And you get to find out what they're going through and how they feel. And it's a really big help. I mean you know like someone could come in, and it's just like when I was going through my divorce there was a lady come in here and she had

just been through a divorce and we got talking and it helped a lot. I mean people around here are helpful, as far as that goes.

In a later interview she talked about supporting others. "If they're having a problem, if I've been through it, I'll sit down and discuss it with them and talk to them and hopefully make it easier for them."

When they talked of working for people in the community, the women primarily spoke of helping individuals rather than confronting community problems. I asked each woman about how the center helped the people of the community, and they usually listed services or programs: GED classes, clothing, SHARE, housing rehab, the Christmas programs, the pre-school, space for community events. They also spoke in terms of "helping a lot of people" and "helping families out." Only Elaine said "seeing people get interested," and only Tina mentioned working on the water issues in their community. So at least at first, they talked of the centers as places where people could get help with their basic needs. But later in group interviews they discussed both the importance of the centers as support for individual change and the possibilities of group action for change. We return to these group discussions at the end of this chapter.

Learning and Changing

The seven women who participated in this study were active in their community centers in a variety of ways. They gave to the people of their communities in a variety of ways. And from their work and experiences, they learned and changed. I have identified eight categories from their descriptions of the learning and change that resulted from their community center work. These are listed in Table 7. In this section I describe each category, summarizing the changes and learning the women reported, and in the following

section examine the factors in the community center experiences that contributed to or supported these changes.

In these interviews each woman spoke of specific things they had learned. Many of these were particular skills: how to send out fund-raising letters, how to set up an agenda, how to arrange clothing sales and set prices according to what people can pay, how to keep financial records. These were skills they learned "on the job." As Helen put it, "We train our selves, we train our self. We have to."

Table 7: Changes Attributed to Work in Centers

Area of Change	Elaine	Susie	Mary	Gloria	Helen	Tina	Karen
Increased confidence, willingness to speak out	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
New goals, work or educational	*	*		*		*	*
New skills		*	*		*	*	*
Increased community involvement	*		*	*	*		*
New friends		*	*	*	*		*
Learned to work with people who are different	*			*	*		*
New skills working with people	*			*		*	
New understanding of their experiences	*	*				*	

Three women spoke of particular "people skills" they had learned. Elaine and Tina were trained as adult literacy tutors. Tina took part in a "prejudice workshop" at a regional conference she attended as part of the Two Sisters leadership. Gloria and Elaine have participated in Community in the Classroom, a project integrating community development and literacy. Elaine also talked of learning communication skills and to listen from people in the center.

Having the opportunity to learn to interact with people who are different from themselves was an area four women mentioned. This learning might be described as multicultural, not in the sense that the women described any particular skills of multicultural communication that they had learned, but in that they now know that they can be with and work with people different than themselves.

> *I would never....When I first started I don't think I'd ever seen my self working with a Catholic sister. Which blew my mind, 'cause I always thought you don't mess with them people, they [have] weird ideas. I guess it's a stereotype, too, because I think you'll run into that in certain areas, you know.... And I'm friends with them now, but for that first while it was really weird. And then I went from, I met another, there was another group that come in here from, Haiti, I think through a, it was a Christian program group that were going around working and going through different centers. And seeing how each of the centers ran and worked and the people in them....And it just seems like I've met people from all parts of the world, right here in the center. (Elaine)*

> *I think it makes a difference in other people. You come into contact with so many different people from different countries and you know....And these big cities.*

These big city people will come in here. I don't pay no attention to it. I really don't pay no attention to it no more, but I used to think it was funny, you know. (Helen)

The three women who came into the community centers as they were getting out of their marriages spoke of how they received the support they needed as they were taking this step. Susie went on to give this support to others. She, Elaine, and Tina also talked about gaining a new understanding of their marriages.

They all talked to me and they treated me like an adult, not a little kid which was what my husband was treating me as. [I] didn't go out of the house and didn't need to read books, didn't need to learn, didn't need to get out and do anything, supposed to stay at home while he run around. Well the ladies up here showed me that was wrong. (Tina)

So they not only received support as they went through with divorces; these three women also learned from the experience with the help of the others in the centers.

Having a close circle of friends was another change which five women noted. While they had had close relationships within their families, the center work seems to have given them a circle of friends. Only Tina, who had made good friends at college, mentioned important friends outside the center. Helen and Gloria both talked about how much they liked each other. Susie and Karen mentioned their friends at the center, as did Mary:

And now, I, before I didn't get out much. Well Mamaw was sick, but now I'm on the board and I go to dinners and stuff like that with them. And I have, well I don't

have any young friends except for my neighbor. But then Susie, I'm friends with her and Elaine. And just people like that. People on the board and stuff like that.... And I get out and I have more friends than I did....That's just where all my friends are at. I mean we get along really well. (Mary)

By working in the centers the seven women learned new skills, found support and friendship, increased their knowledge of other people. But the more important learnings, the real changes were in their sense of their own abilities. All of them spoke of feeling stronger, more confident.

It took me the longest time to figure out that I was smart. And it wasn't just a gradual knowledge that I was intelligent enough to do college work. I was volunteering and I was helping a lady. I was tutoring her in second year college algebra. And I thought to my self, "Hey! I'm smart! If I can do this then I'm an intelligent lady." Cause when I worked it and nobody else could I thought, "I'm not stupid." And it's helped me ever since then. It made me realize that I wasn't stupid, that I could be taught. I could learn. And from then on I've just been learning as much as I have been able to learn. (Elaine)

And I guess the community center, they sort of gave me my confidence back, the ladies up here did. And they started getting me out more and involving me in more activities and before I knew it I was back to the way I used to be. So I got all my confidence back and it's helped. I do a lot more here than I've done in a long time. (Tina)

Three women expressed this in terms of voice:

I said it's the first time I really would get out and talk cause I was always too bashful. I guess they're the one got me started out not being so bashful talking to people. So it's helped a lot cause I was always a real shy person. (Karen)

Oh, yeah, I talk, yeah, I talk more. I used to be so shy and like... I wouldn't...like right now I can get out and talk to everybody. I feel like I growed up a lot working up here. And I can communicate better with people and things. I can stand on my own. (Gloria)

'Cause used to, five or six year ago I wouldn't have spoke out. I wouldn't have been sitting here talking to you in other words. 'Cause I was just more reserved in myself, my kids, you know, in my own family. You know, you get to meet people and you meet all different kinds of people and I guess it brings your, what do you say, your insides out? But it was for the good. I feel that it was for the good. (Helen)

For five women this increased confidence has included new goals, either educational or vocational or both. Only Helen does not plan either additional schooling or looking for work. Tina, Gloria, and Karen all have both educational and vocational goals. Susie's plans may have been formed independently from her community involvement, but she talks as well about community work as giving her goals. Mary indicated that she would like use her business skills in community development. She thinks she would need more college background before she could be responsible for a community development organization, and she might consider this in the future.

As we have seen, the reasons the women expressed for becoming involved in the community centers did not include working for community change. But four of them did talk about this as a way that they have changed, about how the reasons for their continuing involvement now include what they can do for others.

> *Well, the thing about is, you have to realize what I came out of. When I come over here first, everything was just focused on me and my needs. And then as, that took like two years, you know, focused a little bit beyond that. And then decide what I wanted to do and how I would accomplish it....But all of us work together in it and we want to see the community center... not so much be, well we'd like to see it financially successful, but we want to see it people successful. We want to see people's lives changed, the improvement in their lives. We want to see our people have better lives. (Elaine)*

As we consider later in this chapter the women's analysis of their communities' problems, we will return to this topic.

A Place to Come Together

The centers are places where those who come to get help often end up helping others and where those who are volunteering to help others also are supported in their own learning and growing. From the women's discussions I have identified 10 factors that contribute to making the centers places where women grow and learn. Those factors are:

- the quality of leadership
- development of leadership as an organizational value
- stimulation from people from "outside"

- families and children involved and supported
- an atmosphere of support, friendship
- a work style based on teamwork
- the example of other active women
- social events, parties
- a process for dealing with conflict
- some tangible rewards.

An additional factor that was not specifically identified by the women, but which I believe to be particularly important is the democratic structure of the organizations. All the women have a voice in what happens and have been able to exercise some shared power. This experience has contributed to their sense of their own abilities to make a difference.

The leadership in these two centers is located in three places: the boards, which we have discussed; the staff; and what people at Two Sisters call "resource people." The resource people are members of various religious organizations who came to the region as missionaries. However they work from a perspective of liberation theology rather than evangelism.

