OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES ABOUT POOR APPALACHIAN SINGLE MOTHERS: UNDERSTANDING THEIR ACTUAL LIVED EXPERIENCES

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This research is an adaptation of Sharon Hays’ study of the real lives of low income single mothers. While Hays’ study took place in an urban area, the current study was completed in a rural locale. Hays’ research demonstrates that we need to look past stereotypes and cultural misconceptions, about the poor in America, if we are to learn how to effectively help single mothers overcome poverty, make ends meet, and provide a better life for their children and themselves. The goal of this study was to build upon Hays’ research by gaining a broader and more complete understanding of the real lives of all single mothers through the examining of the life experiences of rural Appalachian single mothers, an often invisible group of single mothers. This research suggest that (1) stereotypes of Appalachian single mothers are hindering the development of effective and appropriate poverty policy, (2) Appalachian single mothers face regional specific obstacles to making ends meet, and (3) there are differences in the single mother population that spatial inequality cannot account for which needs to be addressed in poverty policy.

Approved:

Debra A. Henderson

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Dedication

To

Sheila Rhea Powell (my mother)

For the incredible job she did raising my brother and me, for all the inspiration and support, and for being there.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Female headed single parent families make up half of all families in poverty (US Bureau of Census, 2002a). They are the group that has traditionally had the highest poverty rate in America (US Bureau of Census, 2002a). However, there is debate on how we should address the poverty experienced by single mothers. Some (Hays, 2003; Tickamyer, Henderson, White, and Tadlock, 2000) argue that current policy is based on stereotypes and cultural misconceptions. Others (Sowell, 1981; Murray, 1984) suggest that these policies should be pursued with greater vigor, because the true problem lies in morality and responsibility. This debate tells us that we need to gain a greater and more accurate understanding of the actual lived experiences of single mothers to give us a better direction for further research and policies that may help them.

Appalachia has traditionally been one of the poorest regions of the United States. While improving, Appalachia still lags behind the rest of the nation in economic development, per capita income, and employment rates (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2002b). Given these conditions, single mothers in Appalachia may face specific and regional obstacles that mothers in more affluent regions never have to encounter, such as the lack of public transportation or the scarcity of employment opportunities.

The purpose of this study is to reveal what lower income rural Appalachian single mothers view to be the major problems that they face in making ends meet and providing a better life for their children and themselves. In addition it will evaluate the strategies that these mothers use to overcome these problems. The guiding thesis is that information about Appalachian single mothers has been simplified at the societal level
resulting in oppressive stereotypes and cultural misconceptions, which hinders the development of appropriate poverty policy.

This qualitative study of Appalachian single mothers is guided by two primary goals. The first is to increase our understanding of the lived experiences of single mothers as a whole and to aid in the development of policy and research that will address the needs of all single mothers. The second is to examine the effects of spatial factors (such as the lack of jobs or public transportation) on rural Appalachian single mothers’ ability to make ends meet and provide a better life for their children. In economically depressed areas of Appalachia the obstacles that poor single mothers face in making ends meet may be different than more affluent regions. Overall, this research will contribute to our broader understanding of the problems faced by single mothers by examining the life experiences of an often invisible group of single mothers whose very well-being is determined largely by public policy. This will not only increase our understanding of the inequality faced by single mothers, it will also contribute to the cumulative body of knowledge on social inequality by revealing that the causes and solutions to inequality can be hidden and perpetuated by cultural misconceptions and stereotypes.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the following chapter, I will examine two very different ways that poverty has been historically conceptualized in the United States. First, I will give an in-depth overview of the origins of each paradigm. This will include the theoretical arguments and empirical evidence of each paradigm. Second, I will evaluate the effects of these paradigms on conceptions of poverty and the poor. This examination will reveal that, despite being discredited by many scholars in academia, the view that those in poverty harbor pathological traits or individual deficiencies has remained a powerful political force shaping poverty policy in the United States. As a result, information about single mothers has been simplified at the societal level, resulting in the development of oppressive stereotypes about single mothers that thwart the development of successful poverty policies. Finally, I will demonstrate the impact that feminist research has on dispelling cultural misconceptions about poor single mothers and thereby expand our knowledge of their actual experiences so that we can design better poverty policies. This will lay the groundwork for the argument that we need to expand on their work and seek to gain a better and more complete understanding of the real lives of all single mothers by examining the life experiences of rural Appalachian single mothers.

Explanations of Poverty

The causes of poverty and its relief have been important subjects of study for a very long time (Rank, 1994). Within the United States, “The question of causality has found itself at the heart of most debates surrounding poverty and the poor” (Rank,
Two principal theoretical paradigms have been offered to explain the cause of poverty. The first paradigm is the individual approach to poverty. According to this paradigm, individual attributes of the poor are the cause of persistent poverty. The second paradigm is the structural view of poverty. From this view poverty is the result of structural failures.

**Individual Paradigms of Poverty**

The emphasis on dysfunctional individual attributes as the primary cause of poverty has been reinforced by many early social scientists engaged in poverty research (O'Connor, 2001). These researchers saw poverty as a moral condition. Referring to these researchers, Michael Katz notes, “They represent the enduring attempt to classify poor people by merit. This impulse to classify has persisted for centuries partly for reasons of policy. Neither the state nor private charity can distribute resources in unlimited quantities to all who might claim need” (1989:9). This has led to artificial categories that separate people who can not survive by themselves into the “deserving and undeserving poor”. According to Katz, “The issue becomes not only who can fend for themselves without aid, but more important, whose behavior and character entitle them to the resources of others” (1989:10). While deserving poor, such as veterans, the elderly, and the disabled, got help from agencies and programs without stigma, for most of the poor, notably single mothers, poverty became a stigma. A few social scientists (Kelso, 1994; Magnet, 1993) argue that the dysfunctional individual attributes of the poor are the result of what Emile Durkheim once called the development of “anomie,” which
means the absence of social norms in the society as a whole. According to this theory, traditional social values have broken down over the years leaving many indigents without a moral compass. But the most common and influential incarnation of the individual paradigm of poverty is the culture of poverty theory.

The Culture of Poverty Theory

Oscar Lewis introduced the idea of the “culture of poverty,” by claiming that poverty was a part of a group’s culture and “way of life” that had been passed down from generation to generation along family lines. Lewis contends that this “culture of poverty” is the result of a set of values unique to the poor that has arisen as a direct result of the experience of living in poverty (Moynihan, 1965; Lewis, 1966). This set of values “develops in order to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair which develop from the realization of the impossibility of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society. Its perpetuation from generation to generation cripples children because it leaves them psychologically unprepared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime” (Katz, 1989:17). This psychological damage is passed on from one generation to the next creating a culture of deprivation. As Lewis noted,

Once it [the culture of poverty] comes into existence, it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effects on children. By the time slum children are age six or seven, they have usually absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime” (1969:188).
According to Lewis, the “culture of poverty” is found in both urban and rural settings and in different regions and nations because it represents a series of common adaptations to common problems (1969), which is the alienation and marginality that the poor experience on a daily basis. These cultural adaptations include a lack of involvement in many of the institutions of wider society, lack of savings, borrowing, pawning, inadequate valuing of education, mistrust of the police and government, sexual promiscuity, widespread illegitimacy, and wife abandonment (Lewis 1961). Lewis stressed the distinction between poverty and the culture of poverty and gave many examples of impoverished peoples untouched by a “culture of poverty”. According to Lewis, poverty has a socioeconomic condition, but the culture of poverty was a possible result of the fatalism experienced by the oppressed poor. Lewis never intended to make culture a cause of poverty. To Lewis the “culture of poverty” was a consequence of poverty that only affected a small part of the poor population. Even among those in a culture of poverty, he argued that poverty could be cured with pride and class consciousness. That is, when poor people became class-conscious or joined trade unions, their outlook became “internationalist” and they were no longer in the “culture of poverty. Lewis warned, “my findings might be misinterpreted or used to justify prejudices and negative stereotypes (1961:xiii). Unfortunately, he was right.

Edward Banfield used a radicalized version of Lewis’ “culture of poverty” theory to explain the causation of urban poverty in his famous work entitled The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of our Urban Crisis (Banfield 1968). The Unheavenly City was a significant study of poor urban people, which many scholars believed to be racist
(Katz, 1989; Valentine, 1968). Banfield argued that the problems of the urban poor, such as crime, unemployment, poverty, and lack of education, stemmed less from external discrimination or indifference than from a dysfunctional way of life endemic among lower-class people everywhere.

In this book, Banfield did not share Lewis’s belief that political mobilization could destroy the culture of poverty, nor did he share Lewis’s belief that the “culture of poverty” was a possible effect of poverty and not a cause of poverty. In Banfield’s radicalized version of the “culture of poverty”, all the problems of the lower class were in fact one problem: “the existence of an outlook and style of life which is radically present-oriented and which therefore attaches no value to work, sacrifice, self-improvement, or the service to family, friends, or community” (Banfield, 1970:235). Thus, he argued that this dysfunctional way of life was the reason that economic development and modernization failed to end poverty in American cities during the 1960’s.

Banfield believed that these economic improvements did not help the poor, because their poverty was the result of their own actions and attitudes. Banfield went so far as to challenge the very premises of the President Johnson’s “War on Poverty”. He argued that lack of money was the least of the problems of the underclass and predicted that current government programs aimed at solving urban poverty by improving structural barriers were sure to make things even worse. Thus, from his perspective poverty was seen as the result of the pathological values and beliefs of the poor, which prevent them from effectively participating in the economic and social systems of mainstream America (Banfield, 1970).
When this theoretical perspective is hypothetically applied to rural poverty, the cause of poverty is also seen as the result of the experiences of alienation and marginalization that plague the poor. Like the urban poor, the rural poor lack the ability to have effective participation and integration into the major institutions of larger society, which results in subsequent apathy, hostility, and suspicion toward these institutions.

According to this perspective, the only difference from the urban poor is that the alienation and marginalization of the rural poor is seen as the result of geographic as well as cultural isolation. In the introduction to Jack Weller’s *Yesterday’s People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia*, (Weller 1965) which linked folk society and the culture of poverty in Appalachia, Rupert Vance, a distinguished expert in the sociology of the South, wrote,

> “Mountain isolation, which began as physical isolation enforced by rugged topography, became mental and cultural isolation, holding people in disadvantaged areas, resisting those changes that would bring them into contact with the outside world. The effect of conditions thus becomes a new cause of conditions, but the cause is now an attitude, not a mountain” (1965:ix).

Thus, according to Vance, the dysfunctional cultural adaptations are very similar to the ones experienced by the urban poor, in that they represented a series of common adaptations to common problems associated with economic and cultural deprivation.

Most supporters of the culture of poverty theory cite the supposed failure of President Lyndon Johnson’s “war on poverty” as evidence that the cause of poverty is individual traits, not structural inadequacies (Kelso, 1994:3). As Lyndon Johnson began his first full term as president of the United States in 1964, he promised to initiate a “war
on poverty” that would create a more just and humane society that all Americans could be proud of. This “war on poverty” consisted of spending billions of dollars on programs to launch a multifaceted attack on the causes of poverty. The main focus of the “war on poverty” was to upgrade the skills of the poor. Johnson created many programs to help the poor gain the skills necessary to successfully compete in the labor market, like compensatory education, CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act), the Job Corps, the Manpower Development and Training Act, Head Start, Upward Bound, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In establishing the “war on poverty,” Johnson’s goal was to eliminate the causes rather than the consequences of poverty. As he put it, “to give people a hand up, not a handout” (Johnson, 1964). He hoped to attack the origins of poverty by providing individuals with the training and skills necessary to earn their way out of a life of destitution. Unfortunately, supporters of the culture of poverty theory (Kelso, 1994; Sowell, 1981; Murray, 1984) pointed out that these efforts were met with minimal success at best. Despite spending over $282 billion on targeted education and training programs, governmental efforts to improve the education and training of the poor quickly proved to be ineffective in enabling people to climb out of poverty. The percentage of people climbing out of poverty by securing decent jobs remained static, and the distribution of income in the United States became even more unequal, as cited in Kelso (1994). Kelso notes, “Even more disturbing was the growth of a large and often self-destructive underclass in our inner cities that seemed impervious to change” (1993:5).
During the 1960’s and early 1970s, Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s writings (1965) were some of the most influential and controversial during the debates about the war on poverty. In these writings, Moynihan linked poverty to the deterioration of black domestic life and called for social policy directed toward promoting stable, two-parent families. Moynihan divided the black poor into two distinct groups, a stable middle class and an increasingly disorganized and disadvantaged lower class which he insisted was caught up in a “tangle of pathology” or pattern of pathological and socially undesirable behavior. Moynihan warned that this “tangle of pathology” could eventually spread and create a condition in which broken families, illegitimate children, and welfare dependency would be the norm rather than the exception in urban communities. Moynihan placed the blame for the creation of the “tangle of pathology” on the breakup of the black family and less on culture. Furthermore, Moynihan believed that racial prejudice and limited opportunities in society were the primary cause of the breakup of the black family. Unfortunately, Moynihan’s policy recommendations focused more on trying to correct the behavioral problems of the “broken black family” than on correcting the racial prejudices and discrimination experienced by blacks in American society. He called for social policy directed toward promoting stable, two parent families and helped to foster the idea that poverty was as much a behavioral as an economic problem.

Proponents (Kelso, 1993; Banfield; 1974) of the individual paradigm of poverty saw the work of Moynihan as evidence that the vast majority of the poor were suffering from psychological damage, which has left them unable to take advantage of any opportunities that the government could provide. The belief that the poor were
psychologically damaged had major political consequences. Conservatives originally used this evidence to justify the elimination of government programs designed to help the poor. They thought it would be futile for the government to try to create a more just and humane society in part because the poor had little ability to improve their lot. In addition, they insisted that these programs would only prove to be a costly failure. More importantly, such programs would unjustifiably raise the expectations of the poor that things would get better, when in reality the plight of the poor would probably change very little (Kelso, 1993).

However, by the mid-1970’s conservative theorists (Sowell, 1981; Murray, 1984) began to see evidence of several ethnic groups, who were supposed to be trapped in a culture of poverty, climbing out of poverty. Many of these ethnic groups had to deal with systematic racial discrimination and limited government assistance but still managed to prosper. As a result, many conservative theorists began to study the poverty rates of different groups. Some of these conservative theorists (Sowell, 1981; Murray, 1994) saw the success of specific ethnic groups as evidence that there may actually be hope that all the poor could eventually become self-sufficient. These theorists found that in the 1950s, when the government did little to assist the poor, the poverty rate dropped about 2 percent a year. They concluded that, when people are left to their own devices, they become more able to climb out of poverty on their own than when supported by government programs (Sowell, 1981; Murray, 1984). They also noticed that, when Johnson and his administration began their “war on poverty,” the number of people escaping poverty on their own, now called “pretransfer poverty,” leveled out and even began to decrease.
Thus, these theorists argued that well-meaning government transfer programs were in large part responsible for the poor losing ground in their fight against poverty (Sowell, 1981; Murray, 1984; Rector, 2004). The disincentives embedded in many of the governments welfare programs as well as the philosophical underpinnings of many transfer programs had eroded the incentives for self reliance of the poor. This perspective was very attractive to conservatives, who traditionally support a laissez-faire economy. It became the basis for the modern conservative movement’s poverty policies and the drive for legislation aimed at reducing social services for the poor, culminated with the passage of welfare reform legislation in 1996. Conservatives felt that the causation of poverty was dysfunctional pathological values and beliefs of the poor. Hence, the best way to help the poor was to foster self reliance by cutting back the size of the welfare state and the establishment of workfare, a program that requires employment in exchange for continued assistance (Kelso, 1994).

The view that the cause of poverty is dysfunctional pathological traits became a major influence in public policy. This was especially true in the politics of welfare reform. Founded during the Great Depression, welfare was the federal government’s way to help the nation's poor, mostly mothers and children, to survive poverty. But over time, the system became increasingly unpopular. The rhetoric of conservative theorists aided in the public’s disillusionment with welfare. Many conservative theorists (Sowell, 1981; Gilder, 1981, Kaus, 1992; Frum, 1994; Murray, 1994; Tanner; 1994) argued that welfare was responsible for a permanent underclass of people living off government checks
because the incentives to go to work were so weak. (Katz, 1989). As noted by David Frum (1994),

Risk makes people circumspect. It disciplines them and teaches them self-control. Without a safety net, people won't try to vault across the big top. Social Security, student loans, and other government programs make it far less catastrophic than it used to be for middle-class people to dissolve their families. Without welfare and food stamps, poor people would cling harder to working class respectability than they do now. Big government does for the 98 percent of society that is not rich what her millions did for the late Barbara Hunton - it enables them to engage in destructive behavior without immediately suffering the consequences (4).

Political opinion turned against the idea of anyone getting rewarded for being idle. Welfare was seen by many as a failed poverty policy in need of reform. (Katz, 1989) As a result, congress began to propose new federal welfare laws that would encourage states to limit benefits and impose work requirements of welfare recipients (Noyes, 2002). The political pressure to reform welfare came to a head in 1996 when Clinton came in to office as a centrist democrat promising to "end welfare as we know it." After the Republican takeover of Congress, Clinton vetoed two welfare reform bills but ultimately signed a bill that liberal members of Congress and some members of his own administration considered much too cruel to the poor. In fact, deputy assistant secretary of Health and Human Services Wendell Primus resigned when the bill was passed. The bill, known as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 or welfare reform, ended the Aid To Families With Dependent Children program, a long-standing entitlement to unconditional, long-term
welfare assistance based only on the income eligibility of households with minor children, with time limited income assistance conditional on participation in the labor market. Despite its popularity in the 1960s and its continuing influence in modern politics, the majority of modern social scientists disagree with the assessments of supporters of the “culture of poverty theory” (Katz, 1989; Duncan, 1999; Tickamyer et. al., 2000; Shipler, 2004; