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The Experience of Teachers Who Have Moved From Childhood Poverty to Middle Class

John Steven Dunkin
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by John Steven Dunkin entitled "The Experience of Teachers Who Have Moved From Childhood Poverty to Middle Class." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Teacher Education.

Colleen P. Gilrane, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Richard L. Allington, Susan M. Benner, Clara Lee Brown, Charles H. Hargis

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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**The Experience of Teachers Who Have Moved From Childhood
Poverty to Middle Class**

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Education Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

John Steven Dunkin
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I would like to thank Dr. Colleen Gilrane for all her support and help. I could not have done this without her. I would also like to thank the teachers who took the time to tell me their stories, Viola, Sara, Lillie, Minnie, Tom and Daniel. Without their friendship and willingness to share this effort would never have taken place. My trek toward this accomplishment has taken a number of years. I am amazed that I am at this point in my education. In 1972 I entered the University of Tennessee as a probationary freshman. As I look back and marvel at my progress through the educational maze I continue to realize that it was my parents, Thelma and John Dunkin, who made this possible through their wonderful parenting. My dad was a meter reader for the Knoxville Utilities Board and my mother was a licensed practical nurse. Neither had the opportunity to attend college but they insured that my brother and I had that opportunity. As I look back on my childhood, with fond memories, I see clearly that my parents paved the way for my accomplishment. Finally, my biggest supporter has been my wife, Beverly, and my three sons, Joshua, Adam and Andy. These four are the light of my life and I dedicate this effort to them.

Semper Fidelis

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to research the phenomenon of an individual who has moved from long term poverty into middle class. Phenomenological interviews were conducted with six participants who had experienced poverty in their childhood, attended and graduated college and obtained professional licenses to teach public school; these licenses gave them access to a teaching position with its commensurate middle class status and salary. Interviews began with the question, "Tell me about your childhood and how you became a teacher." Data analysis revealed four themes (and subthemes) in the narratives of these six participants: (1) durable family relationships (longstanding marriages, strong emotional bonds with family members); (2) presence of encouragers (friends and family members as encouragers, teachers and other respected adults as encouragers); (3) determination to be different (proactive determination, reactive determination); and (4) school-based opportunities for meaningful participation (meaningful relationships with teachers, meaningful activities). The experiences of these participants indicate that schools that wish to support poor children and youth in achieving their life goals might consider ways to help students make positive connections with adults in the building, support the families of these students, and offer meaningful activities in addition to academic programs. Further research would be useful investigating the experiences of persons who grew up in poverty and moved into middle class in different geographic regions, through different career paths, and by moving away from their childhood communities.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

What began as a quest to understand the extraordinary has revealed the power of the ordinary. Resilience does not come from rare special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.

Ann S. Masten, 1998

My interest in the topic of individual movement from poverty has been a natural extension of my experience as a teacher in high poverty schools. Each day as a classroom teacher I observed the effects of a life in poverty on many of my students. In the midst of teaching I had the opportunity to receive professional development from the University of Tennessee related to working with students from high poverty backgrounds. During this time, I began to explore the dynamics of poverty and its effect on children. This experience led me to believe that teachers working in high poverty schools must have both an in-depth understanding of how poverty affects children and a deep knowledge base of specific strategies that help children move from poverty. I have come to believe that with specific skills a school faculty can be a component of a powerful network that insures each child has the opportunity to move from poverty; my research reflects an effort to move beyond my beliefs and to examine evidence on this issue.

My study is an exploration of the experiences of selected individuals who successfully moved from poverty into a higher social and economic class in the United States. In order to explore this research topic it was essential that I develop an understanding of how social class stratification and occupational dynamics within the

United States are understood to affect an individual's ability to move between social classes. It was also important to attempt to develop an understanding of the structure of poverty within this country. This is a complex area of research with little agreement between scholars with the exception of their unanimous belief that the United States does function within a class stratification hierarchy.

Social Class Stratification in the United States

Social class stratification is defined as the distribution of a society's resources, which includes but is not limited to wealth, income, occupational prestige, political power and education (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 2003). Social classes within modern industrial societies are defined by their access to these resources, which affect individual values, lifestyle and life chances. The inequality of the allocation of resources defines separate social classes. Individuals within the same class tend to have access to similar levels of resources. In the U.S., this is measured primarily in terms of income and education. Class stratification hierarchy often excludes individuals of a different race and ethnicity from the empowered majority (Beeghley, 2005; Bourdieu, 1977; Gilbert, 1998). Gender is often a determinant of class ranking; historically, single women in the United States have often been excluded from opportunities to move vertically in the social class hierarchy (Beeghley, 2005; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 2003; Rose, 2007). Finally, social stratification in the U.S. is shaped by the degree to which ascription or class placement tied to heredity and achievement influence social class ranking (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991, 2003; Rose, 2007).

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Social Class Mobility

Social class mobility is the study of vertical and horizontal movement in a social order and is linked to the nature of the stratification system. Two mobility researchers, Dennis Gilbert and Joseph Kahl, determined eight factors to consider when investigating social stratification and its effect on mobility in the United States (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987). These factors include the variables of occupation, income, wealth, personal prestige, class association, socialization; political power and social class consciousness (Gilbert, 1998).

While class structure in the United States, during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, is fluid and individuals do have opportunities to be mobile, the class structure has been relatively stable over time (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 2003; Rose, 2007). Currently the majority of adults remain in the same class and occupational category as their parents and when they do move it is over very short distances (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Rose, 2007). This long term trend indicates that the existing class structure is continually being reproduced (Beeghley, 2005; Bourdieu, 1977; Gilbert, 1998; McMurrer & Sawhill, 1996; Rose, 2007; Wessel, 2005). Within the U.S. class structure, the individuals most vulnerable to poverty are the working classes and those already in poverty (Hofferth, et al., 2002; McMurrer & Sawhill, 1996; Rank & Hirschl, 2001). These two groups tend to have the least influence, resources and control over their life choices (Beeghley, 2005; Bourdieu, 1977; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991).

Statement of the Problem

Social science and economic research has repeatedly demonstrated that those living in poverty as children are much more likely as adults to remain in poverty than to move into a different social class (Burtless & Smeeding, 2000; Duncan, 1999; Evanson, 1981; Lewis, 1996; Payne, 2003; Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2005; Rank & Hirschl, 2001). The United States has the largest percentage of individuals living in poverty when compared to all other major industrialized nations (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 2003; Wessel, 2005). The 2007 U.S. Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement* reported that 18.5 percent of children living in the U.S. were in poverty or 13.5 million. In 2006, the South continued to have the highest poverty rate at 13.8 percent with the rest of the nation at 12.3 percent or 36.5 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007a).

In the United States, primary factors that have a significant impact on the likelihood of experiencing poverty or affluence include parental income, gender, race and education. Currently, divorced women, with dependent children, are the demographic group most likely to move into poverty (McMurrer & Sawhill, 1996; Payne, 2003; Payne, et al., 2005)

A number of studies indicate that one of the primary factors that allow movement out of poverty in the U.S. is the acquisition of a college education (Becker, 1998, 2002; Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Harker, 1984; Kerbo, 1991, 2003). Graduating from college or a university normally provides an opportunity for an individual to move into a middle or more elite class. My dissertation focuses on the question of what conditions or resources were present in the lives of persons who grew

up in long term poverty and were able to graduate from college or university.

Understanding of these conditions may provide insight into ways that society can be

deliberate about attempting to make sure that all children in poverty have access to them.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research the phenomenon of an individual who

has moved from long term poverty as demonstrated by attending and graduating from

college by obtaining from these teachers verbal descriptions of their perceptions of this

phenomenon. The essential life experience of moving from poverty to professionally-

licensed teaching will be extracted using a phenomenological interpretation of the data. I

have selected teachers because the teaching occupation requires a college degree and is

considered by social mobility researchers as solidly in a middle class stratum (Blau &

Duncan, 1967; Bourdieu, 1977; Finn, 1999; Hodge & Treiman, 1968; Kerbo, 1991, 2003;

Rist, 2000). Although I will not be able to draw general conclusions from the study of a

small group of teachers, there is intrinsic value in listening to and learning their stories.

We as researchers can always learn by listening to and striving to understand others.

Working effectively with children from impoverished backgrounds is challenging, and

understanding how individuals from such backgrounds have moved successfully into

middle class is key to assisting these students.

Research Question

My research question is, what is the experience of individuals who grew up in

long term poverty but have moved from poverty, as demonstrated by graduating from

college or university, and obtaining a professional license to teach public school? For the

purposes of this study, an individual who grew up in long term poverty is defined as one

who self-identifies with this description. I use a phenomenological approach in this study (Collins, 2003; Kvale, 1996). As I conducted my research interviews I asked the question: "Tell me about your childhood and how you became a teacher."

Theoretical Framework

Investigating mobility from poverty is a complex task with many opposing views and theoretical perspectives. My work was influenced by the work of a number of scholars, including Leonard Beeghley (2005), Dennis Gilbert (1998), Harold Kerbo (1991), and Ann Masten (2001). My theoretical framework concerning social class and its stratification is based on a critical-conflict paradigm; conflict theorists maintain that a society is structured around group conflict and a constant struggle for power and control within that society. Each competing group constantly strives to gain and maintain control of the resources within the society. Divergent groups cooperate only for their own self-interest (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991).

I have determined to utilize the social class structural model developed by Dennis Gilbert (1998). Gilbert integrates both economic and social aspects of American society to include addressing the working poor and what Gilbert terms an underclass within society. This model utilizes theoretical assumptions proposed by early pioneers of social class study including Karl Marx and Max Weber along with research obtained by social researchers throughout the past century in the United States. Gilbert (1998) proposes that class structure in the United States is influenced by a number of factors to include the national economic system, individual wealth and income, behavioral norms within classes, and social prestige, and divides class in the United States into six subdivisions, which are: capitalist, upper-middle, middle, working, working-poor and underclass.

I am also influenced by research in the area of resilience, the relatively new study of how children and young adults overcome adversity to achieve positive outcomes for themselves (Benard, 1995; Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999; Howard & Johnson, 2001; Johnson & Wiechelt, 2004; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1989; Werner & Smith, 1992; Werner & Smith, 2001). Resilience theory assumes that each individual will react to a potentially traumatic life event in a manner consistent with his or her individual aptitudes, family characteristics and community environment. My selection of resilience to inform my theoretical perspective in investigating the experience of moving from poverty is founded on my notion that persons living in poverty require internal and external support in order to move vertically between social classes. An understanding of resilience provides insight into methods to improve outcomes for both children and adults experiencing adverse life situations.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are found throughout this study and are defined for purposes of creating clear understanding of how they are being used in the present study. Although many of the terms have more than one definition, those below have been selected as best fitting the context of my research.

Ascription: A term within the study of social stratification used to denote when an individual, within a specific society, is positioned within that societies class hierarchy based primarily on heredity (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998)

Achievement: In the context of the study of social stratification and mobility used to describe social class mobility based on an individuals move into a higher social strata or

class based on merit or individual effort and not the result of ascription (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 1991).

Blue and White Collar Occupations: Blue-collar occupations have been traditionally described as those involving manual labor while white-collar occupations are described as those involving work in an office setting or management positions (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 2003).

Culture: A pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group (Hodge & Treiman, 1968; Payne, 2003).

Intergenerational Mobility: Study of the occupational position of parents compared to their children (Kerbo, 2003).

Intragenerational Mobility: Study of the occupational position of an individual observed over time (Kerbo, 2003).

Middle Class: A broad, diverse social class composed of medium salaried, skilled individuals and families involved in labor at both blue and white-collar occupations.

Phenomenology: The study of phenomena. Phenomenologists ask questions to determine the nature or meaning of a person's lived experiences (Giorgi, 1985; Spinelli, 2005; Van Manen, 1990).

Poverty: For the purposes of this study, I will define poverty as the U.S. Census Bureau's income thresholds that vary by family size and composition used to determine who is in poverty. Accordingly, when a family's total income is less than the family's poverty threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007b).

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Social Class: A grouping of individuals with similar occupational, economic, political, and social interests located within a stratified social hierarchy (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 1991, 2003)

Social Mobility: Individual or group movement within a class system (Kerbo, 2003).

Social Stratification: When social inequality has become institutionalized where there is a system of social relationships that group these relationships into a hierarchal order (Kerbo, 2003).

Under Class: Low-income families and individuals who have an extended history of little or no participation in the labor force (Gilbert, 1998).

Working Class: A social class composed of low salaried, semi-skilled individuals and families involved in labor at both blue and white collar occupations (Kerbo, 2003).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Well, it has not been easy. But it's something I believe in very much. A free public education. We were the first country to try and educate every man's child regardless of race, religion, creed or color. And if one is willing to work and apply themselves education is the ticket, it really is. If they have the natural abilities, the God given abilities. The gray matter kicking in. You know, knowledge is going to open a lot of doors.

Daniel Willis, A Participant

The purpose of this study was to research the phenomenon of an individual who has moved from poverty. This study is framed by research informing the understanding of how social class stratification and occupational dynamics within the United States are believed to affect an individual's ability to move between classes, as well as the understanding of the structure of poverty in this country. To explore this complex area of research, which contains little agreement among scholars beyond the acknowledgement of a class stratification hierarchy, this literature review consists of four sections exploring the following topics: a) social class stratification, b) social class mobility in the United States, c) poverty, and d) resilience.

Social Class Stratification

Throughout history, all human societies have structured themselves into some form of social class hierarchical groupings. Industrialized and post-industrial societies, such as the United States, contain a hierarchical class structure based on a number of factors to include wealth, income, education level, family social status, technical abilities, personal aspirations, occupation and social prestige. Placement and movement of individuals between and within hierarchical groupings is dependent on a number of

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factors within the society, but generally these factors can be categorized as a function of either individual achievement or family ascription. Current data seems to indicate that placement and movement in the United States is a combination of both factors (Beeghley, 2005; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Collins, 2003; Rose, 2007; Wessel, 2005).

Social classes within any particular stratified society are defined by their inequality (Davis & Moore, 2006; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 1991, 2003). Within complex industrial and post-industrial societies, divisions of labor are present. More complex societies rank families or households rather than individuals. Large groupings of families of approximately equal rank and occupation are differentiated from other families which ultimately determines social class (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998). In the United States social class is primarily defined by prestige of occupation which is intimately linked to income or wealth (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 2003).

Competing Theories of Social Class Stratification

Social stratification is the hierarchical structure of social classes within a society. Two general theories have influenced research into social stratification: the functional and conflict theories of social structure. Functional theorists assert that any society is maintained by a general consensus of the population related to critical values and norms within that society. According to the functionalist paradigm a process of socialization maintains societies. The academic study of social stratification in the United States was dominated by a functional perspective until the 1950's (Kerbo, 1991). Conflict theorists maintain that a society is structured around either one group that has the power to enforce its will on other subservient groups or numerous competing groups in conflict which cooperate for each group's own self interest (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert &

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Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991). Functional theorists view societies, as holistic systems while conflict theorists understand societies to be composed of competing social classes with distinct interests.

Functional Theory

Functionalism does not address the issue of class conflict in society; rather it supports an ideal image of harmonious social relationships within a society. Functionalists argue that the basis of any orderly society is the existence of a core value system that imposes common values on all its members. This paradigm emerged in Europe in the 19th century, as a response to the emergence of industrialism with its subsequent restructuring of social class and the French Revolution, which suggested ideals of equality, happiness and freedom for the individual. These historical conditions gave rise to a very conservative type of sociology, which reflects a concern for social order (Beeghley, 2005; Kerbo, 1991, 2003).

Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), a French sociologist, viewed social stratification through a functional paradigm in that external social forces explain individual behaviors. According to Durkheim, a continuous socialization process was necessary in order for new members of a society to internalize that society's moral order and suppress basic individual human self-interest for the good of the broader society. Durkheim described the social concerns of his era as the product of a decline in morality rather than based on economic class struggle or a struggle for economic and social dominance by a particular group. According to Durkheim, a society is composed of various organs, each with a specific function but all working toward the well being of the organism (Kerbo, 2003).

Talcott H. Parsons (1902-1979), an American sociologist and social stratification researcher, expanded on the work of Durkheim and developed a theory of structural-functionalism, to explain the perceived stability and internal cohesion of societies, which was in turn necessary to ensure a society's continued existence. Parson's functional theory was based on the assumption that a successful society must have social order and this order is based on the development of norms and values within that society. According to Parson, individuals are valued and ranked in a society based on how well they incorporate and emulate these dominant values.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists understand societies to be settings within which divergent groups interact and compete for control (Kerbo, 1991). The sociologist Karl Marx emphasized class conflict in his theories of social order. Marx's (1818 –1883) study of economics, history, and philosophy convinced him that economic organization and social class, which he viewed as linked, shaped societies. He concluded that fundamental social change within a society is the result of constant conflict between social classes. The German sociologist Max Weber (1864 – 1920) expanded on the theories of Marx and incorporated some aspects of functionalism into his perspective of social order. Weber concurred with Marx in defining class as groupings of individuals segregated primarily by their economic position within society. In his study of social class stratification, Weber distinguished between two orders of social stratification: class and status. He agreed with Marx that different classes exist, but he thought that status or social prestige was the key factor in deciding which social class individuals within a society would fall within. Weber argued that where an individual resides, manner of speech, education, and

leisure habits determine social class and particular social classes provide more or less opportunity within a society for individuals (Weber, 2006). According to Weber, a social class is defined as a group of people who share the same economic life chances although they may not necessarily be aware of their common class situation (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 1991). He argued that a society's occupational structure was a point of conflict and competition. Individuals with greater or scarcer skills could demand higher wages and social status. Individuals with lesser skills or with skills common to an abundance of people received both lower wages and social prestige. Weber developed a three-component theory of social stratification, which included the elements of social class, social status and political party affiliation (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991, 2003).

Social Class Stratification in the United States

A History of Understandings of Class Structure in the United States

A definition of class depends on your perspective of society. My review of the literature indicates that defining classes seems to be as much art as science. Dividing society into social classes in the United States is essentially imposing a simplified solution to a complex issue. Using the social theories of Marx and Weber, one can make the assumption that social class hierarchy develops based on a society's economic system (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991, 2003; Rose, 2007). Classes in the United States' social hierarchy are primarily based on economic distributions rather than social prestige (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987). But prestige within each social class is grounded in economic distinctions between classes. These distinctions were observed in studies by Warner, Coleman and

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Rainwater (Blau & Duncan, 1967; J. S. Coleman, 1988; Gilbert, 1998; Hodge & Treiman, 1968).

Individual and group class identification is determined by a combination of family position, individual occupational location, income and occupational prestige in the United States (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987). Americans in general view themselves as middle class and until the Great Depression of the 1930's considered poverty an economic difficulty created by individuals themselves who manifested inadequate work ethics or immoral lifestyles. The strong historic emphasis in the United States on the value of individualism has tended to create a belief that people are responsible for their own economic success (Beeghley, 2005; Mayer, 1997; Payne, 2003). This logic can be extended to theories of social stratification, mobility and poverty. If economic and social opportunity in the United States are equal, those who remain poor or fail to rise in the social structure have only themselves to blame. Polls conducted early in the century indicated that even the poor blamed themselves for their poverty (Kerbo, 2003; Mayer, 1997).

During the 20th century, there have been a number of attempts to identify class structure in the United States. In the 1940's William Lloyd Warner developed a theory of social class with United States society subdivided into three classes, upper, middle and lower, with each further subdivided into upper and lower segments (Warner, Meeker, & Ells, 1960) based on shared values and behaviors resident within each class. He defined each distinct social class based on people who freely associated together and held each other in mutual community esteem. According to Warner, social class was based on an individual's feeling of belonging and sense of shared community.

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A slightly different understanding of class structure emerged in the 1960's. Robert Hodge and Donald Treiman perceived society as split into two major divisions, a business upper class and a working lower class split into white and blue-collar occupations (Hodge & Treiman, 1968). Hodge and Treiman argued that due to the unique nature of American society, it was difficult to impossible for individuals and researchers to determine which social class an individual belonged to, and cited research indicating that most Americans self-identified as middle class and that income, occupation and education were not adequate to determine class placement in United States society.

During the later half of the twentieth century, in an attempt to replicate the work of Warner in a larger metropolitan area, Richard Coleman and Lee Rainwater investigated prestige in the social class structure of Boston and Kansas City (R. P. Coleman, Rainwater, & McClelland, 1978). Coleman and Rainwater conceived of a "Metropolitan Class Structure" consisting of three social classes with embedded sub-classes within each class. Their classes were defined as Upper Americans, Middle Americans and Lower Americans. The Middle Americans were subdivided into middle and working classes and Lower Americans into the semi poor and "the bottom" class (R. P. Coleman, et al., 1978).

Sociologists Gilbert and Kahl (1987) developed a theory of social class hierarchy founded on economic standing, which they subdivided into six major social classes. Kahl published *The American Class Structure* in 1955 and later collaborated with Gilbert in the 1970's. Their analysis of class structure in the U.S. revolved around a number of variables to include classical theory, empirical study and a socioeconomic core view of social class stratification (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987). Drawing from the

theoretical views of both Marx and Weber, this model recognizes a capitalist class, deriving wealth from assets, an upper-middle class, a middle class and a working class. These four are followed by a class of working poor and an under class. This model is based entirely on economic distributions. Gilbert and Kohl argue that prestige differences are important in defining social class but prestige derives from a foundation of economic differences. Thus the Gilbert-Kohl model focus is on source of income. The capitalist sources of income are property assets while the underclass depends on government payments referred to as government transfers. The middle and working classes rely on earnings from employment at differing occupational levels.

The two most numerous social classes in the United States are the middle and working classes (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991, 2003; Rose, 2007). Doctors, lawyers and high level managers can be considered as functioning within the upper-middle class (Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 2003; Rose, 2007). Examples of midlevel or middle class occupations routinely include public school teachers, and mid-level managers. While there is a wide range of salaries and educational levels within this group there are common characteristics. A defining characteristic for the middle class is that their work is normally non-manual and often labeled white-collar. Middle class work is typically not physically demanding, and often involves communicating with people and working with symbols and abstract concepts (Kerbo, 2003). Middle class occupations routinely require a higher level of education and technical skills than working class occupations.

Social Stratification Research in the United States

Research on occupational prestige assesses the social standing of occupations and each occupation's ranking within a stratified society. Occupational prestige and social class self-identification can be effective indicators of individual class location within a stratified society. During the 1930's and 1940's William Lloyd Warner and his associates, from the University of Chicago, investigated social stratification in the United States (Beeghley, 2005; Kerbo, 1991, 2003). Warner selected a small community with a well-established social organization that had developed over a long period of time and concluded that a combination of variables, including wealth, income, occupation, family, and personal associations all affected social class prestige and therefore social class ranking within the community under study (Warner, 1963; Warner, et al., 1960). Warner defined social stratification based on social status within a community and not on an economic scale. The classes in his model were upper-upper, lower-upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-lower, lower-lower (Kerbo, 1991).

The break by stratification researchers from the functional to conflict perspective came in the 1950's with research published by Floyd Hunter and C. Wright Mills (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991, 2003), proponents of elite theory which attempts to describe political and economic power as controlled by a small select group of individuals working outside elected offices (Kerbo, 2003). As cited in Gilbert (1998), Mills' and Hunter's elite theory construct investigated the possibility of a small minority maintaining control of a community through control of key economic and political positions. Mills' study *The Power Elite* (1956) focused on national politics while Hunter's *Community Power Structure* (1953) investigated the city of Atlanta, Georgia.

Their research methodology came to be known as the "reputational method" and was based on interviews of well-informed members of a community and their opinions of who the powerful members of the community were (Gilbert, 1998). This research methodology is similar to earlier social class prestige studies. Hunter determined that, in Atlanta, approximately twenty individuals welded the majority of the political influence within the city (Gilbert, 1998, pp. 179-180).

<center>**Social Class Mobility**</center>

<center>***Social Class Mobility Theory***</center>

An understanding of how, and if, individuals move between social classes is critical to my investigation. Social class mobility is defined as individual or group movement within a class system (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Rose, 2007). What creates difficulty for researchers is that everything is related to everything else when attempting to determine the causes of mobility (Gilbert, 1998; Rose, 2007). Social class mobility is primarily tied to economic mobility in the United States, although ascription plays a significant role in occupational choice and therefore class placement. Mobility is routinely determined by the extent of individual, family or generational movement within the social class structure. Horizontal mobility is movement within a specific class from one occupation of equal prestige to another of equal prestige (Kerbo, 2003). Vertical mobility is movement from one level to another of higher or lower prestige. Social class mobility research is primarily focused on the extent and patterns of vertical movement up and down the structure of society. The basic unit of measure has been the nuclear family with the male head of household, considered as the

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primarily on heredity (Kerbo, 1991). Achievement is defined as determining one's place in a social stratum or class based on individual merit or achievement (Kerbo, 1991). Social class mobility in the United States is a complex combination of ascription and achievement (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 1991, 2003; Payne, 2003; Payne, et al., 2005). The United States contains a diverse population with any number of social and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, much of the phenomenon of social class mobility in the United States continues to be unexplained (Benard, 2006; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Kerbo, 2003).

Human, Cultural and Social Capital Theory

Theories of capital attempt to explain mobility. The term capital, in the context of social mobility, speaks to the concept of individuals acquiring assets they may utilize to their advantage, and can include money, human relationships, job skills, language, dialect, cultural norms or any object that positions an individual to move in a society. Three types of capital are routinely discussed in the literature which are: human, cultural and social capital (Musial, 1999).

The term human capital is used to describe personal knowledge, skills, health or values (Becker, 2002). Schultz (Schultz, 1961) argued that a deliberate investment by individuals in increased education and job skills allows them to increase individual earnings. The theory of human capital holds that an individual's ability to understand and successfully function within society's cultural norms is critical for success. Once individuals have developed the human capital necessary to make them marketable within a society, they must then understand how to move within that society (Becker, 1998, 2002; R. P. Coleman, 1983; Payne, et al., 2005).

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Cultural capital can be understood as an individual's ability to function competently within a particular social class successfully (Musial, 1999). Based on a conflict paradigm of social structure, a key aspect of cultural or social class norms is that the dominant group defines them and attempts both to perpetuate class norms and to protect them from outside contamination (Bourdieu, 1977; Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, & Souberman, 1978; DiMaggio, 1982; Harker, 1984; Musial, 1999). The more capital an individual possesses, the more grounded and insulated within that particular social group an individual is. Cultural capital is acquired by developing a deep understanding of the language and customs of the social class an individual is interested in functioning within (DiMaggio, 1982; Musial, 1999). Payne (2003) refers to this capital as "the hidden rules of class" (pp. 51-62). Bourdieu demonstrated that the French public education system perpetuated the dominant social order within France (Bourdieu, 1977).

Social capital refers to relationships or networks, behavioral norms or common values, and trust to which individuals have access as members of a social class. Modern societies have semi-rigid classes and in order for individuals to move vertically between classes they must acquire the class norms or social capital to function within the class they are aspiring toward; this understanding underlies much of the original research done by Vygotsky (Ardichvili, 2001; Moll, 1990). Social capital can exist in any class strata, to include poverty, middle and upper class.

Status Attainment

Status attainment research is related to specific occupations and their standing in the social order (Beeghley, 2005). Individuals enter occupations and social class based on the manner in which their parent's status produced advantages and disadvantages; this

process is affected by family social class, individual ability, academic performance, encouragement, individual aspirations and education (Beeghley, 2005; Blau & Duncan, 1967). The higher a family's income, the greater the achievement of children in that family (Beeghley, 2005; Blau & Duncan, 1967).

Within the United States, male mobility progresses in a consistent intergenerational pattern of children inheriting the occupations, or similar horizontal occupations, and social class of their fathers. Gilbert (1998) cites research conducted using the General Social Survey (GSS), a national survey conducted annually, which indicated thirty-six percent of children in a family maintained a career similar to a parent. With many children working in occupations similar to their parents, the implications are that they remain in the same social class. Beeghley (2005) theorizes that this rigidity demonstrates two primary occupational classes in the U.S.: a white-collar and blue-collar working class structure with semi-permeable boundaries to social mobility (Beeghley, 2005; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 2003; Sorokin, 1927).

Current Social Mobility Patterns in the United States

The ability of an individual to move vertically in the current U.S. social class hierarchy is contingent on a number of interrelated social and economic factors, including ethnic origin, gender, geographic location, educational level, family class position and family income. The bulk of the adult population in the United States earns under $50,000 per year and can be considered as functioning within the middle and working classes (Rose, 2007).

Social class mobility has been extensive throughout United States history due to a number of factors including a democratic governmental structure, industrialization,

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relatively high educational levels, access to land when the nation was formed and the lack of an established aristocracy (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 2003; Mayer, 1997). Following World War II, wages saw a steady increase across social classes. Due to a number of interrelated internal and global factors, economic fortunes in the United States have been adjusting since the 1970's (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 2003; Rank & Hirschl, 2001; Rose, 2007). After 1973, lower income wages declined and middle income wages saw very slow growth while the highest income categories saw the greatest growth (Rose, 2007). This growth has had the effect of growing the upper middle class and stagnating growth in the working class. There has also been a dramatic increase in wealth among the top tier of the U.S. class hierarchy.

Vertical Mobility Patterns

A discussion of mobility from poverty must also include a discussion of where that movement leads. Vertical movement out of poverty has the potential to lead toward working, middle or upper social class locations within the social stratification hierarchy (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 2003). An important finding in this literature review is that individuals in the United States normally do not move occupationally or socially very far from their family's current class position (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Rose, 2007).

The occupational structure in the U.S. changed over time with the transition to an industrialized society in the late 19th century (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991, 2003). In 1800, 74 percent of labor was agricultural with the majority of Americans working as farmers. This steadily declined and by 1900 only 38

percent of the work force was employed in farming while 45 percent of the working population was engaged in blue-collar or working class non-farm occupations, primarily in urban centers (Beeghley, 2005). Also, in 1900 a new middle class was emerging with approximately 18 percent of the working population engaged in non-manual white-collar occupations. Currently, 2 percent of the work force is engaged in farming and 38 percent in working class or blue-collar occupations. The remaining 60 percent are involved in non-manual, white-collar occupations (Beeghley, 2005; Rose, 2007).

Currently, social class mobility in the U.S., while limited, is not frozen and remains relatively fluid (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991, 2003). The trend in intergenerational social mobility for sons, since the 1880's, has been to move upwardly each succeeding generation (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987). Gilbert (1998) again cites the GSS data analysis, which indicates that in 1990 forty-four percent of children moved above their parent's occupational status while about 20 percent slipped down. This trend seems to emphasize achievement slightly more than ascription in the U.S. class structure. The United States economic structure is now changing from an industrial base and moving toward a global economy.

The two social classes experiencing the most growth are the upper-middle class and the lower working-class (Beeghley, 2005; Rose, 2007). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the rise of industrialization created the need for workers in the production industry. As the economy currently shifts, these positions are no longer required. High-skilled and high paying blue-collar jobs in industry are declining in the U.S. and being replaced by lower-skilled and significantly lower paying jobs in sales and service sectors.

One result of this shift in the labor market has been in the rise of the working poor social class (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987).

After the recession of the 1970's, large corporations and business in general developed the requirement for a number of new high skilled positions in the technical, professional and management areas. As a result, highly educated individuals were able to move into the upper middle class and fill these positions. Unfortunately, those in lower middle class and working class status positions suffered, as in order to meet changing economic demands in the United States and to insure profits and survive in the emerging global market, large corporations began to restructure compensation in their less skilled positions.

Extensive studies of social mobility in the United States were conducted by Blau and Duncan (1967), and later by Featherman and Hauser (1978), both from a functionalist paradigm (Beeghley, 2005; Kerbo, 1991, 2003). These studies confirmed that the highest rates of horizontal occupational ascription, in both 1962 and 1973, occurred with upper middle class and lower working class families. Kerbo (2003) makes the observation that this factor may indicate that social class structure is more rigid in the upper and lower social strata. Regarding vertical mobility, generally, there was a higher rate of upward mobility, in both 1967 and 1973, than downward mobility (Kerbo, 2003).

Educational Institutions and Social Class Mobility

There is general consensus among a number of researchers studying social class mobility that while educational attainment is important in promoting mobility, many educational institutions hinder mobility in order to assist in the maintenance of the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1977; Finn, 1999; Harker, 1984; Kerbo, 2003). Harker's (1984)

research describes how schools perpetuate cultural inequalities and defines levels of inequality. At the lowest level, Harker describes non-dominant groups of children who maintain a habitués outside that of the dominant culture. Habitués is the manner in which cultural norms are embodied in an individual within that particular cultural group. In many schools, this cultural habitués constitutes the cultural capital within a school and determines which students will be successful in the school setting. Next is a group of non-dominant children who against the odds have some success in school, but because they do not assimilate into the dominant group are not successful in school due to incorrect decisions related to education and occupational choices. Above this level, Harker describes students who accept and adhere to what he terms the cultural "currency" or cultural capital of the school. Students at the highest level have fully assimilated into the culture of the school and utilize its particular language and cultural norms to succeed. According to Harker and Bourdieu, schools display a learned ignorance in that teachers and administrators only reward with success students who inhabit or assimilate into the dominant culture of that school (Bourdieu, 1977; Harker, 1984).

Finn (1999) supports an argument similar to Bourdieu's in that both believe schools tend to foster the maintenance of a semi-rigid social class structure. Finn argues that public education is unequal in that schools train children to function within their current social class. Finn, building on the work of Jean Anyon, describes four types of educational experiences for children in the United States, designed to perpetuate the current stratified social class structure. Each school has a role and Finn labels these schools as fitting within one of four categories, which are: executive elite, affluent professional, middle and working class (Finn, 1999).

Gender and Mobility

Research related to social mobility has focused almost entirely on men. Historically, most research has been conducted assuming women acquire the class and social status of their husbands or fathers (Beeghley, 2005). Because women's occupations and social roles are currently changing, researchers are often unsure if they should compare intergenerational mobility to a woman's father or mother. Gilbert (1998) concludes that while it is currently difficult to accurately determine social mobility among women, occupational achievement is significantly influenced by women's class origin.

Women's intergenerational mobility shows patterns similar to those of men but while women may remain in a similar class and occupation to their parents they often work in support positions within those occupations (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998). Working-class and middle-class women in the work force tend to gravitate toward white-collar employment with salaries similar to but often lower than their fathers (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 2003). Gender-based occupational discrimination continues to hinder women's upward mobility.

Since 1979, wages for women have gradually increased due to more hours working, women remaining in the labor force longer and gradually improved wage equity. During the 1970's and 80's, 24 percent of the daughters of working class families held occupations in the upper middle-class as adults, while over half the daughters of upper middle-class families held similar positions (Gilbert, 1998). In 2007, the median income for single adult working men was $43,284 and single women $34,080. Among

single working adult women heading households, 45 percent were living at or below the poverty level compared to 20 percent of men heading single households (Rose, 2007).

Likelihood of Falling Into Poverty

Rank and Hirschl (2001) investigated the probability of Americans experiencing poverty or affluence within their adult life spans, and found that by age 40, 24.7 percent of adults in the United States would probably have spent at least one year below the poverty line as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. By age 75, the number experiencing at least one year in poverty will increase to half the population. Americans are more likely to experience poverty as young adults and again as elderly adults. Americans in the 40 and 50-year-old age groups are least likely to experience poverty. Half the adult population in the United States will experience both poverty and affluence at some point during their life span (Hofferth, et al., 2002; Rank & Hirschl, 2001).

Rank and Hirschl (2001) found that the two key characteristics that dramatically predicted an adult's fall below the poverty line were race and years of education. White males with more than 12 years of education were the least likely to experience poverty in the United States. Based on their research, Rank and Hirschl subdivide the United States adult population into three broad categories primarily identified by income, race and education level. The first and most affluent group includes approximately 30 percent of the population and are almost entirely white with more than 12 years of education. This group can expect to avoid poverty and will experience at least one year of affluence as adults with the likelihood of living in economic affluence for more than one year. The second group represents approximately 30 percent of the adult population, who move in and out of poverty on cyclic bases for the majority of their lives. They are both white and

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African-American but a large portion of the African-American population remains in this group. Two thirds of these individuals have less than 12 years of education. The third group represents 40 percent of the population. Half of this group will spend at least one year in poverty and one in affluence. The other half will experience neither extreme but remain in a middle economic tier between poverty and affluence.

Poverty

There is a wealth of research and published information related to poverty and this review of the literature makes no attempt to detail all aspects of this research. I have attempted to become aware of the basic theoretical positions on the causes of poverty within the United States and develop a basic understanding of the arguments related to why people move into poverty, remain in and escape from poverty.

Current Poverty Rates in the United States

The U.S. Census Bureau tracks the number of people living in poverty, which is based on an economic scale, using the term poverty rate to define the percentage of people who are in poverty during a calendar year. In 1963-1964 Mollie Orshansky of the Social Security Administration developed the poverty threshold formula that remains the foundation of how government agencies determine who is poor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, 2007b). Orshansky based her estimation on the cost of a standard market basket of food, using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Thrifty Food Plan. She then assumed individuals in poverty spend one-third of their income on food and two-thirds on other needs (Beeghley, 2005). In essence, she calculated how much a family must spend on food to remain above a starvation level and used that data to determine a poverty threshold.

Currently the Census Bureau utilizes a sliding scale to calculate the poverty threshold for individuals and families based on the number of adults and children in a home. For example, in 2006 a family of two adults and one child with an income under $16,227 is considered as living in poverty. For a family of two adults and two children the threshold is $16,242 (2007a). Over the past three decades, the U.S. Census Bureau has indicated that the poverty threshold averaged between 11 and 15 percent of the population. According to the Census Bureau, in 2006 there were 36.5 million people living in poverty, or 12.3 percent of the population. In 2006, 17.4 percent of children under 18 living in the United States were in poverty, or 12.8 million. In the U.S., you are more likely to be in poverty if you are a single mother with children, African-American or Hispanic. Approximately 2 percent of the population lives in chronic poverty defined by the Census Bureau as having income under the poverty threshold for longer than four years continually. A recent disturbing trend is the number of people working but still remaining in poverty. Approximately 45 percent of adults living in poverty work full or part-time jobs (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Kerbo, 2003). In any given year only about 15% of people living in poverty are able to move out of poverty (Kerbo, 2003).

Theories of Poverty

There are a number of theoretical paradigms related to how and why poverty exists within the United States. The four primary paradigms are: social Darwinism sometimes referred to as a "Blaming the Poor" perspective, the culture-of-poverty perspective, structural poverty and situational poverty perspectives (Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 2003).

Social Darwinism focuses on the moral and biological character of the poor. Historically, Social Darwinism has maintained a strong following across class boundaries in the U.S. given the strong emphasis in the United States on the value of individualism and with that a belief that people are responsible for there own economic success (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Mayer, 1997). Throughout American history there has been the tendency to equate poverty to low morals, a lack of motivation or deficient work ethic (Beeghley, 2005; Mayer, 1997). This logic extends to maintain that if economic and social opportunity in the United States is indeed equal, those who remain poor have only themselves to blame. Opinion polls conducted early in the twentieth century indicated that even the poor blamed themselves for there poverty (Kerbo, 2003; Mayer, 1997).

The culture-of-poverty theory argues that individuals in poverty maintain a unique value system, that is separate from the mainstream value system, and those in poverty remain in poverty due to their adaptations to the burdens of poverty and inability to adapt to mainstream society's values (Butterworth, 1972; Lewis, 1963; O. Lewis, 1996; Payne, 2003; Payne, et al., 2005). A unique aspect of Lewis' theory of a culture-of-poverty is his description of individuals in this subculture not being aware that they are living in such a culture. According to Lewis, when individuals become conscious of their membership in this culture they are no longer a part of the culture of poverty (Goode & Eames, 1996; Lewis, 1963). Lewis also distinguished between people who were impoverished and those living in a culture-of-poverty. He used the example of Jews residing in eastern Europe until the 1940's and middle-class families who became impoverished as examples of poor individuals who did not assume this culture of poverty (Lewis, 1963). Routinely,

critics of this theory use real world data to argue that the model of a culture-of-poverty does not exist (Goode & Eames, 1996). In relation to class structure and mobility within the United States, Oscar Lewis did not suggest a culture-of-poverty had relevance in the United States (Lewis, 1963).

The situational theory of poverty is similar to the culture-of-poverty theory but argues that individuals in poverty may at times behave differently than mainstream society in order to survive in poverty (Kerbo, 2003; Ng & Rury, 2006; Payne, 2003). The premise of situational poverty theory is that individuals in poverty exhibit behaviors different from other social classes due to their limited life chances and lack of opportunity. In essence, the poor are reacting realistically to their situation. The situational view rejects the notion that poor individuals do not possess the social values of the more affluent classes within a society (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 1991, 2003; Mayer, 1997).

Finally, structural theorists contend that poverty is the result of the overall structure of a society and research in this area focuses on political and economic causes of poverty (Kerbo, 2003). The structural conflict theory of poverty is the one that most helpfully informs this research, and is explored in detail below.

Structural Conflict Theory of Poverty

The structural view of poverty argues that economic and occupational structure in a society can provide an explanation for poverty (Kerbo, 2003; Rose, 2007). A structural explanation of poverty can be validated by research into geographic and regional concentrations of poverty. Persistent poverty is often concentrated in a geographic pocket of poverty (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2006; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Duncan,

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1999, 2005; Kerbo, 2003; Mayer, 1997). These areas are characterized by a lack of jobs and poor prospects for economic development (Duncan, 1999; Hammer, 2000). An over-concentration of unskilled, unemployed individuals or significant reduction of industries can create these pockets. Appalachia is a rural example of a pocket of poverty as are northern urban areas, which have seen a rapid decline of their traditional industrial economic base. The local dominant culture often determines if individuals can easily rise from poverty (Duncan, 1999; Harker, 1984).

Cultures with a history of patronage and excluding individuals and families from having access to the resources necessary for upward mobility can block movement out of chronic poverty (Duncan, 2005; Harker, 1984). Duncan describes healthy civic cultures as those providing families and individuals in poverty the tools to move into the middle class structure of the community. Duncan cites economist Albert Hirschman who describes three choices people living in poverty have: they can accept the community status quo and do nothing, they can leave the area for greener pastures or they can stay and advocate for positive change (Duncan, 2005).

Kerbo (2003) argues that there is currently no satisfactory theory of poverty. In Kerbo's opinion, understanding characteristics of the poor and individual characteristics of working, middle and upper class persons does not help understand poverty. He argues that in order to understand poverty researchers should focus attention on group conflict and unequal access to political and economic resources. His argument that poverty can only be understood through the lenses of politics and economics within a society supports the use of structural conflict theory to make sense of poverty.

Resilience

An intriguing body of research related to mobility studies is that of resilience theory. A number of studies, some of which followed individuals for thirty or more years, have consistently documented that between one-half and two-thirds of children growing up in families with severe and stressful life situations such as mental illness, alcoholism, physical and emotional abuse, and impoverished living conditions have overcome these unfortunate circumstances by displaying or manifesting a personality trait defined as "resilience" or "resiliency." These terms are used in the literature to describe a set of personal attributes that seem to foster the ability to successfully adapt to stressful life situations (Benard, 1995; Grotherg, 1996; Viadero, 1995; Werner & Smith, 1992). Resiliency theory is supported by theoretical and investigative research related to psychology, human, cultural and social capital studies and poverty theory (Beeghley, 2005; Duncan, 1999; Gilbert, 1998; Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Payne, et al., 2005; Werner & Smith, 2001).

Resiliency theory describes childhood resiliency as a process: a balancing of intrinsic and extrinsic protective factors against environmental risk factors, and the gradual accumulation of emotional and cultural strength as children respond successfully to challenges in their families, schools and communities (Benard, 1995, 2006; Lester, Masten, & McEwen, 2006; Masten, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Rutter, 2006). Resilience is a quality that characterizes children who, though exposed to significant stress and adversity in life, do not succumb to this adversity. According to Benard (2006), resiliency is part of the human genetic makeup, which adapts and survives in reaction to the environment it lives in but is not a genetic

trait specific to select groups or individuals. Masten understands resilience to be part of the natural maturation process (Masten & Obradovic, 2006).The foundation of resiliency theory is that every human is born with the capacity to adapt successfully to difficult situations.

In order to be successful in adverse situations, individuals must necessarily display competent achievement in these situations. Masten and Coatsworth (1998) describe this competence as having reasonable success with major developmental milestones as a child and adolescent. With children, the nature of this competence will alter as the child matures and the environment changes. Resilience, according to Masten and Coatsworth (1998), is determined as competence or successful adaptations while dealing with adverse life environments. To identify resilience two observable factors must be present. First, that there is an adverse threat to the individual and second the resiliency displayed is positive for that adverse situation (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Studies of individuals experiencing trauma and adverse life situations have historically documented the personal dysfunction and emotional damage created by the adversity. But, during the mid twentieth century, social and medical researchers ascertained that some individuals experiencing adversity were not affected negatively by these life situations and indeed others seemed to excel in these situations (Werner & Smith, 1989). Recent research related to individuals who have experienced serious emotional and physical trauma has identified four prototypical outcomes of individuals experiencing such trauma. These outcomes include: chronic emotional dysfunction, emotional recovery, resilience, and delayed reactions to the trauma (Bonanno & Mancini, 2008).

Childhood Resilience

Originally, research into the phenomenon of childhood resilience was a result of interest by mental health professionals and social scientists concerned with the improvement of children's life outcomes (Werner & Smith, 1989; Werner & Smith, 1992; Werner & Smith, 2001). The focus of early research was primarily to determine pathological or risk factors children dealt with in individual life situations. The intent of the studies focused on methods to identify the damage done to the child and to provide resources to help them overcome risk factors. But, researchers soon found that a core group of children seemed to be able to function successfully within these stressful situations and even thrive (Grotherg, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Early research in this area began with Werner and Smith (1989) who studied the entire population of children born on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, in 1955, from birth to their early 30s. Werner and Smith determined that while by age 10 two-thirds of the children had developed serious behavior problems; health problems; juvenile delinquency or pregnancy, one-third of the children did not develop high-risk behaviors. This one-third grew and developed into healthy, well-rounded, competent adults. The study also determined that most of the children who had developed high-risk problems had corrected these deficiencies and by their early thirties were living more problem-free lives. According to Werner and Smith, their research on Kauai indicated the innate human ability of "self-righting". This ability to self-right in stressful life situations became the subject of resiliency research.

Researchers have noted that some protective factors are inherent in the nature of resilient people (Howard, et al., 1999; Werner & Smith, 1989, 2001). Werner and Smith's

original research noted that even in infancy, some children were different. These children were more active, affectionate, and good-natured than the majority and these behaviors were consistent throughout childhood development. Werner and Smith noted that resilient children were not unusually gifted but were effective in using the positive abilities they possessed. In addition, these children were very effective in exploiting the advantages they possessed. These resilient youth sought out support from teachers, friends, relatives, and other elders within the community. They participated in local civic organizations and took advantage of educational opportunities at local community colleges.

A key finding for Werner and Smith (1989) was that nurturing, competent adults buffered children from the stresses in their lives. Teachers, mentors, coaches, and other significant adults provided support and a positive influence for these resilient children. Benard (1995) found that even though a child may have the character traits of resilience, the local family, schools and community must provide three essential support mechanisms for individuals to succeed. Benard refers to these resources as "protective factors" or "protective processes". She groups them into the categories of: caring and supportive relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation (Benard, 1995, 2004, 2006).

A number of researchers have analyzed and developed a set of notional characteristics to identify the profile of a resilient child (Benard, 1995, 2004, 2006; Durlauf, 2000; Grotherg, 1996; Howard & Johnson, 2001). Resilient children have social competence, in that they can attract positive attention from others, they are empathetic toward other individuals, and they have good communication skills and a sense of humor

in difficult situations. Resilient children have adequate problem-solving skills and can plan, think critically and creatively, along with being willing to ask for help when needed. Most critically, they have developed what Benard (2004) has defined as "a critical consciousness" (p.18), which allows them to be aware of the problems in their family or society, and to know that they are not the cause of these troubles. These children also have autonomy, meaning that they believe in their ability to influence events around them, and they have a strong sense of their own identity, which does not waver in the face of neglect or ridicule. Resilient children also have a sense of purpose, and a belief in a bright future. Another survival key to resilient children is their ability to exploit whatever advantages exists in their environment. This exploitation includes the tendency to utilize support from friends, relatives, teachers, and other key community members to accomplish individual goals. These critical associations enhance resiliency by providing emotional care and support, they also challenge children by having high expectations of them, and give children the opportunity to participate and contribute in meaningful ways with the community, school and family unit.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed research in social class stratification, social class mobility, poverty, and resilience. While there are competing theories and models of social class stratification, there is agreement among scholars that there are social classes in the United States, and that most Americans view themselves as members of the middle class. Research indicates that social class mobility in the U. S. is a complex combination of ascription and achievement resulting in differentiated access to human, cultural, and social capital. Mobility is limited but not frozen, and is influenced by ethnic origin,

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gender, geographic location, educational level, family class position, and family income. There is consensus among scholars that many schools hinder mobility by perpetuating the status quo.

Researchers disagree about the necessity of having theories of poverty in order to conduct research in this area. The structural conflict theory, which is based on the argument that economic and occupational structures can provide explanations for poverty, is the most informative to the current study. Resilience research has focused on individuals who successfully adapt to stressful situations. Through identifying not only the personal characteristics but also the protective factors and protective processes that enable these individuals to succeed, resilience research is also quite useful in framing the current study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Doing science and implementing scientific findings are so difficult in education because humans in schools are embedded in complex and changing networks of social interaction.

Berliner, 2002

Selection of Methodology

I was interested in approaching my research using a constructivist paradigm. From this perspective, the world or reality is unknowable to humans and can only be understood through the filter of our human senses and consciousness (Berliner, 2002; Schwandt, 2000). Therefore, from this perspective, multiple realities exist that have been constructed by each individual and are greatly influenced by that individual's unique human structure. My research purpose and questions led to my selection of methodology. A phenomenological or naturalistic inquiry into the phenomenon of an individual moving out of poverty is an appropriate choice for this research. My study focused on the question:

> What is the experience of individuals who grew up in long term poverty but have moved from poverty, as demonstrated by graduating from college or university, and obtaining a professional license to teach public school?

Within naturalistic qualitative research there were a number of possible research choices I could have selected (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). I selected phenomenology due to that methodology's allowing me to work closely with participants in understanding their experience of moving from poverty into middle class. Phenomenological research is an approach to understanding human experience (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is concerned with the difference, if any, between the appearance of things, and what these things actually are (Spinelli, 2005). The constructivist, and specifically in this case the

phenomenologists paradigm, argues that researchers and participant subjects must become in fact co-researchers to collectively construct meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Therefore, the primary researcher cannot be distant and objective but must become involved with the participant and help reconstruct an understanding of the social world the participant is in (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

From the phenomenological perspective, to investigate a specific phenomenon in isolation, without taking into account the individual's life experiences and current setting, would be to miss the meaning and experience of being human (Giorgi, 1985; Sokolowski, 2006). The phenomenological perspective posits that knowledge is founded on individual experiences. Human experience is not static; the meanings of human experiences often change as those experiences are described or reflected on by the individual (Pollio, et al., 1997). The meaning of an experience can be described through dialogue between the individual experiencing the phenomenon and a researcher who is committed to listening. In phenomenologically-based inquiry, the researcher and participant work together to clarify the experience in question through dialogue. The purpose of the dialogue is to develop a meaningful description of the experience.

Van Manen (1990) argues that persons cannot reflect on lived experiences as they are taking place because that would change the nature of the experience. Reflection can only be retrospective never introspective. He states:

> Reflection on lived experience is always recollect; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through. ... In other words, phenomenology is the systemic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experiences (p.10).

The Phenomenological Interview

I selected a hermeneutic phenomenological interview technique as my data collection method. My hermeneutic interview had two purposes (Van Manen, 1990). First, it provided the means to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon I was studying. Second, it provided a means to develop a conversational relationship, which allowed me to delve into the meaning of my participant's lived experiences. I followed Ernesto Spinelli's (2005) suggested procedures in designing and carrying out my research, as detailed below:

- First develop a short unbiased research question whose purpose is to specify the focus of the investigation and select participants who are qualified by their experience to engage in a descriptively focused enquiry.

- Conduct and record and enquiry for approximately one hour utilizing a one-to-one interview.

- Transcribe the interview verbatim.

- Read the transcribed interviews several times to gain an appreciation for the contents as a whole.

- Analyze each interview and extract significant phrases and sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomena.

- Extract meanings contained in each significant statement.

- Organize the significant statements into significant themes.

- Write an exhaustive description of the thematic elements of the investigated phenomena

- Present the written description to each participant and request that they respond to the description.

- Collect any comments from participants and complete a detailed description of the phenomena investigated (pp.136-137)

Participant Selection

My task in identifying participants was to locate individuals who identified themselves as having lived in poverty as children, who had completed a college degree and who were professionally licensed as public school teachers. The open nature of qualitative inquiry often makes it difficult to specifically determine the number of participants necessary to investigate a phenomenon (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Kvale, 1996), but I anticipated interviewing no fewer than six individuals (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

In order to locate possible participants for my research, after I obtained approval from the university to begin, I began asking colleagues, friends and peers if they might know of a teacher who had grown up in poverty. Over the course of approximately three months I obtained the names of several individuals, whom I contacted. If these persons were interested, I then scheduled individual meetings with them and fully explained my research. At those meetings I also determined if they were suitable candidates for my research. Once those details were finalized I conducted my interviews.

Data Collection

The goal of each of my phenomenological interviews was to obtain a first-person description of a specific life experience. I begin each interview by asking, "Tell me about your childhood and how you became a teacher." I refrained from asking additional

questions unless I felt I had misunderstood a comment or the participant seemed to have lost their train of thought. Any additional questions I asked were not pre-specified but flowed from the interview dialogue (Pollio, et al., 1997). Pollio et al (1997) suggest that the researcher ask questions designed to allow for rich and full descriptions of the participant's specific experiences of the phenomena under investigation and I attempted to follow that recommendation. I refrained from asking "why" questions in order to preclude shifting the interview focus toward a theoretical discussion (Pollio, et al., 1997).

After completing an audio tape interview, I then transcribed the interview into a written text. After completing three interviews and transcribing the data into text I began to realize that similar stories and possible themes were emerging. Kvale (1996) recommends interviews continue until a "point of saturation" is reached. I decided after six interviews additional participants were not necessary, as the same themes were recurring. I continued to keep in mind that the number of individuals I interviewed was not as important as the quality of the lived experiences I obtained from the participants (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Phenomenological Interpretation of Data

Bracketing

Prior to beginning any collection of data, I attempted to define any bias I might have toward my research by conducting a bracketing interview of myself. In order to understand the essences of phenomena, researchers should attempt to understand their own biases and understandings regarding the phenomenon under study. Merleau-Ponty described the bracketing process as a method researchers could utilize for the purpose of revealing and setting aside preconceived opinions and theories related to the phenomena

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under study (Gearing, 2004). According to Gearing (2004), the researcher's purpose in reflexive bracketing is to insure the researcher's personal values, background and cultural suppositions related to the phenomenon are clearly defined and transparent. Prior to beginning the research, the investigator identifies his personal suppositions and ideas regarding the phenomenon. This is done in order to mitigate the impact of these suppositions on the phenomenon under study. The researcher must develop an internal self-awareness of his personal feelings related to the phenomenon. This will allow the researcher to reduce the influence of these presuppositions on the phenomenon, which allows for greater transparency in the research process while, understandably, not completely bracketing out the researcher's internal presuppositions. In reflexive bracketing it is understood that external suppositions such as culture, history and the environment of the phenomenon cannot be bracketed out and are considered by the researcher in the analysis stage of the research.

My specific method of bracketing was to develop a narrative of my presuppositions related to the phenomenon of individuals who had moved from growing up in long-term poverty to becoming licensed teachers. This included a brief narrative of my family and school experiences in Appalachia along with my understanding of how individuals moved from poverty and into teaching. This was developed prior to beginning my data collection. At the conclusion of my research analysis I reintroduced this narrative and incorporated it into my conclusions.

Data Analysis: The Hermeneutic Circle

Once my interview data were transcribed, I began the process of organizing the text into themes, as recommended by van Manen (1990). As van Manen (1990) describes

them, " ...phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes" (p. 90). I used Giorgi's (1985) four-step method to interpret the interview data that I had transcribed:

- I read each transcript a number of times to obtain from the participant a sense of the whole interview.

- I then read each transcript to pull out "meaning units" or themes.

- After developing initial "meaning units" or themes for each transcript I developed written statements to describe each theme within each transcript.

- I then took all the themes from all the transcripts and synthesized them into a detailed and consistent statement.

I used a hermeneutic interpretive method when developing the themes related to my text (Cornish, 2001; Schwandt, 2000). With a hermeneutic interpretation, the researcher identifies specific passages that relate to similar themes in each protocol. The themes are then refined by the researcher and if desired verified by a research group or co-researcher. Because a researcher's interpretation of the data collected involves references to information that is already known, understanding operates in a circular, dialectical manner (Cornish, 2001; Spinelli, 2005).

This entails a continuous process of matching a portion of the text to the whole text (Pollio, et al., 1997). The point of hermeneutic interpretation is to insure that all portions of the text are synthesized as a whole and not decontextualized into fragmented portions. Every individual passage is always viewed in relation to the whole text. While

there is an element of ambiguity to this form of interpretation, it is therefore essential that interpreters have a firm understanding of the process (Pollio, et al., 1997).

After re-reading all my interviews a number of times I listed four initial universal themes: mentors, strong work ethic, self-sufficiency/determination, and loved/stable family. See Appendix B for a detailed chronology of my analysis. In order to develop these initial themes I took each theme and matched statements in each interview. I was not satisfied with the names of these four themes as they contained judgmental language; also, I was concerned that they might not represent each participant. I then determined that I should start over by reviewing each interview transcript and listing all comments that might be related to my research question.

After reading and re-reading all my transcripts again, I developed a matrix of all possible themes based on statements all my participants had made. I also included within my matrix a column to indicate which themes related to other themes. This matrix included 18 possible sub-themes that were then checked against each transcript in detail, to determine if that sub-theme held for each participant (indicated in the "yes" or "no" columns). Following this analysis, some sub-themes were eliminated, and others were distilled into five, and eventually four, overall themes with sub-themes for each.

I continued my analysis by reviewing my transcripts and checking them against my possible themes for a third time, focusing in depth on my themes of durability of family relationships and individuals' determination to be different. I also asked my peer debriefers to read my transcripts and my themes and to give me feedback. At this point, I re-worded the names of some themes, in order to reflect more accurately the qualities being described. I eliminated some themes as being general descriptions of my

participants that were not necessarily related to my research question, and refined my overall themes to three: durability of family relationships, influenced positively by others, and determination to be different.

I was not satisfied that the names for the themes captured the essence of the qualities I was trying to describe, and used charts of sub-themes and a matrix of influential individuals in each participant's life to help me analyze further. I also spoke to my two peer debriefers and obtained valuable input and insight as I refined my themes.

I determined that I would use a theme of durable families to address my participants' experiences related to family. I included two sub-themes to address the long-term marriages of my participants' parents and the relationships the participants had with family members. I selected a theme of presence of encouragers with two sub-themes related to family, friends, teachers and respected adults in order to address the impact and influence of different individuals who supported and influenced the participants. In order to describe each participant's experience of striving to move from poverty, I selected a theme to reflect the participant's determination to succeed. Within this theme I sub-divided it into proactive and reactive categories. Finally, I determined that schools and teachers had a major influence on the participants' experience of moving from poverty to middle class. In this final theme I discussed the impact and influence of teachers and extracurricular activities on the participants' experiences moving from poverty.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Qualitative research posits that every human phenomenon has its own logic and intrinsic structure (Kvale, 1996) and defines scientific knowledge to be an investigation into the specific contextualization of a phenomenon. The phenomenologist's ontology

argues that true reality is both unknown and unknowable. Each individual constructs his or her own reality based on individual life experiences. Reality, or what people describe as reality, or what is experienced by them as reality, is linked to mental processes and specifically to our innate human ability to construct internal meaning (Giorgi, 1985; Sokolowski, 2006; Spinelli, 2005). Phenomenology follows the assumption that people constantly attempt to impose conscious meaning on their lived world. Objects that we as individuals perceive exist through the meaning each of us gives them (Spinelli, 2005). According to phenomenology, understanding the world around us is at one level subjective in that it is always related to, and constructed by, the person engaged in knowing (Sokolowski, 2006). The foundation of phenomenology is to focus on "the experience" that persons have.

A study is valid if it can reflect the truth value of the topic investigated (Kvale, 1996). A qualitative perspective of validity involves the philosophical question of what is truth. From this perspective, knowledge is socially constructed. According to Kvale (1996) knowledge is what the community of researchers says it is based on their own understanding. Kvale (1996) states, "Validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship during investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings" (p. 241). Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000) state, "To me validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (p. 751). Polkinghorne (1989) recommends a researcher ask the question, "Does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural connections that are manifest in the examples collected?" (p. 57).

Qualitative researchers refer to rigor and truth value using the term "trustworthiness" rather than "reliability" or "validity" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used the following strategies to establish trustworthiness: bracketing (described above), archive/research journal, member checking, peer debriefing, and thick description.

Archive/Research Journal

I have maintained an archive of all of my research materials (audiotapes, transcripts, drafts of coding schemes) to allow for an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to be established if necessary. I have also kept a research journal documenting my steps in the research process.

Member Checking

The true litmus test of a qualitative researcher's findings is the confirmation of the participants that the findings do, indeed, reflect their understanding of the phenomenon (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I provided my participants with transcripts of their individual interviews and requested that they contact me in the event that they wished to change or add information, or to let me know if I had inaccurately recorded them. Two of them responded right away, that the transcriptions were accurate, and that the reading made them think of even more events. I followed up with the other four participants, who all said they were satisfied.

After completing my analysis, I also gave the participants copies of the findings for their feedback. Two participants responded within two weeks of receiving my findings. One participant noted several minor errors in my description of relatives, which I corrected. I contacted the other participants and they were satisfied with my findings. I

provided all the participants with a complete draft of my dissertation a week prior to my committee receiving the completed draft. I contacted the participants after approximately five days. Each participant concurred with my results and requested a final copy.

Peer Debriefing

A key element in establishing the trustworthiness of my research was the sharing of my analysis with a university faculty member and a fellow graduate student, in order to receive feedback on my developing themes. As peer debriefers with experience in conducting qualitative research, they asked questions and challenged categories which sent me back to my data for further refinement (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Thick Description

Qualitative researchers do not presume that their findings are generalizable to other situations; rather, they assume that it is the responsibility of the reader to determine if the findings of a study are transferable to that reader's situation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is the researcher's responsibility to provide enough information about the setting, participants, and research procedures that readers have what they need to make this determination, by providing thick descriptions in their research reports (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was my intent, and it is my hope, that I have written about each of my participants in sufficient detail to allow my readers to determine how transferable my findings are for them.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

And my dad was an alcoholic. He died when I was 12. Uh, my life was not very pleasant at that time. Uh, every weekend or practically every weekend he was drunk. I had a good mother. I don't know how she put up with it all but she did. And I guess that's where I got a lot of my determination. On these weekends that were not very pleasant I said, "I will never live like this!

Minnie Francis, A Participant

In Chapter One, I defined my research problem by assuming a social class hierarchy exists in the United States. Viewed through the lens of a structural conflict paradigm, one of the factors that provides an opportunity for individuals to move from poverty is access to resources for mobility gained from ascription. For individuals without access to hereditary resources, the acquisition of high value occupational skills may provide an income sufficient to move an individual from poverty. A professional teaching license provides such a high value occupational skill. The purpose of this study was to research the phenomenon of an individual who has moved from long-term poverty and is now teaching children in poverty by obtaining from these teachers verbal descriptions of their perceptions of this phenomenon. My research question was, what is the experience of individuals who grew up in long-term poverty but have moved from poverty, as demonstrated by graduating from college or university, and obtaining a professional license to teach public school?

In order to accomplish the purpose of my study, I located six individuals who had experienced poverty in their childhood, attended and graduated college and taught in public school systems within the United States. When I quote participants in this research paper the words are their own. Natural speech, at times, differs from written speech and I have not altered the verbal comments of my participants when I transcribed their

Table 1: Summary of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Occupation	Age	Yrs Teaching
Lillie Catherine	Female	Teacher	62	30+
Minnie Frances	Female	Teacher	69	30+
Sara Green	Female	Teacher	34	12
Tom Prine	Male	Teacher	56	29
Viola Usher	Female	Teacher	57	20+
Daniel Willis	Male	College Professor	65+	30+

interviews. To maintain the anonymity of my participants I have used pseudonyms chosen by them and altered many of the geographic locations of which they speak.

In order to place the research participants' themes into an appropriate context, a biographical sketch of each participant is shared next. Demographic information about the six participants appears in Table 1.

The Participants

Viola Usher

Viola Usher was the first participant I interviewed. Viola is in her mid-fifties with graying hair and always seems to have a smile on her face. She has a deep Southern accent and is full of homegrown witticisms. Viola sings in the local church choir and teaches many of the students attending her school in her Sunday school class. She lives

with her husband and has two children. One is a handicapped daughter she adopted. Her son is attending college on a baseball scholarship. At the school where she teaches she is famous for her homemade cakes and pies, which she bakes for teachers' birthdays. According to Viola, her father joined the Army prior to graduating from high school. After marrying Viola's mother and moving back to his hometown, he drove a college athletic department bus to earn a living. Viola's mother was a talented artist who had been offered employment with the Walt Disney Company when she graduated from high school but was denied employment when the company discovered she was only sixteen. Viola grew up on a small farm with her parents, two brothers and a sister. Viola is extremely proud that her father has a college classroom named after him. Her earliest memories are of living in a home she referred to as "more of a shack than a house" with Viola sharing a bedroom with her brothers while her older sister and parents had their own rooms. Behind the house was an outhouse and in front of the house a well. A significant event in all her family's lives was when her father was able to scrape the money together and built a larger home for the family. Viola related stories of family fun being tied to playing basketball and other activities on the family farm. For a vacation the family traveled to a nearby lake and camped. She related that as a child she and her siblings anticipated with pleasure Fridays when her father would buy them candy and a soft drink at the local country store.

Viola supported the family farming effort by completing daily "chores" from an early age, which included doing all the family laundry when she was a teenager. In order to earn her own spending money, she began babysitting children in the surrounding community. On one occasion she lived in a local teacher's home for a week, taking care

of the teacher's children, while the adult family members were out of town. Viola was interested in sports and became a high school cheerleader. These cheerleading efforts lead to a small scholarship at the college where her father was employed. After sustaining a knee injury, Viola supported her college efforts by working as a waitress. She majored in elementary education in college.

Viola's parents still live on their farm and she visits them when she can. Her twin brothers chose careers in law enforcement and continue to be employed in county government near their parent's farm. Her sister is an elementary school secretary. Viola married a fellow college student and began teaching while her husband was employed at the college. When her husband's parents became ill she and her husband moved to his hometown in Tennessee in order to care for them. She obtained a teaching position in her husband's hometown and has been teaching for over twenty years. She currently teaches third grade.

Sara Green

Sara Green is the "city girl" among my participants. She grew up in a very small Tennessee town. Sara is a 34-year-old second grade teacher who daily demonstrates her concern for her students. She is also a young mother with her oldest son attending school in the building she works in, a second son in diapers and a husband working as an engineer for a local business. Unless you know her story, you would not suspect on casual acquaintance that Sara grew up in abject poverty. Her father was a pipe fitter for the Tennessee Valley Authority who never seemed to be able to remain employed for any extended period of time. Sara speaks of hunger and knowing that there was no food in their home. She and her younger brother participated in the free breakfast and lunch

school programs and she related how those were often the best meals they received. In her childhood home, at times, the only food available was beans and cornbread. As I listened to Sara I sensed, more than from any of the other participants, her desperation and sheer resolve to escape poverty. Sara and her family moved a number of times due to her family's inability to make rent or mortgage payments. At one time, her family moved to Virginia and for several years lived in a small house with her father's brother's family. After moving back to Tennessee, she recalls on one occasion being evicted from their family home and being forced to live in a small trailer.

Sara speaks of her desperation to move from poverty and inspiration, through a conversation with a teacher, that a college degree could be a commodity that would take her from poverty. Sara, like Viola, was a high school cheerleader and utilized that talent to obtain a small college scholarship. Through living at home, cheerleading and working at a bank and later a gift store, Sara was able to work her way slowly through college. She attended the local community college for two years and then drove 142 miles each day to attend a four-year college. It took her six years to graduate. Each evening and weekends she worked at a gift shop. Upon graduating from college Sara got married, began teaching in her hometown and had her first child.

Lillie Catherine

When Lillie Catherine's name is mentioned by teachers who know her the context is always related to outstanding teaching and a true love of children. Lillie is an artistic individual who always seems to be cheerful and upbeat. According to Lillie, the four things that brought her to teaching were her strong-willed mother, the city library, her best friend and an encounter with a college professor she did not like.

Lillie grew up in extreme poverty. She describes the experience of her father obtaining a job as a bus driver as the family transitioning "from being really poor to just poor." Her father joined the U.S. Marine Corps when he was fourteen without completing high school. Her mother was employed at a factory during World War II making munitions. Her mother and father married and settled in a large city in the Midwest. When her father lost his job as a bus driver, the family moved back to Tennessee to be near both her parents' extended families. Lillie spoke of her Tennessee home as "a run down shack with tarpaper siding," a temporary structure constructed by the government during World War II and converted into homes after the war. The home contained no insulation and had an outhouse for a toilet.

Lillie grew up in a large family and her mother remained home to care for the children. Her father drove a coal truck when they lived in Tennessee. Lillie recalled desperate poverty as she grew up in Tennessee, with hunger a recurring experience. According to Lillie, one of the significant events in her childhood was her failure to be selected for a baton twirling team because her teachers selected less qualified girls whose families were very prominent in the community. Lillie related a number of life events where she experienced injustice due to her poverty. As she spoke of these events, her latent anger and rebellion seemed to bubble to the surface.

Lillie related in her childhood story that one of the most significant positive experiences in her life was the discovery of the city library. Her eyes sparkled during her interview as she described her discovery that she could check out six books at a time from that library. She spoke fondly of her love of books and winning a library-reading contest one summer. Lillie still loves books and reading. I have met a number of her

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former students and they often mention Lillie's passion for books and her ability to excite students about books. I think of Lillie as a child of the 60's. She currently lives in an old Victorian home with wind chimes on the porch. She often can be seen in sandals and wearing a shirt she has tie-dyed. She has a boyfriend with whom she has been living for over thirty years. They have never married.

Lillie retired from teaching last year after a long and distinguished career as a classroom teacher. The majority of her career was involved in teaching young at-risk children to read. Lillie currently tutors students in reading, math and piano from her home. Recently she was invited back to her former elementary school to tutor special education students in math on a part-time basis. The school had been placed on the state's targeted list for low special education math scores. Lillie was successful in assisting all her students in scoring "proficient" on their end of year assessments. She is truly an exemplary teacher.

Minnie Frances

Minnie Frances is a tall, gray-haired lady with elegant mannerisms. Prior to my beginning the taped interview, she related how she was attending a local community college course on how to entertain friends in her home. Minnie grew up on a farm in Tennessee. Minnie plants beautiful flower gardens around her home. It took me several days to arrange an interview because she was too busy planting flowers and setting out her vegetable garden. Minnie could be said to have lived the childhood others envision children in Tennessee living. She was raised on a farm, attended a small rural school and eventually became a local teacher living near her childhood home.

In reality Minnie's childhood was often filled with emotional pain and poverty. Her father was an alcoholic and she described her mother as a homemaker and farmhand. A number of her brothers and a sister died as infants due to unknown causes. Minnie loved school as a child and adult and throughout the interview continued to relate amusing stories about her experiences in school. In her youth she was a gifted athlete and her high school basketball coach attempted to convince her to try for a college athletic scholarship. When Minnie was twelve her father passed away and she lived with her sister until graduating from high school. A circuitous rote led her to a teaching career. For 10 years she was a teaching assistant in the school she would one day teach in. Minnie also received her college degree later in life than the other participants. Her son and daughter were attending college during the same time frame she was.

After concluding the taping, she related how, as a young girl, she loved to ride her horse on the weekends far into the woods, often so far she became lost. In order to find her way home, she would drop the reins of the horse and the animal would find its way home. She also rode her horse to school, having made arrangements to stable it in a friend's barn near the bus stop. Today Minnie is devoted to her grandchildren and continues to teach part-time at a small elementary school.

Tom Prine

Tom Prine also lived in a rural area of Tennessee. After the taped portion of our interview, he laughed about not wearing shoes to school when the weather was warm. His family was very close and he repeatedly spoke of his deep love and respect for his mother and father. Tom described his early home life as follows:

We always had large gardens. We canned, dried, smoked, everything we could do to have enough food to get through the wintertime. Uh, we did have electricity after I was up a little bit. I say electricity; we had two or three light bulbs in the house. We heated with a coal stove. We had no running water; we had a well with a bucket. You had to drop the bucket down in the well and pull the water up on a pulley and put the water in a bucket and carry it into the house. We had a ringer washer and washed clothes by hand. We took baths in the creek.

Tom Prine is one of the kindest and friendliest people you would ever want to meet. His good nature and seeming inability to become angry have made him one of the most popular individuals in his school system. Tom is the kind of person you want to have a classroom next to. He is a master teacher and willing to help and give advice. Tom grew up on a very small farm in a remote region of Tennessee. His father loved to farm but did not have sufficient land to make a living at it. Tom grew up helping his father farm and sell produce at the local farmers market on the weekends. The home Tom and his brother grew up in had no running water and when they finally received electricity, they only had two light bulbs in the house.

Tom attended a small two- or three-room schoolhouse where students were not required to come in from playing unless they wanted to. According to Tom, some of the worst teachers in the county ended up at his school. While attending the large county high school, Tom was offered a full scholarship to the state university if he would major in agricultural engineering. He declined the offer and instead attended a smaller college and majored in elementary education. After graduating Tom was employed as a teacher in a small rural school near his parent's home. Tom continues to emulate his father's strong work ethic. He is the first to get to work and the last to leave. The school system he is employed in has benefited from a number of grants Tom has applied for and received. Tom currently resides on a large tract of land with acres of forest and pastures.

Daniel Willis

Daniel Willis is a tall stocky man, currently in poor health due to a lingering illness. He speaks with a slow Southern drawl. Although a retired college professor, in manner and appearance he looks more like a local farmer. Daniel lives in a farmhouse that is probably well over one hundred years old and drives a Ford pickup truck around town. Daniel is capable of engaging anyone in conversation on topics as diverse as when it's best to harvest your corn to an in-depth academic discussion related to the latest research on remedying the dropout rate at the local high schools. He is very active in his community and has been on his local school board for a number of years. His wife and daughter are special education teachers and his sons work for local industries. Daniel has several grandchildren, some of whom he babysits daily. He enjoys gardening and making Muscatine wine from his own grapes.

Daniel was born in a mining town named for the gentleman who owned the mine and the town. Daniel's father was a miner who became ill when Daniel was a child and the family moved to a small farm. Daniel's life story is filled with descriptions of work. From early childhood Daniel worked baling hay, killing chickens and tending crops to make money for his family. Daniel trapped for furs as he walked to school in order to make money, which he often gave to his mother. He loved football and earned a scholarship, which he lost when he got in a fight with his college coach. After getting in the fight with his college coach, he married his high school sweetheart and joined the Army. That experience along with several grants and scholarships provided an opportunity for him to eventually obtain his Ph.D. In the Army, Daniel scored extremely high on a series of intelligence assessments and received training in decoding Soviet

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Union military electronic communications. While Daniel at first taught in public schools for a number of years, he eventually devoted his career to vocational education programs at the college level.

The Themes

Each of my six participants grew up in poverty, managed to attend and graduate college, and chose teaching as a profession. As teachers, all eventually determined that they would devote their professional careers to working with students living in circumstances similar to their own childhood. As I listened to the participants relate their experiences of growing up in poverty and their struggle moving from poverty, I continued to be astonished by the similarities of their stories. Each participant demonstrated obvious pleasure in being asked to tell the story, although some experiences seemed emotionally painful as they were recalled. As I listened I came to appreciate the depth of character each participant displayed and was filled with admiration for their accomplishments. As noted in my literature review, the majority of individuals in the United States remains in or moves slightly above or below the social class in which their parents reside. These men and women beat the odds, moved into middle class, and are successfully carrying out middle class professions.

I was struck by the similarities of their life stories. Analysis revealed that all my participants had experienced four interrelated life themes. These four themes include durable family relationships, the presence of encouragers, determination to be different, and school-based opportunities for meaningful participation. This constellation of synergistic relationships is described in the following analysis.

Theme 1: Durable Family Relationships

While all participants spoke of extreme hardship growing up in poverty, they also spoke of the strong bonds within their families. All my study participants were and continue to be members of families with a history of durable family relationships. All participants spoke of enduring family relationships with parents, siblings and extended family. As I interviewed the participants, I was interested to note that they all indicated that their parents had remained married to each other for an extended period of time. From my conversations with them, I learned that none of their parents were ever divorced. While all my participants' parents experienced long term marriages that is not to say they were necessarily blissful marriages. Each participant also spoke of a strong emotional bond with at least one family member, if not more. This emotional bond often included a mother or father, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles or other relatives.

Longstanding Marriages

Each participant's mother and father remained married. Viola's parents have been married over sixty years. Viola experienced a happy home life and spoke of her parent's current situation:

> Mom and Dad are … it's just great. They're well thought of. They're certainly not rich. But they live on a farm that's paid for. And you know, they're happy. They've been married sixty some years.

Sara's parents were married when her father returned from the Army and according to Sara are still married. Lillie's mother and father married when he returned from World War II. Minnie's mother and father had been married a number of years before Minnie was born and he passed away when Minnie was twelve; her mother never remarried. Tom's parents remained married until his father passed away when Tom was

out of college. His mother has not remarried. While Daniel did not relate his parents'

current status, he mentioned in his interview that he apologized to them "years later" for

running away as a teenager, which seems to indicate his parents had been married for at

least 20 years.

Strong Emotional Bonds With Family Members

Viola experienced a childhood surrounded by loving parents and a close

relationship with brothers and sisters. She spoke lovingly of her father, mother, and

siblings, as follows:

> I had four brothers and sisters. My father worked, my mother didn't until I was in high school. My brothers are 11 months younger, they're twins. One brother was older and one sister was three years younger. So we were very, very close.

> We grew up not taking vacations but having fun on the farm. We played baseball, we had a basketball goal and that was pretty much it. I remember I wanted to be a cheerleader in high school. We didn't have money to buy that stuff so my mother knitted my sweater and made all the skirts for the cheerleaders, so they paid her and I could get my shoes.

> We would look forward to Fridays. My Dad would stop at this little grocery, they had Tab there. You know they had Tabs back then. And Dad would get us a nickel bag of candy. We thought that was the grandest thing in the world. I still remember Bobby's that was our treat. It was great.

Sara described knowing "we were loved but we didn't have anything. Barely had

clothes." With tears in her eyes, she described how her mother helped her when Sara was

dating a young man whose family invited her out to dinner:

> They asked me to go with them to eat at O'Donnell's. Well, that was a fancy restaurant. Well, I wanted to go but I was scared to death. Because I didn't know what to do. How to behave, how to act. I had told my mother, I want to go but I'm afraid and I kinda wish you would say no. She said, "I tell you what, when I get paid, before you go...because it was about two weeks away before we were to go ...I will take you to that restaurant and I will teach you what to do." And she...she's a very smart lady. Incredibly smart, and knows what's proper. Its just we were never able. I remember when she took me in that restaurant and

somebody waited for me to tell them how many people were going to be seated. It was just like a different world. I was a nervous wreck. We ordered a very, very small portion, ha. You know we didn't have a lot of money being in that environment. I'm thankful she was willing to do that. Instead of going and buying whatever. To at least have the experience. No, the whole family couldn't go but at least she wanted the very best for us. And I think all these kids' parents really want the best for them. They just don't have the best to give.

Lillie spoke of her mother, female relatives and a close friend as the individuals she experienced the strongest emotional attachment to as a child. She described her feeling of gratitude toward her mother in the following statement:

Now, I look at some of the kids here and I sometimes think we were not poor like they are because my mother would do without anything to see that we had socks. I see kids here whose parents buy cigarettes and they don't have socks. So, maybe that's the difference. We were lucky to have a mother who cared so much.

Minnie's childhood was stressful due to her father's alcoholism, but she appreciated her mother's concern for her, saying "I had a good mother. I don't know how she put up with it all but she did." Minnie moved in with her older sister when her father died and spoke of the concern her sister and brother-in-law had for her, "They were very good to me. My brother-in-law, he was very good to me and my sister."

Tom described his family by saying, "We were a good family. We just didn't have money. And they were very supportive." He described a portion of the incident that leads him to teaching, which also demonstrates his parents' concern for his well-being:

When I was in 8th grade we had a principal teacher who just did not have it together. He was pretty bad. He had been moved from another school. My mom and dad actually went to see the superintendent of schools. That was a pretty big deal for them.

Tom worked on his father's farm well into his college days. He spoke of both his parents' insistence he continue in college even while continuing to work on the farm, "Uh, even

when I still had to work on the farm all the way up through, I wasn't expected to quit high school and go to work on the farm."

Even Daniel, whose restlessness resulted in his running away from home in his youth, speaks of his parents in a way that indicates a good relationship:

> In fact, when I was growing up I ran away from home. I turned 16 in a neighboring state. If I could have gotten a job I don't know what I would have turned up as or been. I was pretty obstinate. And all I could do was apologize to my parents for years later. And tell them I was so sorry. Because they didn't deserve some of the behaviors I had.

Theme 2: Presence of Encouragers

Each participant encountered one or more persons who provided motivation and inspiration that supported the desire to achieve. These were family members, teachers, friends, or other respected adults, as shown in Table 2. While each participant's situation was unique, the common factors were that they were inspired to attempt to alter their current life situation, and received support and encouragement from persons who communicated the expectation that they could succeed.

Friends and Family Members as Encouragers

Several participants described friends and family members who pushed and nurtured them to achieve. Tom's parents required that he continue to attend school, as described above, even when they needed him to work on the farm. Sara described her parents as encouraging her and her brother to strive for a better life:

> My parents would often say, my mother especially would say, "If I had finished high school." "If I had taken the opportunity to go to college the situation we are in would be a lot different." She often made us believe anything we wanted we could have. But we would probably have to work for it a lot harder than other people. And I just always tried to listen and take that into consideration. And try to make that manifest in me.

Table 2: Significant Individuals in the Lives of the Participants

Participant	Family Member	Teacher	Friend	Respected Adult
Viola	*	*		
Sara	*	*	*	
Minnie	*	*		
Lillie	*	*	*	
Tom	*	*		
Daniel	*	*		*

Sara spoke of her eventual discouragement after six years of working to complete

college. She describes how after meeting her future husband he provided encouragement

to stay the course and complete college:

> There were plenty of times, you know I thought, you could always go back to the bank, you make a decent amount of money. I don't really have to stay in school. And then I met my husband now, I met him. He came from a different background. He was going to school at UT, big studier, big, really ambitious. Real good with money. He kept encouraging me to try and make it through. I did and got my job here.

Viola attributed her desire to attend college as a product of the high standards set

by her parents:

> But mother? We were always expected to do our best. If we didn't do our best we got punished. Through grade school and high school we were all expected to do our best. My sister. We all worked in public service. The twins, who were eleven months below me were police. My brother, who was older than me, worked in property assessment. Now he is in charge of all the recreation, softball and he umpires. My sister now works at a school as the secretary there.
>
> Having wealth was not top priority. Making sure you were in church. That you worked. They would have never accepted public assistance. Never would have accepted welfare. That was not an option. You worked. If you were able to work

you did. And we all worked through school. When we got old enough we all had jobs. And we all have worked. That's just the way it is. And we're all that way. All five of us worked.

Lillie spoke highly of the encouragement provided by her best friend Silva who lived down the street from her, saying, "Sometimes I think I have become who I am because of that best friend." She also described her childhood friend's impact on her in the following statement:

> Silva influenced me. Silva was my buddy. We were just inseparable. We swapped, I would spend one weekend at her house and she would spend the next at mine.

> But, anyway it was part of that but then I felt I had a good friend who I started college with. Who was my best friend and I admired her so much. She was like a role model to me. Silva started college then I did. I thought, Silva can do it then I can too.

> And then I don't know how I fell into teaching. I can't remember. It could have been anger. I remember I thought, well Silva is going into teaching so I will look at that.

Teachers and Other Respected Adults as Encouragers

An encounter with a teacher provided Sara with the idea of obtaining a college degree. She described the incident as follows:

> When I was in high school I had a teacher, she is at the middle school now. She kind of took me under her wing. She would always say, if you can get an education no one can ever take that away from you. You can lose all kinds of things. You can lose jobs, you can lose homes but if you have a education no one can ever take that from you. And for me, that kind of stuck in my head. When you're a child your perspective is well somebody took that away from me. You don't really have any ownership of things.

Minnie was influenced and supported by one teacher in particular, her high school basketball coach. She became very emotional when she spoke of him. Minnie described his support:

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So, I always wanted to go to school. When I was in high school I thought, "I would love to go to college." But I knew there was no way. And uh, (begins crying) my coach (long pause) offered to help me get a scholarship or grant or something to go to college.

Daniel seems to have been inspired/encouraged by a number of encounters he had with individuals in the military and a local businessman. He related the following story from his youth:

Yeah, I worked for a small construction company. And I was putting in a small sewer project. And an elderly gentleman was watching me work. And I stopped work to eat my lunch. Sat in the shade of a tree to eat. And the old man come over and started talking to me. He asked me how much money I was making. And I said well I'm pretty strong for my age and I get paid a man's wages. I'm doing all right. And he looked at me and he said, "Son, I'm going to tell you something. From your neck on down your bodies' worth one dollar. From your neck on up it's up to you what your worth. (laughter) So, that was the other encounter. (Willis later related, off tape, that he found out from his boss that the old gentleman happened to be the richest man in the county.)

Later, Daniel related this event that took place during his military service:

While I was in the Army, one Saturday afternoon I was watching a bunch of kids play ball. And I was there watching the kids play. And next to me was an old, almost retired enlisted man. And we got to talking. He asked me what I had done and where I had been. I told him about losing the scholarship and dropping out and those kind of things. He said, "Ya know son, I'm going to tell you something." He said, "After World War II I had a chance to go back to college. I had two years already. But I had made rank. I had done real well. And I had to make a decision whether to stay in the military for a career or go back to school. I decided to stay in the military. I had an excellent career. I am one of the top enlisted men and those kind of things." And then he paused and he looked at me and said, "I'm going to tell you something. There hasn't been a day go by I hadn't thought what could I have been. What could I have done. If I had just taken that chance and returned to college." So, that encounter with that gentleman helped me look at a lot of situations I find myself in and pathways.

Theme 3: Determination to be Different

Each participant's story reveals a firm resolve to change his or her life situation. This resolve was expressed by some in proactive terms, as a determination to achieve some particular vision of possibility. It was expressed by others in reactive terms, as a determination not to repeat a pattern or an event they experienced as children.

Proactive Determination

Lillie described how making money showed her the possibilities of living differently, and inspired her to go to college to make even more money:

> But the day I turned sixteen I got a job. So, I could save my money and I could buy those things. And I think getting that job kind of helped me go on to college because I thought, if I can make more money then I can buy the things I want to have. I would be able to afford me a pair of Bass Wiggins, I could go on and buy them myself if I want to.

Once in college, she wanted to prove both her mother and one of her professors wrong, having a vision of herself as someone who could succeed:

> My sophomore year was the year my Mom made that comments, "Oh, you'll never get through." Actually, my sophomore year was the year I discovered partying. Freshman year four point. First semester of my sophomore year, 1.7. [laugh]. And I was paying for this out of my own pocket. Then after that semester I thought, OK wake up time. It took me – and I had a hard time digging myself back out of that hole from a 1.7. And then I don't know how I fell into teaching. I can't remember. It could have been anger. I remember I thought, well Silva is going into teaching so I will look at that. I think it was that sophomore year the only class I did well in was F100, Introduction to Teaching. The lady's name was Professor McCrudy. I sure did not like her but I liked the idea of teaching. I remember there were two midterms and three research assignments and I got an A on everything. I got my grade and I got a B. These are the things you look back on and say golly I wish I was eighteen again and knew what I know now because man I would be at the office. I went to her and asked, why did you give me a B? I got an A on everything. She said I had a lack of attitude. That's what she said to me, "You have a lack of attitude." I said, "I don't have lack of attitude, I might have a bad attitude." I think probably by that time some of that anger on how I was treated in high school. You know how when you finally become an adult and you see things in a different light and you become kind of cocky with that. The attitude. I know I can do this. That probably came across in her class. But that

made me mad. And I thought, I'll just show you, I'll become the best teacher there is. [laugh]

Daniel's dating, and eventually marrying, someone from a different background showed him other possibilities and encouraged him to continue his education:

I met a young lady that I ended up marrying. Which is kinda interesting? Here I am a country bumpkin out of the country and she was a blue blood. Her folks were in politics. Those kind of things. Had a restaurant. They had quite a different lifestyle.

For Viola, who saw herself as a teacher as far back as she can remember, the proximity of a college that targeted working-class students made her dream seem possible:

I always wanted to go to college. I always wanted to be a teacher, as long back as I can remember. I had a lot of good teachers. A lot of people that influenced me. I knew that was what I wanted to do. I was just very fortunate that Kentucky College was right there because even with loans I would have never been able to. I just didn't have the opportunity.

Kentucky College, if you have good grades and make high enough on your SAT and if your grades are high enough in high school and if you don't make much money—which wasn't a problem for us—you could go to Kentucky College. It didn't cost us anything. It is pretty much based on your income. We didn't live in the dorm because we lived close enough to drive back and forth from home. So, that's how I got to college. We just would not have been able to make it if it hadn't been for Kentucky College. It provides a good, good education. It is one of the top ten colleges in the nation. They have a large endowment and they provide for foreign students and people in the Appalachia area. You have to work at least ten hours a week.

Reactive Determination

Sara seems to have been frustrated with her parents' inability to hold onto money, and determined to handle her own finances differently:

My parents never saved anything. They provided things we needed. They would go out and spend it. I watched a lot of financial mistakes. We had cars but there was no money going back. So my dad lost his job again, he got laid off again and then he had a heart attack. So there was nothing. And then when I graduated from high school, I started working when I was a sophomore I think. I started working in a grocery store. And I just knew, my brother and I would always talk about

where we have come from and look at how our life has ways being a struggle. Never being sure if we can afford this or that. Not being able to go buy clothes for school pictures or you know, we have always lived that way. And look, even though they had all this money for a little while there is nothing to show for it.

And my brother, he is so determined I mean...the way that you are raised, it's hard to get out of it. Get out of that frame of mind. Just like money habits and spending habits. And you still think you have got to have all this stuff because you might lose it. You know that kinda thing. That goes with the poverty attitude. My brother has some very dangerous spending habits. But he makes really good money and he is a really good saver too. But...we talk about it all the time.

It's just really strange when you...I don't know...I have to financially support my family now. And is that ever going to change? Probably not. But they just never did get out of that mind set. I still feel like that child in poverty.

Expanding further on the incident described above in which his parents went to the superintendent of schools, Tom shared that the superintendent's response motivated him to become an educator and change the system:

And you know my parents, neither one went to school, and they were concerned that I do well, cause I enjoyed school. I enjoyed being there. I actually went a year before I was in first grade and just hung out at the school. So, they were concerned. And being where the school was located we did not get the best of the teachers. We usually would get someone who had burnt out somewhere else. When I was in 8th grade we had a principal teacher who just did not have it together. He was pretty bad. He had been moved from another school. My mom and dad actually went to see the superintendent of schools. That was a pretty big deal for them. Because you know they were pretty backwards. Their question to him was, Why had he moved this guy out to be our principal and teacher? And our superintendent's response was, "How many votes did I get out there?" And they came back and told me that. That was the day I decided to be a teacher.

Lillie had several experiences that motivated her, including this description of an event in which she became aware of her being treated inequitably due to her family's economic position:

A couple of things I remember that really let you know as a kid that you're not in the group. You don't belong. First thing, when I was at Spring Elementary

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School, this was before we went to Indianapolis, and they had tryouts for majorettes and I had a cousin who was a lot better off than me. We were the same age and she took baton lessons and everything she learned she taught me. She had given me an old baton of hers and I remember trying out for those baton lessons to make the team, and I knew, I really knew how to twirl well because of Wanda. These girls would get up and you know put it in there hand and not really twirl it. One was a Wells and one was a Cole and in Oak Grove there was a trucking company, Wells and Cole. They were very well off. And I remember they got picked for the team and I did not and that's probably my earliest memory when I think, "It really does matter who you are and what money you have." It really makes a difference. That was the first time in my life when I really thought, it starts creeping in, you're not as good. It can spur you on to do better or it can really make you angry. Where you're going to get even.

Minnie reflected on both her sorrow at her mother's life situation and her resolve to live differently by stating, "I had a good mother. I don't know how she put up with it all but she did. And I guess that's where I got a lot of my determination." Minnie moved in with her sister after the death of her father and she spoke of both the support of her sister and brother-in-law and her realization that no one was going to help her and that she needed to become self-sufficient:

Well, I learned that – real quickly – They were very good to me. My brother-in-law, he was very good to me and my sister. But they had a family. They had two children. I learned very quickly to take care of Minnie because nobody else was going to. And not that they were not good to me. And took care of me and feed me well. And when I left to go live with them, they of course had a house for them and two children. So, my brother-in-law and me built a room on the back porch. So, we took the back porch and made a bedroom (laughter).

Theme 4: School-Based Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

All participants were deeply engaged in some aspect of the schools they attended and many of the teachers with whom they came into contact. Each participant spoke positively of his or her love of both teaching and of school in general although several were motivated to improve teaching and education due to isolated negative incidents they

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had experienced as students themselves. Even when they reflect from their current positions as educators—and find some aspects of curriculum wanting—each remembers a teacher or an activity that was meaningful for them.

Meaningful Relationships With Teachers

Viola described thinking so highly of her teachers that she wanted to be one herself:

> I always wanted to go to college. I always wanted to be a teacher, as long back as I can remember. I had a lot of good teachers. A lot of people influenced me. I knew that was what I wanted to do.

Sara related to a particular teacher, described above, who helped her realize, "if you can get an education no one can ever take that away from you." Tom's reflections on his education do not always paint it in a positive light, nonetheless he found school engaging enough that he attended even when not required to do so:

> And you know my parents, neither one went to school, and they were concerned that I do well, cause I enjoyed school. I enjoyed being there. I actually went a year before I was in first grade and just hung out at the school.

Minnie started elementary school late and seems to have generally enjoyed school. She had a very positive experience with her first grade teacher:

> I went to a little country school. A three-room school. And my first school experience. ...the teacher put me at a table with these small kids. Well I could sit at the end of these tables and take my knees and lift the table right up off the floor because I was so much larger than them. And the teacher was very sensitive to this. And she called me up I think about the second day of school and she said, "Can you read?" And my sister had taught me to read and taught me some math. Basic addition and then the numbers. I didn't learn to read by phonics. I learned to read by following along as my sister read. And my mother read to me. But anyway, so I could read and she put me in second grade.

Several years later, she developed a friendly relationship with her third-grade teacher that grew out of his willingness to relate to her family:

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Then my next experience, I guess funny experience was when I was in third grade. We got a young teacher, a male. I think it was his first teaching experience. And he decided to come visit all the children and meet their families. Well, where we lived on the mountain, we had very few visitors. Other than family and you know, people that we knew. And so I was scared to death. And he had told us he was coming. I looked out one day and I saw him coming and I was scared to death. But he came in and talked to my parents. When he left, uh, dad took him out to the smoke house and I knew what that meant. Cause that's where he stored the wine. So he gave my teacher a drink of the wine. Obviously he liked it pretty well because he took a jug home with him. And a couple weeks later he came around to me and he said to me, "You know that good grape juice your mother makes? Would you bring me some?" Well, I went home and told my daddy. And he said, "Well, how you going to get it to him?" And I said, "Well, I guess, take it on the bus. The way I go." So anyway I took him wine the rest of the year. (laughing)

Meaningful Activities

Several participants found the availability of athletics or libraries to be important enough to them that they can still describe them in detail, many years later. Sara was a participant in the free and reduced meal plans at school, saying, "I think we ate at school and when we got home we knew the ration of food was very limited." She also found cheerleading to be something she enjoyed and that could help pave her way to college:

> So, I was a cheerleader in high school and I had someone from a college, Mountain State Community College that wanted me to cheer there. They told me, now you can get a partial scholarship if you want to. And I thought, well that would be good. But I knew my parents could not afford to send me to college. So I worked full time at a bank and put myself through college. I would take my lunch hour and go to a class, come back to work and take night classes. And somehow fit in cheering and getting everything I could. All the while my parents are struggling.

Lillie ties her positive experience of school with her love of books and reading saying, "Plus, I had always made good grades. I liked school. I liked to read. I think kids who do not like school, college is not as interesting to them." She described her first experience at the library:

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That for me was a life changing moment. Moving to Indianapolis. I remember probably the biggest impact when we moved to Indianapolis, we got there that summer, these kids down the street said, come on you want to go to the library with us? What is that? [laugh] Of course in cities downtown the libraries were the most huge buildings. All that stone and that kind of wood that was so shiny it looked like stone. But I will never forget walking into that library and stopping with just mouth open. And I remember saying, "Oh, my gosh I can get six and it doesn't cost me anything." I could take them home read them and bring them back. Such an influence.

The second summer I moved to Indianapolis they had a contest at the library. Who could read the most books and I read 250 books that summer. I never had books like that to read before. But now in looking back you have to be careful what you think of kids as a teacher. You know when you think, "Oh my gosh how pitiful." You can never let them know you think that.

Minnie found her niche in athletics, and had one coach, described above, who encouraged her to try to get a scholarship or other financial aid. She still remembers how enjoyable school and athletics were, saying, "I loved school. I just loved school. I played sports in high school and that gave me I guess a lot of discipline."

Daniel described in detail experiences, with 4-H, with football, and with having access to books in the school library:

Well, I participated in 4-H while in the grade school. And I was selected to go to the college for a week. There I was exposed to higher education for the first time. I could see the hallowed halls of ivy and those kinds of things. It opened my eyes to another world. And it did enable me to meet a number of other students from other areas and counties from across the state.

But I loved football, but knew I wasn't going to be good enough to make a living at it. ...We had a county exam. Everybody that wanted to go to high school had to take an exam. And I took the exam and passed it. The area that we were living in I had the choice of going to three different county high schools. I picked the one that played football. Not a very smart thing to do. If I had been smart I would have made the selection criteria based on curriculum. (laughing) I didn't, I wanted to play football. Well, like I said, I had my growth early. I was fairly strong for my age. So, it was 26 miles one way to the high school riding the bus. It was in the days when Missouri was consolidating all the high schools. I guess like a lot of the other states were. This particular school happened to be in a college town.

An engineering college town. And the high school had excellent, excellent programs and teachers. They had rigor. So I got a fairly good education in high school.

But from about the fifth grade to the eight grade I just kinda treaded water. I read every book there was in the library. Which isn't saying much because they didn't have much. (laugh) But it's the truth. I began to teach myself algebra in the fifth grade.

Chapter Summary

All of the participants interviewed for this study grew up in poverty, successfully attended and graduated from college or university, and became professionally licensed as public school teachers. Analysis of their interviews revealed that four themes describe conditions that were present in their growing up: durable family relationships, presence of encouragers, determination to be different, and school-based opportunities for meaningful participation.

The theme of durable family relationships has the sub-theme of longstanding marriages of the participants' parents, as well as positive relationships that the participants describe with at least one relative. Participants all described one or more person who offered them encouragement, support, and high expectations; these persons were variously family members, friends, teachers, or other respected adults. Each participant was determined to make his or her life different; for some, this was a proactive response to a vision they had of some possibility. For others, this was a reactive response to a situation or event that they were determined not to repeat in their own lives. Finally, school was a site for meaningful participation for all of the participants, sometimes through relationships with teachers, and sometimes through participation in activities.

CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTIONS AND NEW QUESTIONS

So, I always hope there is that one you can really influence. Just one you can change and then it is all worth it. If you can change just that one persons life. When you look at someone like Alice, good mother, good father, good home life. You can see why someone like her could become successful. It's the others, like one teacher at the high school. When he was little, never said a word in kindergarten. So quiet, never thought he would ever do anything and look he has been teaching for quit a while now. To me that's a success. And he knows who influenced him. Along the way, I'm sure it was some teacher

Lillie Catherine, A Participant

Introduction

My study describes the experiences of six individuals who have successfully transitioned from a childhood living in poverty to an adult life in the middle class. Social stratification research in the United States consistently indicates that the majority of individuals rarely move very far from the class level they are born into (Beeghley, 2005; Gilbert, 1998; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Kerbo, 2003; Rose, 2007; Wessel, 2005). This stagnation is the result of a number of factors, some of which include the distribution and possession of wealth in the United States, social class behavioral norms, occupational skills, educational opportunities, family social pressures, regional economic opportunities, regional social class structure, gender, race, and individual personal abilities. The participants in this study were exceptions to these trends, and their movement from poverty to middle class was accomplished through their successfully completing college or university and their obtaining a professional teaching license. This license gave them access to a teaching position with its commensurate middle class salary and status.

All participants were exposed to similar experiences that seemed to shape and support their efforts to change their childhood life circumstances. Each lived with parents who were in a longstanding, committed relationship. All participants had the support of significant individuals in their lives that challenged and encouraged the participants to accomplish their life ambitions. These encouragers included parents, family members, friends, teachers and adults they respected. Each participant's decision to move from poverty was the cumulative result of factors and influences in childhood. Each participant's decision to alter his or her life situation was one to which he or she was firmly committed. All participants attended public school, and their experiences with teachers and/or with the schools they attended afforded them opportunities for meaningful engagement.

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of the present study and the new questions they indicate for research and practice. I will begin by returning to my bracketing self-interview to review my initial perceptions of poverty and how they relate to my results.

Bracketing Interview

As I reviewed my bracketing interview, completed prior to my beginning to interview participants, I was struck by how often my own impressions of poverty and the movement from poverty did not match what I learned from my participants. In retrospect, my bracketing interview was useful in that I was able to set aside my preconceived notions of poverty and of the movement from poverty, especially with respect to work ethic and behavioral norms.

My own bias reflected that I believed that the parents of children living in poverty did not normally work or want to work. I assumed that I would find that most parents collected welfare and food stamps. All my participant's parents worked when they could, proving me wrong on this issue. While I was not aware of it, it became clear to me that before beginning this work, some of my beliefs were of the "blame the victim" theories of poverty.

I also believed that a primary cause of long-term poverty was behavioral norms that prohibited adults from functioning successfully in working and middle class. However, my participants reflected behavioral norms similar to my own family's, which could be defined as working or middle class norms. I was particularly aware by my own bias when Tom Prine stated, "We were a good family. We just didn't have any money."

Reflection on Results

Durable Family Relationships

Families are and continue to be the foundational experience for children. Each of my participants lived with parents who were in longstanding, committed marriages. While not all necessarily happy or rewarding relationships, these were durable. This finding is intriguing both in terms of resilience research and in terms of economics.

A pillar of resilience research indicates that in order for humans to develop and mature, emotional security and stability are critical (Benard, 2006). A stable relationship between parents seems to enhance the development of resilience (Benard, 1995; Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Rutter, 2006). Each participant was raised within a nuclear family with parents who remained married throughout the participant's childhood and beyond. The participants resided with their parents for their entire childhood and many continued

to live at home while they attended college. This stable family environment provided an emotional base for each participant even though their families lacked the financial means to provide many of the material possessions more affluent families could offer their children.

All participants experienced a strong emotional bond with at least one family member and often more than one. These emotional bonds with relatives had the effect of providing emotional cocoons to insulate and nurture the participants from the lack of material resources surrounding them. For example, Lillie spoke of the strong emotional support she received from close relatives in Tennessee. She stated:

> … but probably the biggest influence was the very strong females in the family. My mother and my two grandmothers. Just very, very strong people. So, I think it was part of that. I really did admire that. They were such steady, steady people that you could depend on no matter what.

The theme of durable family relationships contains the sub-theme of longstanding marriages of the participants' parents, which is interesting when considered from an economic perspective. Currently in the United States, mothers with children, who divorce, are the demographic group most likely to move into poverty (McMurrer & Sawhill, 1996; Payne, et al., 2005). We can only wonder how much more difficult the situations of the participants' families would have been if any of the marriages had ended legally. Would the participants still have been able to move out of poverty, or would their paths have been rockier? Some economists believe that even today, due to severe financial constraints related to health care and cost of living expenses, individuals are divorcing or marrying for purely economic reasons (Sack, 2008).

Schools, of course, have little influence on the durability of the personal, family relationships of their students. But this finding does highlight the possibilities that might be served by consolidating agencies in one location, as Kronick (2002) advocates in his book, *Full Service Schools: A Place for Our Children and Families to Learn and Be Healthy*.

Presence of Encouragers

All participants described one or more persons who offered them encouragement and support, and expressed high expectations. These persons were variously family members, friends, teachers, or other respected adults. Each participant endured the trauma of childhood poverty but each described one or more individuals who believed in the participant's ability to succeed in their life ambitions. Although all participants were forced to deal with poverty, they were fortunate in that they were inspired, challenged, and encouraged by influential individuals surrounding them. I chose to use the term "encouragers" because these significant individuals helped each participant overcome the environmental obstacles that hinder many others in their attempts to move from poverty (Rose, 2007).

At times these encouraging voices had the effect of counteracting other negative messages. For example, the positive encouragement of Lillie's best friend provided the support and encouragement for her to pursue and continue college; in spite of statements by her mother telling her she would never finish college. Lille spoke of her friend's encouragement:

> Well I graduated in June of 68, and of course I didn't have any money. But my friend Silva had already gone to school for a year. And it was nice to have

someone tell you, well you can do this you can do that, there are National Defense loans.

When Sara met her future husband she was encouraged by him and had the opportunity to see an individual functioning in middle class. She described how she had been trying to complete college for about six years and was becoming very discouraged, but when she began dating her future husband she was encouraged by both his words and actions. Recalling experiences related to this encouragement and inspiration often brought tears to the eyes of participants as they spoke of their encouragers, these persons were such powerful influences.

This theme is a particularly hopeful one for educators who are interested in supporting the growth of children who are living in poverty. Every teacher, administrator, coach, or other staff member is a potential encourager in a child's life. School personnel can make a deliberate decision to make positive connections with children. At the very least, schools need to be sure that students do not encounter discouraging voices as part of their school experience.

Determination to be Different

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the majority of adults in the United States remain in or near the social class their parents are in. This creates an unfortunate dilemma for children raised in poverty in that their opportunity to improve their economic situation is limited. The participants in my study succeeded in becoming the exceptions to this social stratification pattern. Each participant experienced an overwhelming drive to alter the poverty in which they spent their childhood. While not all were overly concerned with improving their financial situation, each participant was resolved to accomplish a life

goal they had set for themselves. All participants were determined to make their life different, for some, this was a proactive response to a vision they had of some possibility. For others, this was a reactive response to a situation or event they were determined not to repeat in their own lives.

Proactive determination, in this study, seemed to be a response to relationships with positive role models, proximity to a college community she (Viola) could imagine herself in, experiencing the freedom that comes with having "extra" spending money. Once these participants could see themselves in these roles, they were determined to accomplish them. Reactive determination, for these participants, grew out of unacceptable (to them) behaviors and attitudes on the parts of their parents, their school teachers and administrators, and their elected officials. Their anger, frustration and resentment in these situations fueled their desires to change their lives.

This window into the minds of the participants offers insight into the minds of current students living in poverty, as well as strategies that might support these students in their own growth. The potential for schools to present visions of possibility seems endless—field trips, extracurricular activities, literature, guest speakers, and technology.

School-Based Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

All of the participants in this study were connected to school in a positive manner. School was a site for meaningful participation, sometimes through relationships and sometimes through participation in activities. Teachers, coaches, and event sponsors were important people in the lives of these participants. Athletics, cheerleading, extracurricular organizations and activities, and libraries provided opportunities for these individuals to be meaningfully engaged. This finding resonates with a consistent finding

in resilience research that schools can provide opportunities to improve a child's chances to move from poverty (Benard, 1995, 2004; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Effective schools establish caring relationships between students and staff. These schools also provide opportunities for students to participate and contribute in meaningful ways to the community and the school.

This theme parallels a condition that was present for successful students in the Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development (Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007). In describing the various "pathways to academic success" for the adolescents in their study, these researchers highlight the critical role that a compelling activity, relationship, or subject can play in retaining at-risk students in school. I wonder if my participants would have stayed in school to graduate—a prerequisite for going to college—without the presence of these meaningful people and activities. This calls into question "no frills" budgets and schedules that eliminate activities and classes considered to be elective in favor of academics. Student cannot be successful academically unless they stay in school, and perhaps these electives are necessary to keep them in school.

New Questions for Practitioners

While a phenomenological interview study of six participants can in no way result in generalizable findings that should be applied in all cases, this study does raise important questions for consideration by educators who are interested in supporting the growth and development of children and youth growing up in poverty. These educators might fruitfully think about ways to make positive connections with students, support their families, and offer them opportunities for meaningful engagement.

How to Make Connections?

What if it were the goal that every student was connected in some positive way with an adult in the building? The custodian, the principal, the secretary—all are possible mentors who can help make school a positive place in the lives of students. Resilience research indicates that relationships with adults in school can be part of the important protective support factors that enable children to thrive (Benard, 1995, 2006; Howard, et al., 1999; Howard & Johnson, 2001; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Many of the students in the Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development were academically skilled; the ones who stayed in school and graduated were those who could relate to a teacher, to an activity, or to a subject they loved (Snow, et al., 2007). We need to think creatively to support our students' academic success and make sure they find school itself a place they want to be. Even better, school might be the place where our students meet their encouragers who nurture, support, and challenge them sufficiently that they are able to reach their life goals.

Possible ways to achieve these connections might include organizing all of the students in a school into mentoring groups assigned to adults in the building, or having advisors who keep up with students all the time, rather than school counselors who intervene only when there are problems. Whatever the structure or strategy used, it should not be left to chance that students have relationships with adults in the school building.

How to Support Families?

The participants in this study were all members of families that stayed together, even into college years when some of them lived at home. Their parents' marriages were

durable, which economic scholars consider a factor in financial health. Educators may want to explore the idea of full-service schools in which families have access to medical, community, and social resources in one location (Kronick, 2002, 2005). This could serve to support poor families who struggle to locate and travel to doctors, agencies, and other resources they need. Perhaps families could even receive advice about resources available to them that they would not otherwise be aware of.

How to Offer Meaningful Activities?

Despite current trends, this question might be the one productively engaged by educators who wish to support children who live in poverty. Financial constraints and high-stakes testing are turning many schools into purely academic places that pride themselves on their rigor. The experiences of my participants, as well as those of the students in the Home-School Study, indicate that academic development is not enough, and students need to find a meaningful way to be engaged in the life of the school (Snow, et al., 2007). For my participants, these included cheerleading, athletics, 4-H and libraries.

Where resources can support them, art and music teachers need to be included in the budget. When resources are scarce, creative solutions such as using volunteers to provide activities in "clubs" that meet during school and for which children choose their affiliations is a possibility. Families, community members, school staffs (including clerical and janitorial members) contain a wealth of knowledge around activities and topics that are hobbies of them that they might be willing to share with children through such a program—offering those children for who academics are not particularly

compelling a reason to feel a part of the school community. Their engagement is such activities could enable the presenteeism needed for their academic success.

The activities will be different in every community, but it is important that they all be structured in such a way that no one is excluded. Costs of uniforms, equipment, transportation, meals, and other incidental requirements need to be addressed in ways that make activities accessible to all students, not only to those whose families can absorb these expenses.

New Questions for Researchers

I interviewed six persons who grew up in poverty, graduated from college or university, obtained a professional license, and moved into the middle class by becoming public school teachers. Their stories are inspiring and illuminate areas in which educators might support students growing up in similar circumstances. It would be informative to investigate similarly persons who lived in different geographic regions, who chose different career paths, or who moved not only out of poverty but also out of the communities in which they were raised.

Geographic Region

All of the participants in this study grew up in rural Appalachia. Research investigating the phenomenon of mobility from long-term poverty in other regions of the country would be an important addition to this work. Further, researchers might interview persons whose communities were not rural but urban or suburban to determine how they experienced this phenomenon.

Career Path

The operational definition of middle class for this study was completing college or university and obtaining a professional teaching license. How might the phenomenon have been experienced differently, or similarly, by person who grew up in long-term poverty and chose a different profession or livelihood as a means to move out of poverty? Would doctors or business professionals also have found school such a compelling place as these participants did? Research is needed in this area.

Movement From Childhood Community

All the participants in my study, with the exception of two, returned to their childhood communities. The two who did not returned with spouses to the spouses' childhood communities that are similar to the participants' childhood communities. How might the stories of persons who grew up in long term poverty and moved not only into middle class but also away from their families and cultures, be different? Research in this area could be a contribution to understanding the phenomenon.

What About the Ones Who Didn't Make It?

As a teacher and as a scholar, I finish this study of persons who successfully moved from poverty into middle class still worried about those who did not make it, and concerned that I teach and administer in a way that the students in my school will be successful if they wish. I can't imagine how to set up such a study, but hearing the stories of persons who tried to move out of poverty and did not make it, might be just as important as hearing from those who did.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview With Sara Green

Interview of March 10, 2008 with Sara Green
Interviewer: Steve Dunkin
Note: Some portions of the transcript have been altered or deleted to hide identity and locations of the participant.

Steve: Tell me about your childhood and how you became a teacher? Your experience of growing up in poverty and getting to go to college? That's what I am interested in.

Sara: OK, well…

Steve: Maybe start out with your family?

Sara: My parents both worked off and on. My dad, he had a good job at TVA, but he would get laid-off often. And uh, of course we were much older, when he had that job.

Steve: You were a teenager when that was going on?

Sara: Yah. Oh, before that my mother tried to stay home with us while we went through school and my dad, he worked at a kinda grocery store. And having two kids and trying to keep up with family, that was hard. She still wanted to stay home with us. She tried really hard to read to us a lot, always tried really hard to provide that type of thing. We didn't have – we lived in some of the most pitiful places. My parents had moved here when I was four. In fact, the house we first lived in when we moved to Roosevelt is now condemned. It is right by the post office. Then my dad got laid off so – it was like probably a year. So my mother started working. She was ironing rugs somewhere. They neither one had been to college. She was 16. He had been home from Vietnam not long when they met. So, I think she got her GED later. So, my dad was drafted right out of high school into the Army. So, he went to a trade school to become a pipe fitter. But, he didn't use it for a while. And ah, my dad stayed home. My mother went to work ironing. And – they were able finally, while my dad was still working, to buy a house. The house they are still living in today. But, they couldn't afford it. So, my dad found a job in Virginia. It was at I think Sequoia, it was just an outage but he was going to make more money than we had and he hoped he could send payments in and keep our house. So we moved to Virginia and lived with our aunt and uncle and three kids. So there were five of them and four of us. We lived in this tiny little house in Virginia. And we lived there about a year.

Steve: How old were you there?

Sara: I was in fifth grade. So, we moved back because my dad's job ended there. We moved back here because we had a house. They neither one had a job. And the bank I think tried to take the house. Whatever, I didn't understand it all. We ended up living in this little bitty tiny trailer and there was no income. And the church was buying our groceries, Bringing us food. I knew we were loved but we didn't have anything. Barely had clothes. We would like have cornbread and beans just about every night. I think we ate at school and when we got home we knew the ration of food was very limited. It was a very limited amount of food we had. But we had stuff like that.

And then my mother took a job as a secretary for a company in Morganton. She was the owner's assistant so she started to make some money. And finally they ended up getting the house back and we were able to move back home. But my dad, he was still trying to work little outages. They didn't have much income, but apparently they were trying to do a lot of catching up on things they had lost on with their debt and all. So, we still did not have a lot. By the time we got into high school my mother still had her job in Morganton, I think she worked there about ten years. And my dad was able to work for about a year straight.

So, they were able to – you know when you grow up that way and you – just like I see these students here you know, the parents get money and they spend it. They don't save it. My parents never saved anything. They provided things we needed. They would go out and spend it. I watched a lot of financial mistakes. We had cars but there was no money going back. So my dad lost his job again, he got laid off again and then he had a heart attack. So there was nothing. And then when I graduated from high school, I started working when I was a sophomore I think. I started working in a grocery store. And I just knew, my brother and I would always talk about where we have come from and look at how our life has always been a struggle. Never being sure if we can afford this or that. Not being able to go buy clothes for school pictures or you know, we have always lived that way. And look, even though they had all this money for a little while there is nothing to show for it.

My mother did not make enough money to support all of us plus the home and the car. So I worked. It wasn't much money but I did work When I was in high school I had a teacher, she is at the middle school now. She kind of took me under her wing. She would always say if you can get an education no one could ever take that away from you. You can lose all kinds of things. You can lose jobs, you can lose homes but if you have an education no one can ever take that from you. And for me, that kind of stuck in my head. When you're a child your perspective is well somebody took that away from me. You don't really have any ownership of things. So, I was a cheerleader in high school and I had someone from a college, Mountain State Community College, they wanted me to cheer there. They told me, now you can get a partial scholarship if you want to. And I thought, well that would be good. But I knew my parents could not afford to send me to college. So I worked full time at a bank and put myself through college. I would take my

lunch hour and go to a class, come back to work and take night classes. And somehow fit in cheering and getting everything I could. All the while my parents are struggling.

Steve: You lived at home?

Sara: I lived at home, yah. And when it was time to go to Tech University I still had to work to put myself through. So I stayed in Oak Grove and I drove myself 71 miles each way. Every single day. I would come in, I was working at a gift shop, it's not there anymore. But, I worked and I would either get up on Saturday morning and open and work all day long and work on Sunday open till close. Well, when I would get out of school I would go straight in and work till closing and close everything down. And do that everyday. Now, there was not a lot of time to study but I had to get myself through. There were plenty of times, you know I thought, you could always go back to the bank, you make a decent amount of money. I don't really have to stay in school. And then I met my husband now, I met him. He came from a different background. He was going to school at UT, big studier, big, really ambitious. Real good with money. He kept encouraging me to try and make it through. I did and got my job here. But, we sure didn't have anything.

Steve: How come you picked teaching?

Sara: Well I knew I could get a lot of it done at Mountain State Community College and it would be cheaper. Because I had to take into consideration the price of everything. And I wanted to have that little bit of a scholarship that I could get. I ended up at Mountain State because of working full time. And I couldn't take the load of classes I probably should have. But it took me six years to get my bachelors. But I never quiet working and I was working at that gift shop all the way through until they called me from here and said, "OK, they were going to hire me." And I quiet that day and started working here the next day.

Steve: Were you married when you started working here?

Sara: I was. We had gotten married …pause … I graduated in May of 98, got married in June of 98 and got hired in August of 98. And had a baby in March of 99.

Steve: You planned real well didn't you? (laughter from both) Is there anything that jumps out at you about moving into a different situation than your parents? Something that really kinda motivated you or struck you about living a different lifestyle?

Sara: Well, when the teacher told me that my education could never be taken away from me, that was when I really thought, "You know – that was true." My parents would often say, my mother especially would say, "If I had finished high school."; "If I had taken the opportunity to go to college the situation we are in would be a lot different." She often made us believe anything we wanted we could have. But we would probably have to

work for it a lot harder than other people. And I just always tried to listen and take that into consideration. And try to make that manifest in me.

Um, I think I chose teaching (pause) for one it would transfer from Mountain State Community College to Tech University. And I thought you know there are a lot of kids just like I was. And now that I have taught here for ten years in a high poverty area I really do understand where these kids are coming from. I don't understand the lack of love and stuff there parents don't necessarily give them. Because my mother, and my dad, were very determined to make sure that we knew that we could always rise above if we wanted to. Even though I came from that I appreciate it because I think it made me a different kind of person.

And my brother (pause) I was the first person to go to college, to set foot on a college campus. And my brother, we had graduated from high school the same year and he had joined the military and after he was in there for a few years he has two bachelors' degrees. But on my mother's side of the family that (pause) we are the only ones that have been in college. And my brother, he is so determined I mean (pause) the way that you are raised (pause) it's hard to get out of it. Get out of that frame of mind. Just like money habits and spending habits. And you still think you have got to have all this stuff because you might lose it. You know that kinda thing. That goes with the poverty attitude. My brother has some very dangerous spending habits. But he makes really good money and he is a really good saver too. But (pause) we talk about it all the time.

How, you know, our parents have this much money for so long and they were both working and there is nothing to show for it. It's just really strange when you (pause) I don't know (pause) I have to financially support my family now. And is that ever going to change? Probably not. But they just never did get out of that mind set. I still feel like that child in poverty. A lot of the time, well not that child but I have to really slow down my thinking when it comes to (pause) like money (pause) what am I going to do with it. Well I am going to save it. But, I would really love to go buy some stuff. Because I need some stuff. That's kinda (pause) You just feel you got to have it. You feel like stuff is what's important. It's just really strange. My parents still tell me and my brother all the time, "Were' so proud, were so glad, I know you could do this. You were always smart enough, I wish I had." And there are other people in our family that say, "Well, you guys think you are better than us because you went to college." It's just that (pause) we were really poor (laughter). Really poor (laughter).

Steve: Did you know that?

Sara: YES we knew that! Yes, I knew that! You go to school and you don't have all the clothes everybody else has. And you don't get to go out. I remember the first time, I was a freshman in high school, I had never been to a fancy restaurant. I had a boyfriend and he was from a wealthy family, his mother was a realtor and his dad was loaded. They asked me to go with them to eat at O'Donnell's. Well, that was a fancy restaurant. Well, I wanted to go but I was scared to death. Because I didn't know what to do. How to

behave, how to act. I had told my mother, I want to go but I'm afraid and I kinda wish you would say no. She said, "I tell you what, when I get paid, before you go (pause) because it was about two weeks away before we were to go (pause) I will take you to that restaurant and I will teach you what to do." And she (pause) she's a very smart lady. Incredibly smart, and knows what's proper. Its just we were never able. I remember when she took me in that restaurant and somebody waited for me to tell them how many people were going to be seated. It was just like a different world. I was a nervous wreck. We ordered a very, very small portion, ha. You know we didn't have a lot of money being in that environment. I'm thankful she was willing to do that. Instead of going and buying whatever. To at least have the experience. No the whole family couldn't go but at least she wanted the very best for us. And I think all these kid's parents really want the best for them. They just don't have the best to give. Even at this age, with second graders it's already in their heads the way to be. The way we do it in poverty. And it's really, really hard to rise above that.

Detailed Chronology of Theme Development

Overall Themes as of July 2, 2008

During June I collected my transcribed interviews and began the process of reviewing the documents and extracting possible theme topics. After several days of review I selected eighteen possible themes for further review. I extracted statements from each transcript and matched these statements to determine if they supported one or more of the eighteen themes. I also felt it important to note if all or only some of the participants meet my criteria for each theme. In addition, I attempted to match themes that seemed to relate to each other or note if there was a possible concern with a theme.

Matrix of Tentative Themes Following First Series of Readings

Theme Title	Positive for all	Negative	Related to…
1. All fathers worked but remained in poverty.	yes		2. All mothers worked in the home when their children were young and some outside later.
2. All mothers worked in the home when their children were young and some outside later.	yes		1. All fathers worked but remained in poverty.
3. All interviewees worked as adolescents and adults.	yes		12. All worked to support themselves after high school and through college.
4. All parents were married for extended times and were not divorced.	yes		7. All interviewees expressed that they were loved by their parents.
5. All interviewees have strong positive relationships with one or both parents.		yes	Daniel is exception.
6. All siblings worked and moved from poverty.		yes	Some siblings in poverty.
7. All interviewees expressed that they were loved by there parents.	yes		4. All parents were married for extended times and were not divorced.
9. All interviewees state that one or both parents provided a strong role model.		yes	Weak evidence with Daniel, Sara.

Theme Title	Positive for all	Negative	Related to…
10. All interviewees had a positive experience with a teacher or teachers.	yes		17. All expressed positive connection to school.
11. All interviewees experienced positive influence from friend, relative or significant other role model.	yes		18. All expressed a major influence to be:
12. All worked to support themselves after high school and through college.	yes		3. All interviewees worked as adolescents and adults.
13. All interviewees currently view working with children in poverty an important task.	yes		
14. All interviewees expressed strong determination to move from poverty.	yes		
15. All viewed college as means to move from poverty.	yes		
16. All expressed connection to rural area they were raised in.		yes	Weak link/evidence
17. All expressed positive connection to school.	yes		10. All interviewees had a positive experience with a teacher or teachers.
18. All expressed that they were influenced significantly by an individual.	yes		7. All interviewees expressed that they were loved by there parents. 10. All interviewees had a positive experience with a teacher or teachers. 11. All interviewees experienced positive influence from friend, relative or significant other role model.

From the above July 2nd matrix I further consolidated my initial themes by dropping several that were redundant to others or were not supported by statements in my transcripts. I grouped these eleven remaining themes based on shared traits. In order to refine this process, I again matched statements in each transcript to the grouped themes in order to determine if participant statements supported the consolidated themes.

Matrix of Eleven Consolidated Themes

1. All fathers worked but remained in poverty. 2. All mothers worked in the home when their children were young and some outside later.
4. All parents were married for extended times and were not divorced. 7. All interviewees expressed that they were loved by their parents.
3. All interviewees worked as adolescents and adults. 12. All worked to support themselves after high school and through college.
10. All interviewees had a positive experience with a teacher or teachers. 17. All expressed positive connection to school.
18. All expressed that they were influenced significantly by an individual. 7. All interviewees expressed that they were loved by their parents. 11. All interviewees experienced positive influence from friend, relative or significant other role model.

       I again reviewed and consolidated the themes and developed four phrases or words that I considered possible major themes and then matched each of the remaining themes to one of my four phrases or words. This review included collaboration with a colleague at the university, another colleague employed out of state and I also requested feedback from my participants. In developing this matrix I again matched participant statements to my four major themes and sub-themes. From this review, I reintroduced several themes from my initial matrix and dropped others from my later matrix documented above.

Matrix of Major Themes with Sub-Themes for July 2nd

Major Theme	Sub-Theme
Family Ties	1. All fathers worked but remained in poverty. 2. All mothers worked in the home when their children were young and some outside later. 4. All parents were married for extended times and were not divorced.
Loved	7. All interviewees expressed that they were loved by their parents. 11. All interviewees experienced positive influence from friend, relative or significant other role model.
Influenced Positively	10. All interviewees had a positive experience with a teacher or teachers. 11. All interviewees experienced positive influence from friend, relative or significant other role model. 17. All expressed positive connection to school.
Achievement	3. All interviewees worked as adolescents and adults. 12. All worked to support themselves after high school and through college. 14. All interviewees expressed strong determination to move from poverty. 15. All viewed college as means to move from poverty.

Themes Development as of July 10th

I had developed four major initial themes in early July and after further review of my participant transcripts altered the terms selecting three major themes. I determined to focus on the themes of:

1. Durability of Family Relationships
2. Influenced Positively by Others
3. Determination to be Different

Matrix of July 10th Three Major Themes with Sub-Themes

Major Theme	Sub-Theme
Durability of Family Relationships *"They've been married sixty some years."*	All fathers worked but remained in poverty. All mothers worked in the home when their children were young and some outside later. All parents were married for extended times and were not divorced.
Influenced Positively by Others *"Son, I'm going to tell you something. From your neck on down your body's worth one dollar. From your neck on up it's up to you what you're worth."*	All interviewees experienced positive influence from friend, relative or significant other role model. All interviewees expressed that they were loved by their parents. All expressed positive connection to school.
Determination to be Different "I'm not going to live like this!"	All interviewees expressed strong determination to move from poverty. All interviewees worked as adolescents and adults. All worked to support themselves through college. All interviewees saw college as a life changing event. All interviewees currently view working with children in poverty an important task.

Overall Themes as of August 20, 2008

During August I again reviewed my transcripts and discussed my theme topics with colleagues and participants. After detailed review of participant statements, discussion of theme wording and terms and again insuring participant statements matched proposed themes and sub-themes I refined and selected the following themes and sub-themes.

August 20th Matrix of Major Themes with Sub-Themes

Major Theme	Sub-Theme
Durable Family Personal Relationships	Parents Were Married for Extended Times
	Participants Expressed That They Developed an Emotional Bond with Someone in Their Childhood
Inspired by Others	Participants Experienced Positive Influence and Encouragement From Friends, Relatives or Significant Other Role Model
Resolved to Succeed	Participants Expressed a Strong Resolve to Move From Poverty
	Participants Worked as Adolescents and Adults To Improve Their Life Situation
	Participants Worked to Support Themselves Through College
A Nurturing and Challenging School Community	Participants Expressed a Positive Connection to School
	Participants Had a Positive Experience With a Teacher or Teachers
	Participants Perceived College As a Means From Poverty

Refinement of Themes as of September 30th

In September I alter several theme titles and sub-theme titles (as indicated below). Altering these themes was the result of long conversations with my peer reviewers and a number of discussions with some of my participants. Once of determined what changes I would make I provided each individual a copy of Chapter Four of only the sections pertaining to him or her without reference to other participants. Once I received any

feedback from participants I then provided all participants a complete copy of Chapter Four. After I allowed all participants an opportunity to comment on my draft of Chapter Four I then finalized that chapter. When I had completed Chapter Five, I provided each participant and my peer reviewers a completed copy of the entire document. In early October I finalized the document.

September 20th Matrix of Major Themes with Sub-Themes

Major Theme	Sub-Theme
Durable Family Relationships	Longstanding Marriages
	Strong Emotional Bonds With Family Members
Presence of Encouragers	Friends and Family Members as Encouragers
	Teachers and Other Respected Adults as Encouragers
Determination to be Different	Proactive Determination
	Reactive Determination
School-Based Opportunities for Meaningful Participation	Meaningful Relationships With Teachers
	Meaningful Activities

Vita

Steve Dunkin was born in Knoxville, Tennessee on March 7, 1952. He graduated from Fulton High School in 1971. Majoring in special education at the University of Tennessee he graduated in 1976 and worked for one year at Tennessee School for the Deaf. In 1977 he transferred from the U. S. Marine Corps Reserve to the regular Marine Corps and was commissioned a second lieutenant in September of that year. In 1984 Captain Dunkin received an M.A. in history from George Mason University. He remained on active duty as a combat engineer and retired from the Marines in 1996 with the rank of major. Major Dunkin then returned to East Tennessee and with the support of the Troops-to-Teachers program accepted a position with the Blount County School System at William Blount High School teaching special education. While teaching in Blount County he obtained an Ed.S. in reading education from the University of Tennessee. In 2000 he accepted a position teaching special education in the Knox County School System. While in Knox County he was accepted in and completed the Urban Specialist Certificate program through the University of Tennessee. Mr. Dunkin is currently a Literacy Leader in the Roane County School System.