In both these centers as well as several others in southwest Virginia, Roman Catholic nuns have been instrumental in the formation of the organizations. At Two Sisters two nuns and a priest continue to serve as resource people to the boards, but they are not voting members. Sister Janet is involved in much of the day-to-day work of the center working in effect as a staff member. When we talked about Janet's importance, Helen said she had been very important in getting things going and encouraging center work, but that the center is no longer dependent on her because the group now has experience in organizing and carrying out their activities.

That's the reason I say I don't believe it'd go under, but we would really miss her. She'd be missed. For she keeps everybody going. She keeps everybody hopping! She's a pusher, that's right. And some people, that's what it takes. Some people are go on and do it, and some people you got to push.

I'd say it's [having a person like Janet] very important. Cause I think us old country women and such, we don't know how to get none of this started. And they come in, you know, and get us all started, and then we know how, now. But we didn't have no idea. (Helen)

The support is personal as well as organizational:

I found most of the nuns that we deal with to be very strong people. And some times that's what it takes to help us be stronger. I mean I get a lot of advice from Sister Janet. You know she's gave me a lot of advice. As far as my first semester in college when I didn't have the Pell grant yet to pay for my books, she gave me that money out of her own pocket and I reimbursed her when my Pell grant come through. If it hadn't been for her, I'd a been way behind in my classes. She helped me. I can call her just about any time for advice and she'll give it to me. They don't try to come in and take over. They're just here when we need them. Janet sort of facilitates things. She gets things going for us. You know she puts the ball on the roll, but she doesn't take the whole thing on herself. She doesn't say, "Well, I'm in charge, and you've got to do this." She just helps with it. She's one strong link in a whole chain. She's basically a terrific person. (Tina)

Gloria also talked about how Janet had helped and encouraged her education. In Lee City, too, nuns have also been important to the center and in encouraging individuals. Both Elaine and Mary mentioned times they had worked with them.

Each center has people who work as staff. At Two Sisters two women are paid as part-time staff. Edith's primary job is to be teacher for the pre-school. Martha drives the van to bring the children to school and for other trips and is office manager. Both women volunteer with much of the other work at the center and work many more hours than they are paid. But they are not on the board and are considered staff. Lee City does not have anyone who is paid regularly as community center staff although there are summer youth and community service workers assigned to the center. But Sarah, who is paid part time to teach Adult Basic Education classes at the center, is board chair and seems to function as center staff. She also works part time for the town development projects, and the work all overlaps to some extent.

The staff are important for their work in keeping the centers running. But they are also respected for their personal qualities, their encouragement, their honesty, and their commitment to the work of the organizations. Gloria talked about how the staff at Two Sisters is paid part time but works much more. Elaine told how Sarah has stuck with the center and the community.

> *Again Sarah is, like I said she's been a mainstay here. She's been you know, she's <u>been</u> here. She's not gone and left....and she's been one way the entire time. She's not been one way with this person and another way with another person. She has been the same way...*

Helen talked about Edith:

She is, she is really outgoing. And if she's got something again' you, honey, she'll tell you. She won't go behind your back and talk about this and go behind your back and talk about that. Or I've never caught her doing it.

Mary and Elaine both talked of learning from Sarah. Elaine was particularly eloquent:

I've learned a lot from Sarah. I've learned how to communicate a lot from her. I've learned that, I guess there were times that I didn't think I could do anything and she'd say, "You can do it girl. Go on for it." And just seems like cause she said it, I believed it, and was actually able to do it. I think if anybody influenced the way that I, that I am now, I think it would be mostly Sarah. Cause I've stood back and I've watched her and I've learned an incredibly lot from her. I don't know if she realizes how much that I have learned from her. But that she does teach that way. But I have learned a lot from her. I've learned you know, other things from other people. But the one that's really made, that, that would be Sarah, what I've picked up, what I've learned. Communications skills. People skills. How to overcome obstacles that seem like they're hills, mountains. And just sometimes you need somebody, you need to see somebody going through something to show you that it can be got through. And she has been that for me.

In these organizations there seems to be a commitment to developing leadership. People are encouraged to take initiative as Susie reported:

Sarah, she come in and we [painted] one wall. I said, "O.K. let us do one wall and see if you'll like it." And she come in and she said, "Oh, no!" And then she come back and she said, "Well I like it. It's a growing on me." (Susie)

I was really worried about it cause I thought what if I don't charge enough for this...or something. And Sarah'll say, "Now don't worry about it. Just get what you think, what you think they can pay or what you think it's worth." (Susie)

Tina talked about how she was encouraged to participate:

They basically allowed me to be myself instead of trying to make me be something I was not. And they accepted me for the way I was and they did anything for me that they could possible do. And like I said, they included me in everything they could possibly think of to include me in. And when the groups were up here, Janet and them would call and say, "Hey, Tina, come up here," and I'd be up here and do different little things for them, even if it was running a errand or something around here. Or going across to the pre-school to give somebody messages and stuff. But finally I worked my way from a volunteer to a board member.

Gloria had a similar story about Edith showing her how to run the clothes sales then telling her she was on her own. Elaine has adopted this stance of developing leadership, defining it as "a heritage that you pass on down."

And I try to put as much responsibility on them as they can take. Cause I actually believe to get into something, to be a leader in it, you got to be involved in it. You can't do it from afar off. And sometimes doing something for your community will take your, your problems won't seem as big to you.

The centers are indigenous grassroots organizations. They take their form from the culture and needs of the communities. But access to "outside" people and organizations has added new ideas and perspectives as Helen noted above. Tina had similar comments:

> *It's very important because they teach us how to write proposals and stuff. I see it like a few years back we would not have known how to do that. We would not have been able to get through it. But she had the know-how and stuff and they help out with it. And any other problems that might arise they seem to be able to help us work through it. So, I see Janet and them as important.*

In addition to working with "resource people" from religious orders, the centers are connected to various regional organizations that may provide consultants to help with specific projects or problems and that hold regional gatherings. These contacts are also a source of support and ideas.

The centers are not just a place to go and work. They are social centers where friends meet, and families are welcome. Christmas parties, Thanksgiving dinner, the dances all are events that people attend for fun as well as to work. Teenage and adult children are involved. Both Elaine and Helen's sons have been Santa Clause for the Christmas parties for children. Tina's son seems to have several extra grandmothers. This support has been quite important to her involvement in the center.

> *My son is always welcome up here, so I don't have to worry about leaving him at home and locking him behind doors and stuff with my mom and dad. He's always welcome up here, and he has free run of the place. He likes it and the people like him.*

The centers also provide physical support in the form of clothes for children. At Two Sisters regular volunteers receive a free "share" of food each month and free snacks at the dances. While these tangible rewards are probably not the reasons people volunteer, they are a way that their contributions are recognized.

While the leadership and approach to leadership that is evidenced in the centers is an important factor in making the centers a place where women learn and change, probably the most important factor (and one that is not entirely separate, in that the leaders are part of the group) is the support that the women provide to each other. Everyone interviewed for this study talked about this support. They felt encouraged to be active, to speak out, to change.

When I got in the community center I figured everybody was out for their own good, and what did they want from me? But like I said it took time to understand that they did want something from me but it wasn't bad. They wanted me to be the best that I could be, and it took me a long time to figure that out. And so, each person that I met in here, it was the same attitude, the same goals seemed like from all the people, they wanted me to be the best that I could be. And little by little I think I'm being the best that I can be. (Elaine)

I guess they're the one got me started out not being so bashful talking to people. (Karen)

Usually the community centers, it's like you get your toe in the door through them. And then when you get in there, you can swing that door open, but til then you need a toe in the door. (Elaine)

Other women serve as examples of what can be. They serve as a support group for learning, for trying new things:

> *Yeah, you've got to learn from other people. And you learn from mistakes, you make a mistake you learn by that mistake. (Helen)*

The center is a safe place to make mistakes, a place where others have gone before and believe that other women can follow. This egalitarian approach is carried into work style. Most work is done by informal teams. Someone may have an assigned task, but it may be because that person is a learner rather than the "expert."

> *There's no fussing or fighting in it. You know, well we'll fuss and fight about normal stuff, but like to get this place worked up like it is, we worked together to do this. There wasn't no "Well you do this. I'm too good to do that or I don't want do that." (Elaine)*

The sale of food at the dances or the packaging of Christmas bags happens in the same cooperative way, both because it is fun and because it is efficient.

> *You would be surprised how three or four people can get together and do say 300 some bags in just a few hours. (Helen)*

This work style is not unusual in these communities. Helen talked about her entire family working together to put up hay. Work in the mines has depended on people working together. Women often come together to can food.

Perhaps not as typical are the ways these two centers have developed to deal with conflict. There seems to have been planning and the establishment of processes to handle problems between people. People seem to be willing to "lose" on occasion and still continue to work with the organization. Gloria related one instance when she was in the minority:

> *Well we got a, what you call it, a trailer house up [the road] that was rented out to this couple, they was married. And then they decided that wanted to leave to go to North Carolina cause their job had run out up here. And [the board] agreed that they didn't want nobody single to move in, single parents. And I didn't feel like that was being fair. And then, well you know, well cause the majority rules don't mean that they're right all the time. I feel like it's more, to me it seems like it's more single parents out there around this way than there is married couples. Yeah, well I guess everybody should be grown up, say "Hey, we had a vote on this so the majority wins. This is the way we're going so just pick it up from here." Try to work together.*

The Two Sisters Center has established a procedure for discussing personal disagreements with a small group and not bringing these problems to the board unless there is no alternative. They seem to have a real commitment to talking it out, to finding a way people can continue to work together.

In this section I have examined the seven women's work in the community centers, how they believe they have changed individually by being involved in the centers and some of the factors that seem to make the centers an environment where women can change. In the next two sections I look at their perspective on the social problems in their communities

and consider whether the changes they have reported were only in their sense of themselves or whether they now see themselves as activists in a broader sense.

The Region: Talk of Home, Talk of Problems

Appalachia evokes a variety of images--beautiful mountains, striking miners, traditional music and crafts, endemic poverty. But except for the southwest Virginia town of Appalachia, it is not a term most people who live here use. They talk about the mountains, being from the mountains, or being "country ," but rarely describe themselves as Appalachian. I wondered if it made any difference to people that they were from here. I asked them directly, and I listened to what they had to say about places outside this region. We also talked about the problems of the area, what they were, where they came from, what might be done about to solve them. This section examines the ways the participants talked about home and "off" and how they define and understand the problems of their communities.

Home and Off

The mountains are home for these women. They live here and plan to stay here--at least in the long term. Karen was unique in not expressing any attachment to this area. Her family is from here, and her husband wants to live here, but Karen liked living in Illinois as a child and was most enthusiastic about the time she spent in Connecticut while her husband was in the Navy. She loved the ocean and the salt breeze and would like to go back. While several of the others would like to travel and realize that they may have to leave to find work, they plan to return to southwest Virginia, to home.

When they talked about the differences between here and "off"--North Carolina, Texas, and Oklahoma were the places they had visited--they compared both the people and the physical qualities of the land. When talking about the mountains they talked about needing trees. Oklahoma and Texas particularly were described as "too flat," "spooky looking," "The sun looks like it's touching the ground," "That sky's right down on you." North Carolina was described as a little better with some hills and trees, but Gloria declared it "drab."

People from the mountains were also described in positive terms when compared to people from other areas.

> *Around here people are, when people know you, they've got respect for you. Away from here they don't care what color you are, they're rude to you. (Gloria)*

> *Where I came from, if you can do something for a person you do it because you want to do it, not because it's about money. (Gloria)*

> *I think people up here are very friendly. People will go out of their way to help even strangers. (Gloria)*

> *Most of the families around in this area is close knit families. They usually stick together and stick up for each other. (Susie)*

> *People around here are friendly. They try to help you if they can. In cities people just, they just don't care. (Tina)*

In part they were comparing people in the mountains to what they had heard about other places, but there was also some direct experience. When they thought about living somewhere else, they thought in terms of small towns, not urban areas. In big cities "you never know what will happen." You "don't know you neighbors." You are "crowded up." For example Helen described visiting her sons in Dallas:

> *Lord, no, I wouldn't live down there....They live in good places, now, though, they did live down in Dallas. Down in the...they lived about two miles from downtown Dallas before. And oh you'd go down there and you couldn't sleep at night. It was sirens going all night, people out on the street were fighting, guns agoing off and....I was scared to death.*

> *Ohhh, it is huge! And those big buildings and they just got roads right over top of each other concreted up, you know. And honey I tell you, you can get lost up there. So when I start out I set all my road numbers down and I make sure I stay on them roads.*

Her sons adapted and had to, like hundreds of thousands of mountain people who have left to find jobs over the last 50 years. As the Appalachian coalfields undergo the biggest restructuring since the 1950s when a million people left for the cities of the Midwest, more and more people will make this change. But they will likely dream of returning someday. As Susie plans to go, she plans to return.

> *But that's just like me when I move away and everything, my plans are when I get old enough to retire, if I live to see the age to retire, I'm planning on coming back to [this] County. I mean you know, I'm not leaving it forever. I plan on coming back*

cause I think this is a really nice place to retire. If you don't have to get out and work, and you don't have to worry about the money, I don't think you could beat this place around here. Yeah, I said I'm not turning my back on [this] County. I guess I never could, I'm so used to these mountains and things.

At the time of this writing Susie has moved to North Carolina, and one of Helen's sons has returned to Virginia with his family, hoping for a job as a prison guard. Even though there are few jobs, most of the women seem to feel like Helen:

In other ways, we are really blessed. Now we are. I said we got plenty to eat. We got clothes to wear. We got a roof over our head. We got friends. We got good neighbors.

Community Problems and Solutions

In the interviews I asked about the problems of the community, about reasons and solutions. The responses the women gave are summarized in Table 8.

Jobs--or the lack of them--was the problem all agreed on. For the most part the other problems they identified were seen as resulting from high unemployment and low wages--drinking, poor health care, poor housing. Not enough to do, particularly for young people, was also listed by several, and "a lot of teenage pregnancy" was seen as a result. Gloria made the interesting observation that people do not communicate as much as they used to because they don't see each other since they are not working. She also identified "the racial thing" as a problem.

Table 8: Community Problems

	Community Problems	Why?	Solutions proposed
Elaine	-jobs -attitudes that said women shouldn't work	-business has left. - "The money run out. The coal run out." -a coal mining community - - "There's not been nothing to tak e its place."	-more education, GED, high school -bridge from school to businesses -businesses and communities cooperate to develop jobs -computer or electronic mail businesses - business leaders have to work with the people
Susie	-no jobs around here - "People can't support a family on a minimum wage job." -kids don't have anything to get involved in. -drugs and drinking	-big companies don't want to come to this area. - "We're just a coal camp and nobody cares really." - "I'm not going to that dumpy place" - Companies are afraid to invest here. - "People just gets down on theirselves and they get down on the world and they just feel like, they get so depressed and so discouraged and everything." - "Upper ranking people make the decision."	-get some big sights in here to see - use highway money to set up businesses -circulate the money instead of pocketing it - "Community should get together and tell businesses that we need some jobs."
Mary	-children not taken care of -unwed mothers -Not a lot of work -a lot of minimum wage jobs -trash thrown around	-coal mines shut down -remote, not good road access -need training to go into the mines	-clean up trash and fix up houses -more opportunities for work -child care -new road -sewing factory community started -education so you can get a good job -community development projects hire people
Karen	-high unemployment, highest around -health problems (because of no jobs)	-not enough work around here - kids don't have the experience to go into the mines - you have long hair you can't get a job	-get factories -start little businesses

Table 8 (Continued)

	Community Problems	Why?	Solutions Proposed
G l o r i a	-the racial thing -no jobs -people don't communicate much -not too much for the kids to do	-no leadership, everybody out for themselves -people "got their hands in it," corruption in public programs, put the money in their pockets, hire their family	-jobs bring people together -look at people as one race instead of colors.
T i n a	-no jobs -not enough good housing -most people on welfare -single mothers, lot of teenage pregnancy -high drop-out rates	-not much to do , having sex is something to do -if mines shut down will be a ghost town -can't work in the mines without training - "We're a closed rural area." -not much opportunity to bring other businesses in	-have to work with what we've got and that's not much
H e l e n	-not many jobs nowhere now. -nothing for the young people to do. -no good stores in the county (like Wal -Mart)	- "As much coal as went through this county we could have had anything. But they just wasn't interested in bringing it [industry] in to this county." -the crowd in the county seat won't let in other stores. "one little family network" -Pittston going to W. Va. to break the union	- "I'd like to see some industry come in for the young people where all the young people won't have to leave."

The women tended to blame the region's poor economic situation on the fact that the mines are shutting down and "they" have not brought jobs to this area. "They" are business people who are seen as having the power to locate here but not being willing to because of poor roads, not caring, or some unknown reason. Training is seen as important as a part of the solution, but except for noting that training is now needed to go into the mines -- if they were hiring -- no one was specific about what kind of training for what kind of jobs. In these explanations there was a sense of class difference, that someone else was making the decisions, but it was more a sense of bemusement than outrage at historic

exploitation. Helen and Gloria both believe that the "crowd in the county seat" stand in the way of progress by keeping out new stores and pocketing money that was meant for county wide projects. Only Helen commented on the vast wealth that was taken from this region and how little was left.

In proposing solutions, the women considered a mix of more services such as child care and education, getting someone to come in with industry, and local efforts at economic development. Their suggestions are similar to those proposed by the various development groups and regional planners in the region (Fisher, 1990) . Perhaps because she works with the Lee City Development Authority, Mary seems to have thought the most concretely about how local efforts might work. She talked about the sewing factory opened in Lee City and noted that the development efforts themselves hired people.

As they talked about problems, at least individually, the women did not seem to see themselves as actors for change. They worked in community centers to "do for" people, to try to alleviate some of the effects of no jobs. But they did not seem to think of themselves as being able to make any differences in what they defined as the basic problem--jobs. Later, when I met with them in a group, I had a somewhat different understanding, as I discuss in the last section in this chapter.

Talking in a Group

This study was designed with three data gathering components: participant observation in the centers, extended individual interviews, and group interviews with the participants. It is the group interviews I consider in this section.

I conducted two group interviews, one at the Two Sisters Center and one in Lee City. The women preferred to meet with people they knew. The Two Sisters interview was interrupted several times as people came in and out with requests and as various family

members came and went. Each session lasted about two hours. The interviews were for the most part unstructured, and the conversations wandered quite a bit. I did ask several focusing questions, however, as noted below. We began by catching up on each other's lives since the last time we had met. My original plan was to present my preliminary conclusions to the participants in a group in order to test my analysis and get their reactions. I did this by reading to them the paper I had written for presentation at the 1994 Adult Education Research Conference (Appendix VI) and I asked for their comments, for what they thought made sense, and for what did not. The AERC paper focused on findings about their work and learning in the centers. Both groups said they liked what I had said, liked the writing (at Lee City they commented on the structure as well as the content), and thought that it was accurate. Both groups went on to talk about the issue of their increased confidence, Lee City in terms of themselves and at Two Sisters about how the center provides a space for this to happen:

> *A lot of women said they was at home that were I guess cut off, seem like they was cut off from everybody then when they started working in the center they were kindly like...they got to know people and got, I guess in touch with each other. Cause a lot of women they're at home, they's a lot of people you don't meet at all even though they live in your community most of the time. The way I feel like, the center was, everybody just came together, just listening to some of that [what I read]. (Gloria)*

When they heard it described, Mary and the other women at Lee City were struck by what they had accomplished. They had not thought of their work in that way:

The things we do, we wouldn't look at them as an accomplishment, as a group activity or something. We just don't. (Mary)

It's just something needs done, and we do it, and we don't think no more about it. (Elaine)

In both centers hearing their work described by someone else seemed to make it more valuable and important to the women.

Action for Change

As I analyzed the individual interviews I looked for evidence that the women in the centers were involved in or thought of themselves as actors for change in their communities. As noted in the discussion of community work most of what they talked about doing in their center work can be described as service, as doing for others. The women spoke of having increased confidence, of feeling they could speak out, but they did not talk about times when they had done this, except for Gloria's interventions when she believed her sons were being discriminated against. In the group interviews what I heard was somewhat different.

In both group interviews the women talked about taking action in a way that they had not in individual interviews. In Lee City the action they discussed was still service within the center, but they were talking about initiating projects, about doing more than was currently being done. I had asked them if they expected to continue to be involved in the center. They said they were and then began to discuss and plan ways they could bring in more people, raise money and develop more center activities.

At Two Sisters the discussion touched on both actions that various women had been part of and on broader issues beyond the community. As they talked about how they had always been "home bodies" and now were willing to speak out I asked them if there were examples of times when they had gone to other places to speak out on issues. Tina talked about going to the CORA (Commission on Religion in Appalachia) assemblies. Gloria told about taking part in a march on Washington. Several of them were planning to take part that evening in a candlelight demonstration against child abuse. That led into a discussion of child abuse and the difficulties of determining what had happened in some cases. While they were angry about instances of abuse, they were also aware of instances when someone had been wrongly accused.

When I asked the Two Sisters group about what they thought the center would be doing in the next several years, Tina thought they would do more work on what she called community issues:

> *I'd say there'll be a lot more work on community issues and things we want to get solved, problems that are here that we want to work on. I see a lot of that happening [in the center]. Community issues . We've already tackled the water problems and sewer systems and things and I think eventually people get tired of not having employment here and try to make a way for it.*

This led to a discussion of businesses leaving the area and the pricing policies of the stores that remained. Gloria thought that would be a good issue to work on. Helen said that would mean "shaking up" the county seat. While there was no planning, or even a clear idea of what they might do, this discussion indicated a willingness to take confrontational action, which I had not heard in the individual interviews. They began to

talk about the economic situation in the region, how more and more miners were being laid off. Helen offered this explanation:

> *Honey, they're gonna shut the whole thing down. Move into West Virginia and then come back in two years and open up non-union. Now that's what they've got in mind. They said they're gonna phase everything out in the next six months.*

Gloria compared this to what had happened when the air traffic controllers struck and were fired by President Reagan:

> *I don't know, I said, maybe just me, I mean I'm not trying to get everybody focused on what I'm talking about, but I think from the eight years that Reagan was in there, it seemed like it just put a hurt on everything, when he's in. When that, what, airline thing came on, he replaced them? It seems like the union's been going down hill ever since he got ahold to it and just tore it all to pieces. I mean he might not be the reason it happened, I feel like he had a part in that when he say, "Hey. You take this job or we're gonna replace you with somebody else."*

Helen agreed with her. Both these explanations include recognition of "systemic oppressive forces" (Lather, 1991, p. 4), which go beyond wondering why "they" don't care.

These final group interviews confirmed my findings from the individual life history interviews. However I did find in these group discussions a stronger sense of agency among the women, a sense of being able to work with others to make changes in their communities.

Summary

This chapter reviews four broad areas: family, education, community center work, and community problems. Examining what the seven women said about their relationships with their families, revealed an ethic of care connecting families across generations. Education and learning have been important to these women, but schooling was problematic for most and has not seemed to be a source of real change in most of their lives. It was in relation to community work that they talked about change.

In the centers they were involved in three types of work: project, maintenance, and support. The project work included all the things involved in carrying out the various projects of the organization. Maintenance work included both the physical maintenance of the community center buildings and organizational maintenance, board membership, fundraising. Support work consisted of "being there" for each other and for the many people who come to the centers for assistance. They listened, shared experiences, provided whatever help and information that they could. They described personal changes from their community involvement, which included new confidence, a new ability to speak out, and new educational and employment goals. The centers offered a supportive environment that encouraged growth and change. In the final chapter I consider the conclusions and implications for the field of adult education that can be drawn from these findings.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

I began this study because I wanted to document the strength and commitment of women in various organizations in the Appalachian region. These were women who were courageous, willing to sacrifice, and committed to their families and communities. I also wondered what it was that led them to be involved in community organizations and whether they took from this work a changed vision of the world and their place in it. This study was designed to examine the question:

> *How do women active in Appalachian community organizations define the impact of their experiences on their lives and learning as adults? What have they learned and how have they changed?*

In this chapter I present the conclusions I have drawn from this study and consider implications for practice and research.

Today the issues embedded in this study are even more urgent, both locally and in the wider arena of the global economy, than when I began. In southwest Virginia the economy is threatened by the continuing reduction of employment in mining and by the gradual elimination of tobacco as a cash crop. Unemployment in Virginia in October 1994 was 4.7%; in Hamilton County it exceeded 15%. At the same time women like those in this study are being targeted by those calling for "welfare reform," reform that is likely to mean drastic reduction in already paltry services. (Tina receives $207 a month for herself and her son.) We seem to be in a particularly virulent era of blaming the victim for the ongoing results of global economic restructuring.

The data collection for this study included participant observation in two organizations, extended life history interviews with seven women active in these organizations, and group interviews with the women from each organization to review my preliminary findings. Participating in this study has enabled the seven women to tell their life stories. In order to contextualize these life stories I have provided a description of the organizations and communities in which they live and work. My findings are based on an analysis of the stories as they are set in this context.

The community organizations in this study, the Lee City Community Center and the Two Sisters Center, are both grassroots groups whose members operate community centers and try through various projects to meet the needs of people in their communities. They are democratically run with small part-time staffs. Most work is done by volunteers from the community including the seven women I interviewed. The projects include a pre-school, housing rehabilitation done by college and church volunteers, food distribution, used clothing sales, and a Christmas programs for children. The centers are the sites for adult education classes, dances, community meetings, and private parties. Center members are often active in trying to bring about changes in their community, for example confronting the local authorities about water quality or working to develop community businesses.

The seven women told their life stories in response to similar questions, but each structured her story in her own way. For Elaine, Susie, and Tina, the theme of their stories focused on rebuilding their lives and their sense of self after physically and/or emotionally abusive marriages. Karen's story was one of survival from one hard time to the next. Gloria structured her story around her confrontations with racial prejudice. Mary's theme was her struggle for and ambivalence about independence from her family. Helen's life story was built around doing for others in her family and later in the community.

While each woman had her own story, the women as a group also shared many areas of experience and many themes. The findings of this study come from an exploration of these themes: (a) family, (b) learning and schooling, (c) work in community centers, and (d) community and regional problems.

Conclusions

In the previous chapters we have learned about seven women, about their lives, their struggles, their strength, the hard times they have encountered, and their determination to move beyond these hard times and keep going. We have learned about two community organizations where women work together to make their neighbors' lives easier and richer. We have learned about the range of problems people in the Appalachian region confront and about the sense of home that leads them to search for solutions to these problems. From these women's lives, the themes they explored, the experiences they have related, I have drawn several conclusions.

It is women's concern for family that leads them into community organizations, and an extension of this concern to the community that keeps them active in the organizations. All these women were close to their families both emotionally and physically. They cared for and were cared for by their families. The women initially got involved in the community centers for a variety reasons, often because of some personal need for one of the center services. They stay involved, doing volunteer work at the centers, because of the opportunity to give to others. An ethic of care that is found in their families is extended to the community. Their involvement is based on a belief that people should take care of their own, and that their community is part of their own.

Sally Maggard (1988), Virginia Seitz (1992), and Judy Fiene (1988) all identified this concern for taking care of others in their studies of Appalachian women. While the women in Fiene's study were not active in community or other organizations, they were strongly committed to their families and defined their self-worth in terms of care and responsibility for their families. Seitz found the activism of the women in her study, all of whom were involved in some kind of "associations for change," grew out of their concern for family. Maggard identified what she called "emotional work," keeping each other's spirits up and supporting each other through the hard times among the strike supporters she interviewed. This emotional work is similar to what I have called support work in the community centers, the talking, listening, encouraging, being there for each other and those who come to the center for assistance. At Two Sisters the support work became the "emotional work" of strike support during the 1989 Pittston strike when the center served as a meeting place for striking miners and their families.

These community organizations not only provide a wide range of services to the communities they serve, but are effective learning situations, particularly for women. Community organizations like the two discussed in this study are a resource to their communities in a variety of ways. They meet the physical needs of families with limited resources by providing access to food, clothing, and emergency assistance. They are sites for educational and recreational programs for children and adults. They are places for people from outside the region and local people to meet and learn from each other as they work together on volunteer projects. And they strengthen a sense of community by providing the space and opportunity for people to come together for a variety of purposes.

These centers are also important learning sites for the women who are active in center work. The women in this study all spoke of learning new skills and developing new insights. In Chapter 6 I discuss factors that made the community centers ideal sites for

learning and growth for women, including: a commitment to leadership development, a relaxed atmosphere, work done by collaborative teams, and the ongoing support of women like themselves. Hinsdale, Lewis, and Waller (in press) found similar elements of collaborative education and opportunities for leadership in the Ivanhoe Civic League, another southwest Virginia community organization.

In *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, et al., 1986), the authors argue that educators will be effective helping women gain their voice if they:

> ...Emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate; if they accord respect to and allow time for the knowledge that emerges from firsthand experience; if instead of imposing their own expectations and arbitrary requirements, they encourage students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing. (p. 229)

This kind of supportive, collaborative learning environment is found in the community centers. This environment has much in common with consciousness raising, which begins with personal experience, values collaborative discussion in small groups, and assumes political commitment (hooks, 1989; Hart, 1990; Weiler, 1991; Lather, 1991) and with the feminist pedagogy described by Hayes (1989) and Caffarella (1992) based on democratic, collaborative classrooms and the importance of relationships in women's lives.

For the women in this study, being active in grassroots community organizations led to transformative learning and change. In Chapter 2 I discussed Mezirow's theory of transformational learning leading to perspective transformation.

> Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (1990, p. 14)

The ways the women have described the changes in their lives and thinking correspond to this definition. They have come to question some of their previous assumptions about the world and have changed their thinking about what they can do and their assumptions about other people. Susie described her new-found understandings of how her father's alcoholism impacted her sense of self. Tina learned that her husband's definition of a woman's role was not one she had to accept. Gloria told of her growing willingness to talk about and confront racial prejudice. Elaine described realizing that she was "an intelligent lady." These new understandings are indications of perspective transformation.

The women identified their experiences in their community organizations as the primary source of their learning and change. While all seven women have taken part in formal education beyond high school, for only two did this schooling seem to have much impact beyond acquiring particular skills. Rather it was working with other women in a supportive environment which led to transformative learning.

For Elaine, Tina, and Susie, their involvement in the community center came after what Mezirow refers to as a "disorientating dilemma" (1990, p. 14), in their cases the dissolution of their marriages. They were in a sense forced to make changes in both how they lived their lives and how they thought about themselves. For the other four women, participation in the work of the community center seemed to have been what Carolyn Clark has called an "integrating circumstance" (1993, p. 79). Their experiences in the community

center helped these women put together various aspects of their lives, reconsider their options, and transform their perspectives on what they were able to do in their lives and community. Recent work by Joyce McKnight (1994) on learning in grassroots "initiatives" led to findings similar to those of this study: "Almost all participants showed evidence of perspective transformation, a profound change in their beliefs about self, others, and society due to participation in grassroots initiatives" (p. 267) .

The women in this study all spoke of feeling more confident, often in terms of voice, of becoming more able to talk freely with all kinds of people, of expressing their opinions. In *Women's Ways of Knowing* Belenky, Finchy, Goldberger, and Tarule found "that women repeatedly use the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined" (p. 18). In this study women spoke of realizing that they were "smart," of "getting my confidence back," of "growing up," of "bringing their insides out." They feel more capable, more able to work with others to bring about changes in their communities.

The ways the women changed were transformative, but it is not as clear that their learning was emancipatory. The various terms used to talk about learning that is connected to social change are sometimes used interchangeably. However, understanding of and willingness to address power distribution in society is seen by many scholars as a hallmark of emancipatory learning. In her discussion of consciousness raising as emancipatory learning, Mechthild Hart (1990) asserts that consciousness raising includes not only the experience of power on a personal level, something these women have all experienced to at least some degree in their community work, and an orientation to action, but also "a theoretical grasp of power as a larger social reality" (p. 71). For Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) the goal of education is development of "critical consciousness," the ability to analyze social reality and take action to change oppressive elements. He has

called this process *conscientization.* Tom Heany and Amy Horton (1990) have suggested that this kind of emancipatory learning takes place in social movements when participants have the opportunity to act and reflect on their action. Here, I am using the term *emancipatory learning* to refer to learning that not only changes a woman's sense of herself and her own abilities and her assumptions about the world, but that also involves an ongoing analysis of the social, political, and economic forces which impact her life.

Each of the women in this study has experienced transformative change in her thinking and sees herself as someone who can act within the community. The women have moved from taking action to improve their own lives and those of their families to working in the community to improve the lives of others. However they are only beginning to analyze broader social and political issues. While Gloria is clear about the impact of racism on her family, she told me, "I say why I don't try to understand. If I did I'd be crazy. You, too, Beth." When they talked about why southwest Virginia has such high unemployment, the women talked about how "they" (business interests from outside the region) wouldn't bring industry to the region. But the women talked very little about either past exploitation of the region's resources or about why current economic decisions are made. These women have taken part in events organized by the Mine Workers union and regional social action groups. At Two Sisters there is perhaps more thinking about broader environmental and economic issues and consideration of action they might take as an organization. But for the most part these women see themselves and their organizations as confronting and attempting to alleviate problems on a community level, not as part of a broader effort to confront and change power distribution in this society.

Implications for Practice and Research

If the findings section of a dissertation is the "what" and the conclusions the "so what," this is the "so" section. This follows Two Sisters usage where after someone has said what they have to say, they tend to end with, "So." This seems to be a way of saying "I've said what I had to say. You make of it what you will." There may be some implied meanings, but it is up to the listener to make his or her own meaning. This post-modern approach to communication may be appropriate in this section. I have implied some meanings from this work, but the reader has to determine if the meaning is there in her or his context. The implications I see from this research and the recommendations I make are based on my experiences in the Appalachian region. I believe they have value in other contexts, but that should be determined in those wider (and different) contexts. So.

This study has implications for people concerned with expanding social equity, including those involved in the practice and provision of adult education in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and community college settings. First we can examine the kind of learning environment in which these seven women learned in transformative ways. Elements of these environments can be adapted to more formal learning situations including: a) small group discussion, b) informal settings, c) time to talk and share, d) beginning with and valuing personal experience, e) opportunities for leadership within programs, f) social events within the group, and g) recognition of the importance of peer support. Many of these practices are in place in ABE programs; they are perhaps rarer in community college classes where the focus is more on content. In both settings more effective learning can be brought about by creating an environment which encourages people to share with and support each other.

As we attempt to structure classes in this way we need to take into account the power of "doing school" (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990). At both of the community centers

in this study, GED and ABE classes are held. These classes include some of the elements that make the centers successful learning environments--an informal atmosphere, time for talking, and support from the teachers and peers. But the curriculum of the classes is structured around the GED test. And the teacher holds the power. The classes, the formal educational program in the centers, lack some of the features which make the centers such powerful learning environments. Changing this may require a more overt analysis of both goals and power than most education programs, even these located in community centers, usually undertake. Program staff and participants need to have the opportunity to define their goals. In programs committed to transformative learning, the power to control the direction of the program needs to be shared. (See Auerbach, 1993; Gillespie, 1990; King, 1993, for examples of attempts at building learner centered or participatory adult education programs.)

A second area for which this study has implications is welfare reform. In many of the various welfare-to-work schemes, adult education programs are asked to help participants, usually women, gain the skills needed to enter and succeed in the job market. The focus of most training programs that target unemployed women is on job search skills like learning how to write a resume or particular job skills which quickly become obsolete. Leaving aside for the moment the question of "What job market?" we can learn from what factors have enabled women in community centers to grow and change. In addition to the elements that supported learning and change mentioned above and listed in Chapter 6, we should also remember that the women in this study were doing real work that benefitted their communities. They discovered that they had skills or could develop skills with which they could help other people. And they had the opportunity in a supportive environment to work with others to take on new tasks, new responsibility, and new leadership.

Publicly funded adult education programs usually focus on individual change as a way to confront social problems. The problems of the welfare system or a weak regional

economy are defined as individual problems or the result of workers having limited skills and education. In Appalachia as well as other regions of the country with severe economic problems, there are those who are looking for more systemic explanations and solutions for social and economic problems, who advocate social as well as individual change. (See Fisher, 1993, for Appalachian examples.) Grassroots community development organizations like the Two Sisters and Lee City centers are to some extent part of this effort. The women in the community centers have learned and changed individually and have learned to work together to carry out projects to meet the needs they find in their communities. They have also built organizations that support this work and learning. But they have not, for the most part, confronted what they all identified as the central problem in this region--lack of jobs. They do not seem to see themselves as part of any long-term effort to deal with the economic situation in this region. A more structured education program (which might be called leadership development or political analysis) could both make particular centers more effective in their work and also strengthen social change efforts regionally.

There are progressive groups in the mountains that have taken on the kind of analysis and long-term strategic political work that might give the people of this region control over our economy and resources. Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM) in Tennessee and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) are the most notable. These organizations train members in leadership and organizing skills, and use staff to support, not define, members' work (Allen, 1993; Szakos, 1993). Both organizations have been able to impact state environmental regulation and legislation, and both are focusing on the region's economy. In reflecting on KFTC's membership and leadership development efforts, Szakos noted that their training has tended to be on "nuts-and-bolts organizing skills, and there is seldom the opportunity to analyze and critique the political economy or make links between local and statewide issues, or between local and state issues and

national and global structures and events" (p. 114). He also noted that KFTC has not been very successful in recruiting low-income people. Their membership is primarily middle class.

The local grassroots community groups like Two Sisters and Lee City do have members with very limited incomes, perhaps because they meet immediate needs. The two types of organizations could learn from each other or reinforce each other's efforts, but for this to be most effective in bringing about lasting change, additional educational efforts will be needed. Both the regional organizations and particularly the community groups could develop richer educational processes that would not only build the leadership skills of members, but could lead to more effective involvement in long-term change by individuals and organizations.

Educators committed to social change can contribute to these efforts both by documenting and helping to disseminate the educational implications of work that is now going on both within and outside the Appalachian region, and by working with local groups to develop new approaches. Some of this work is going on at the Highlander Center in Tennessee; in the Southern Empowerment Project, which trains organizers; and in other regional organizations that support social change work. There are beginning to be more and more resources available such as the Canadian effort *Educating for a Change* (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, & Thomas, 1991) and *Training for Transformation* (Hope and Timmel, 1984) developed in Africa.

It may also be useful to examine how the educational elements of community groups fit into the theoretical framework developed by Dykstra and Law (1994). They propose this framework as a way analyze the educational forces of popular social movements. It might also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs for social change.

While structured but non-formal education in grassroots groups has the potential to both increase the effectiveness of social change organizations and lead to a more critical perspective for the women involved, there is also a place for a more formal educational program. Throughout the region I have worked with many women who are in the same situation as Elaine, Susie, and Mary. They have had the opportunity to attend community college and have earned an associate degree or certificate. But for the most part what they learned did not inform or connect with their work in community centers. Nor did it give them credentials for employment in the few jobs in social services, health care, or education that might be connected to their community work. Lack of credentials will become an even bigger problem if the movement to professionalize fields like adult basic education is based solely on college classes.

A regional program for women (or perhaps women and men) who are involved in community work could both develop their critical analytical skills and lead to certification, possibly a bachelor's degree in community based education. I envision a program in which participants would take some basic courses (writing, social sciences, math) in their local community colleges. Then (or concurrently) they would meet periodically in group sessions or workshops to reflect and exchange thoughts on their experiences in community education. The program would also include discussion of readings and field-based projects. Some of the interchange might occur through computer networks or other electronic forms of distance education. This course could include people working in adult education, health outreach, parent education, economic development, and more. They could earn a degree in community education with a focus on their particular interest. At the same time they would be participating in a process of learning and analysis that would contribute insights to both their own organizations and to regional social change.

Finally, the work of the women and organizations profiled in this study has implications for research and practice in the field of adult education as we confront global

economic, environmental, social, and political challenges (Welton, 1993). The current global economic restructuring is driven by reification of the market and multinational corporations' drive for ever-increasing profit margins. We can hope that a rising tide will lift all ships. But there is only so much water, and much of that is polluted. At some point, probably sooner rather than later, the people of the world will have to choose. We can live in a world where a very few have the wealth to isolate themselves (temporarily) from the social and environmental results of the current restructuring. Or we can work for a world where wealthy countries and regions learn to live with less and economies are built around meeting the needs of life in a sustainable way rather than creating desires that are attainable by a few (Hart, 1992).

If we chose to work for a just and sustainable way of life we must begin to define the economy as more than jobs. We need to consider together what is needed to build a place where we want to live and want our children to live. We can see in the organizations in this study some indication of what work in such a place might look like--productive, meeting real needs, conducive to learning, offering social support, environmentally sustainable, and based on sense of care and equity (Hart, 1992).

Perhaps our educational task is to begin to look much more broadly and critically at the issues we confront, realizing we are facing the end to unlimited growth as an economic solution. We need to develop educational sites and processes to expand the critical examination of what we mean by a good life or good work, to go beyond political and media interpretations to decide for ourselves what is important and possible.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Information Letter

August 3, 1992

Dear Folks,

Last week I talked to [staff] about a project I am doing. They suggested I talk to you. I am a studying adult education, and one of the requirements for my degree is to do and write up a study connected in some way to adult education and learning. The topic I have chosen is how women active in community organizations learn and change.

The way I want to do this study has three parts:

1. I will describe two community organizations in southwest Virginia, the organization and its activities. To do this I'll spend time going to meetings, talking to people, helping out if I can. I have already done this at Binns-Counts.

2. I will interview three to five women from each organization. Each woman will be interviewed several times privately. I'll ask questions about their lives, their work, their education, and especially about their activities in the community organization. These interviews will be typed up, and I'll check back with each woman to be sure what I have written is what she meant.

3. Then I'll look at the information from all the interviews and see what the women have in common. I may draw some conclusions from what the women have said about how their community work has mattered to them. Then I plan to get all the women together to talk about what I have found and whether it makes sense to them.

I believe this project is worth doing because it will help document the strength and abilities of women from this area, and it may help people in adult education and community organizations do a better job developing programs for women. I would like to talk to you next week about being part of this project. Please feel free to ask any questions. I hope I'll see you then.

Appendix II: Letter of Consent

LETTER OF CONSENT

APPALACHIAN WOMEN LEARNING IN COMMUNITY

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. As you know, I am a studying adult education, and one of the requirements for my degree is to conduct a study connected in some way to adult education and learning. The topic I have chosen is how women active in community organizations learn and change.

The way I want to do this study has three parts:

1. I will describe two community organizations in southwest Virginia, the organization and its activities. To do this I'll spend time going to meetings, talking to people, helping out if I can.
2. I will interview three to six women from each organization. Each woman will be interviewed several times privately. I'll ask questions about your life, your work, your education, and especially about your activities in the community organization. These interviews will be typed up, and I'll check back with you to be sure what I have written is what you meant.
3. Then I'll look at the information from all the interviews and see what the women have in common. I may draw some conclusions from what the women have said about how their community work has mattered to them. Then I plan to get all the women together to talk about what I have found and whether it makes sense to them.

I believe this project is worth doing because it will help document the strength and abilities of women from this area, and it may help people in adult education and community organizations do a better job developing programs for women.

All the information you give me will be kept confidential, and anything I write will not use real names of people or places. Audiotapes of interviews will only be heard by me and will be destroyed when the project is done. Your participation is of course voluntary, and you may withdraw from the project at any time. During taping you can request that the recorder be turned off or refuse to answer any question. If you have any questions at any time, pease call me at 703-762-7430 or write to me at P.O. Box 922, St. Paul, Virginia 24283.

Your signature on the form below indicates your understanding of and willingness to take part in this project. Again, thank you for your help.

Beth Bingman

I, _____ agree to take part in the project described above. I understand I will be interviewed and that the interviews will be taped. I also understand that I may withdraw from this project at any time.

_____ _____

(Signature) (Date)

Appendix III: Interview Protocols

INTERVIEW 1

Family History
Tell me about your family-
- Where did you grow up?
- Brothers and sisters?
- Dad's work?
- Mother's?
- Other kin you were close to?
- Good memories?
- Hard times?
- Things you liked to do?

Adult family - marriage
- When did you leave your parents' home?
- Tell me about your own family?
- Children? Ages?
- Husband?
- Your role in your family? Who makes decisions? Who is responsible for what?

Educational History
Where did you go to school?
How far did you go? Why did you quit?
Best memories?
Worst?
What books do you remember?
What have you done as an adult in terms of education?

Work experience
What jobs have you done for pay?
What did you like about the work? Not like?
Do you want to have a job? What doing?

Work within the organization
When did you start working with.....?
Why?
What kinds of things have you done?
What do you see as the value of this group?
Any hard things about doing this work?

Changes since community involvement
What difference has working with .....made to you personally?
In your feelings about yourself?
In your family?
In how you think about the community? The world?
Have you done things which surprised you?
What have you learned?

Community

What problems are there in this community?
What changes would you like to see in this community?
Other community involvement? Church? PTA? Etc.?
Future educational and work plans

INTERVIEW 2

Questions from Women's Ways of Knowing

Describe yourself.

What stands out for you about the past few years in your life?

What does being a woman mean to you?

What relationships have been really important to you? Why?

Who have you learned from in your life?

Are there other things you have thought about, wondered about that will help us understand women's lives and learning?

Why do you think this area has the problems it has?

Have you ever thought about living somewhere else?

What difference do you think it has made in your life that you are from the mountains?

What do you hope for your children?

Follow-up on Interview 1

Appendix IV: AERC Paper

Appalachian Women Learning in Community

Mary Beth Bingman

Abstract: This paper reviews findings from a study of learning and change in women active in grassroots organizations in rural Appalachia.

In community organizations throughout the mountains people are confronting the problems associated with the Appalachian region - unemployment, limited access to medical care, physical isolation, poverty. As these grassroots organizations struggle to change conditions for people in their communities, the people who are active in the organizations, most of them women, change as well. This research examines how women active in Appalachian community organizations define the impact of their experiences on their lives and learning as adults - what have they learned and how have they changed?

My interest in this topic comes from my experience and ongoing work with Appalachian community organizations and a need to reflect on and understand my experiences. Why is this work sometimes so difficult? What makes people ready to change? How do you build strong grass-roots organizations? How do we in Appalachian communities learn to work together and to understand the forces which continue to buffet our communities? What can we change? From the women I've worked with I have heard stories of strength, hard times, and determination. This research is grounded in the belief that I can learn from these stories, these lives, and that the field of adult education can learn as well.

This study is situated in the literature of adult education and to a lesser extent feminist studies and Appalachian studies. My questions and analysis have been impacted by the work of Mezirow on learning and change in perspective and by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's (1986) *Women's Ways of Knowing*. Paulo Freire's writing on conscientization, a process which not only involves a changing view of reality but a belief in one's ability to change one's reality, also frames my work as does the work of Hart, Horton, Heany, Clark and others who have built on the work of Mezirow and Freire. I define this work as feminist as well as critical, identifying with Weiler's (1988) characterization of feminist research as rejecting the possibility of impartiality, emphasizing everyday lived experience, and being politically committed.

Design

This study documents the experiences of women active in two Appalachian community organizations and discovers and analyzes with them what they have learned and how they have changed. The study includes three components. The first consists of life histories of seven women active in two grassroots community organizations in southwest Virginia. These life histories are based on extended interviews with each participant covering family history, education, work experience and work within the organization. A second component is case studies based on participant observation in the two organizations in which the women are active. These case studies provide the context for the study: Why were these groups formed? What do they do? What is the community in which they operate? A third component is participatory group analysis/discussions with the participants. These group discussions will cover my preliminary conclusions as to the changes that have occurred in the participants' thinking and in their lives. I anticipate the group will deepen my initial analysis with their reactions and reflections. These will be reported in the presentation, but are not complete as the paper is being written.

The Organizations and the Communities

The two organizations in which the women are active call themselves community centers. Both are in coal mining communities. Lee City once was a booming coal town surrounded by smaller coal camps, communities of identical houses built and owned by the coal companies. One of the women told how her mother remembered the town:

> *She was talking about the town, you know how the town used to look. She was talking about it was unbelievable. They had like twenty-some different businesses around here, and dance halls and movie theaters, street lights. And you know I thought, "Well gosh, I can't believe that!"*

Today there are only a few hundred people in town and one or two businesses. But community efforts have built a clinic, developed a sewing factory now leased to a private contractor, led to repairs on dozens of houses, and demolished several burnt out buildings. The community center which was started in the mid seventies is in an old store building in the middle of town. The space has been painted and furnished with used furniture including tables and chairs for the adult education and community college classes which meet here. People use the center for parties, baby showers, and meetings. Used clothing donated primarily by churches from outside the area are sold and the proceeds are used to pay upkeep on the building. The staff is all volunteer, though the part time adult education teacher who is an active center board member is paid by the county schools.

The Two Sisters Center is in one of a string of little communities which border the highway in the space left between the mountains and the river. While the mines in Lee City are nearly all closed, Two Sisters is near some of the largest active mines in Virginia. During a recent strike the center served hundreds of meals a day to the strikers and their families. This center, too, is in a former store building. The pre-school program they operate is located in a little house next door. Two Sisters also sells clothing for upkeep money and is the site of county ABE classes, though here the teacher does not live in the community. There are two paid staff, one of whom is the preschool teacher and the other who manages the center. Many members volunteer time. The Center hold dances on Saturday evenings and is a site for SHARE, a national program which enables people to buy a box of food monthly for about thirteen dollars. Center members have recently confronted the local water authority about poor quality and high prices and are organizing to get a sewage system.

Even though the mines near Two Sisters are still operating, both communities are in some of the poorest counties in an impoverished region. Official unemployment runs at over twelve percent and per capita income is $7837 in one county and $8067 in the other. Fewer than fifty percent of adults over twenty-five have high school diplomas. While Lee City has a clinic, Two Sisters is twelve miles on mountain roads from the nearest doctor. Population in both counties is falling as people move away to look for jobs.

The Women

Seven women took part in this study, three from Lee City and four from Two Sisters. These women were identified by the organizations as active members who were willing to take part in this study. They range in age from twenty-two to fifty. All were born in southwest Virginia, six of them coal miners' daughters. Five of their mothers also worked for wages. One is African-American, the rest white. They have a wide range of work experience outside the home including jobs in a sewing factories, restaurants, nursing homes, a chicken plant, and tobacco warehouses. Four have some community college experience; two have not finished high school. Five are currently taking part in formal

education, three in community college, two in GED classes. Only two are employed, both part time.

Family is very important to each of these women yet none lives in a "nuclear" (wife, husband, and children) family. All but one has at least one child, none have more than three. Four of them live with their parents or grandparents. One lives with her three teen-aged children. Three are divorced, two never married. Of the two who are married, one has a grown daughter and grandchild living with her and her husband who is disabled. The other has invited her elderly uncle to live with her and husband, a retired miner. All had at least one sibling with an average of five.

These women got involved in community center work for various reasons. Ellen had just left an abusive husband and came to the center looking for help with clothes for her children. She started sitting in on classes, and when she enrolled in college classes started tutoring as a work study student. Karen's good friend who worked at the center encouraged Karen to help when the center was cooking for hundreds of striking miners. Karen helped because her father and brother had been killed in the mines. She and other women at the center encouraged her daughter Tina to volunteer. Susie and Mary both started working in the Lee City center as part of summer employment programs. Grace's sister "kept begging" her to help out. Helen doesn't remember exactly why she started working, but the center is just a few houses down the road from her house, and she enjoys "doing for kids, for old people."

While their level of involvement in the community centers varies, all these women are board members and are involved in other activities. Their work with the centers includes: tutoring, helping with clothes sales, cooking for groups of volunteers, helping to solicit funds and gifts for children at Christmas, cleaning and maintenance of the centers, office work, volunteering in children's programs, staffing dances, and taking part in public forums. They are also part of an informal network of support which the centers provide families in their communities.

Findings

I have used processes of categorization and comparison as described by Goetz and LeCompte (1984) to analyze the data from this study. Many themes have emerged. An ethic of caring within families is part of each woman's life. They have either taken care of grandparents, aunts, uncles, family member's children or have themselves been "taken in" and cared for when they needed help. All of these women have lived hard times. When she was fifteen Helen left school to care for her younger sisters and brothers and help on the farm after her mother was hospitalized. Karen's father was killed in the mines when she was a child, and she, too, left school to care for younger siblings. Now she faces caring for a disabled husband who has been unable to obtain disability benefits. Mary and Susie both grew up with alcoholic abusive fathers. Ellen and Tina have left abusive husbands and are raising their children as single parents as are Gloria and Susie. Gloria has faced the pressures of integrating an all white school and seeing her sons face racism in the same school twenty years later.

These and other compelling strands run through these lives - the role of religion, the values with which they are raising their children, the importance of this place in their lives and their perceptions of what they have seen of other parts of the United States, what they read and watch on television and why, their marriages and how they view marriage, the manifestations and analysis of racism in Gloria's life, what they say about the effects of gender. These women have given rich data on all these topics. However in this paper I focus on what they say about learning and change in their lives since they have been involved in their community centers.

In these interviews each woman spoke of things they had learned: how to send out fund-raising letters, how to set up an agenda, how to arrange clothing sales and set prices according to what people can pay, how to keep financial records. But the more important learnings, the real changes were in their sense of their own abilities. Five of the seven spoke of feeling stronger, more confident.

> *It took me the longest time to figure out that I was smart. And it wasn't just a gradual knowledge that I was intelligent enough to do college work. I was volunteering and I was helping a lady. I was tutoring her in second year college algebra. And I thought to my self, "Hey! I'm smart! If I can do this then I'm an intelligent lady. Cause when I worked it and nobody else could I thought, "I'm not stupid." And it's helped me ever since then. It made me realize that I wasn't stupid, that I could be taught. I could learn. And from then on I've just been learning as much as I have been able to learn.*

> *And I guess the community center, they sort of gave me my confidence back, the ladies up here did. They all talked to me and they treated me like an adult, not a little kid which was what my husband was treating me as. Well the ladies up here showed me that was wrong. And they started getting me out more and involving me in more activities and before I knew it I was back to the way I used to be. So I got all my confidence back and it's helped. I do a lot more here than I've done in a long time.*

Three women expressed this in terms of voice:

> *I said it's the first time I really would get out and talk cause I was always too bashful. I guess they're the one got me started out not being so bashful talking to people. So it's helped a lot cause I was always a real shy person.*

> *Oh, yeah, I talk, yeah, I talk more. I used to be so shy and like... I wouldn't...like right now I can get out and talk to everybody. I feel like I growed up a lot working up here. And I can communicate better with people and things. I can stand on my own.*

> *Cause used to, five or six year ago I wouldn't have spoke out. I wouldn't have been sitting here talking to you in other words. Cause I was just more reserved in my self, my kids, you know, in my own family. You know, you get to meet people and you meet all different kinds of people and I guess it brings, your, what do you say, your insides out? But it was for the good. I feel that it was for the good.*

As they talked about changing it was clear that the support of other women in the center had made the difference. They were involved in new experiences, but with the ongoing support of other women like themselves. Two of the women spoke directly of how they now recognize that ability to support other women in themselves. Ellen told how she had learned to listen from the woman who teaches at Lee City, and how she now listens to abused women who come to the center, recognizing that, "There's no easy answers. And sometimes the only thing you can do is just listen." Susie talked about how she was helped:

And as far as working in the community center, you get to talk to a lot of people. And you get to find out what they're going through and how they feel. And it's a really big help. I mean you know like someone could come in, and it's just like when I was going through my divorce there was a lady come in here and she had just been through a divorce and we got talking and it helped a lot. I mean people around here are helpful, as far as that goes.

In a later interview she talked about supporting others. "If they're having a problem, if I've been through it, I'll sit down and discuss it with them and talk to them and hopefully make it easier for them."

While it seems clear that being involved in community center work has led to significant changes in these women's lives, four of them have also recently attended community college which also has some effect. Both Tina and Susie spoke of classes which had impacted their thinking in important ways. Susie took a communications class which helped her understand the failure of her marriage and the impact of her father's drinking on her own sense of herself. She now tries to be sure to talk and listen to her five year old daughter and recognize her daughter's achievements and dreams. Tina was supported by a teacher to use writing to help sort her feelings about her abusive marriage:

And I learned a lot from my teachers and my counselor. You know they gave me a way to let my emotions out like when I was thinking about what to write and I wrote that paper. My teacher said, "Write something that means something to you or something you really know about, not something that you don't know about." And I learned a lot through that because I could put my feelings on paper and therefore it helped me release them.

For Tina and Susie college not only offers the possibility of gaining skills which may lead to employment, but has provided transformative experiences. But for Ellen and Mary, college seems only a source of skills. Neither spoke of any significant learning or relationship at college. They both talked of getting their support from other women at the community center. And for Susie, too, her support in the challenge of going to college while raising a young child is her mother and her friend Mary. Only Tina spoke of significant friends met at college.

We can say that these women were empowered by working in community centers. But was this a consciousness raising experience? Do they have new understandings about power relationships? To try to understand this, I asked them about why they believed our area was in such bad economic shape. When I asked them to identify the problems of their communities, they said without exception, lack of jobs. When I asked them why there are so few jobs, their answers were some version of "they" don't bring their businesses into these areas. In these explanations there was some sense of class differences, a belief that somebody else was making the decisions, but it was more bemusement than outrage at historic exploitation. Only Helen, the oldest of the group, seemed to wonder about this region being exploited economically. "But I said, you know, as much coal as went through this county, we could have had anything." More typical was Susie's sense of being forgotten or ignored.

And I said, I don't know what it is. I don't know why people, big companies and things don't want to come into the areas unless.... I just don't think that <u>this</u> part of southwest Virginia to a lot of people even exists. To me, I think that you know, that we're just a coal camp and nobody cares to really ... Maybe the companies is afraid to start investing, you know, money in places like this. But I mean if people

would just realize how many, how many people they are around here and how, you know, how many people that would be willing to get out and work... If they was just jobs for them to get out and work at.

In grassroots organizations based in community centers these women are confronting the problems in their communities in a holistic, but reactive way. They seem to ask themselves, "What needs doing that we can do?" For the most part they don't worry about underlying causes. At the same time they have developed learning environments that provide support systems for education and change. They value their own growth, their increased willingness to speak. And they demonstrate a belief in the possibility of change in other lives and in their communities.

Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, & N., Tarule, J. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind.* New York: Basic Books.

Goetz, J. & LeCompte, M. (1984). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research.* San Diego: Academic Press.

Weiler, K. (1988). *Women teaching for change: Gender, class & power.* South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Appendix V: Points and Questions for Group Interview

Read from the AERC piece and get their reactions.

Follow-up questions:

What struck you most?
What surprised you?
What did you hear that you agree with, think "that's right!"
Did you hear things that made you think "wait a minute!" What?
Were you uncomfortable with any of this? What? Why?
What did you want to hear more about, know more about?

Women
- friendships seem to be from group - true? how? why?
- feminism, women's rights - what do you all think?

Where do you see the center and the community going in the next few years?
What do you see yourself doing about it?

What has this process been like for you?
Have you learned anything from it?
Where should we go with this?

Vita

I was born in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1947. I attended school there and in southwest Virginia where my family moved when I was eight. I attended Clinch Valley College in Wise, Virginia, and received Bachelor of Arts Degree from Mary Washington College in 1968. I taught elementary and pre-school children and received a Master of Education in Learning Disabilities from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1975.

From 1975 to 1977 I worked as a supervising teacher in a program for severely handicapped pre-school children. My daughter was born in 1977, and I returned to paid employment as an elementary resource room teacher in 1979. I worked as a resource teacher for seven years. In 1987 I began a one-year assignment as county coordinator for an adult literacy program operated by Mountain Empire Community College. In 1989 I came to the University of Tennessee as a student in the College of Education and a graduate assistant for the Center for Literacy Studies. I continue to be employed by the Center for Literacy Studies. I live in southwest Virginia with my family.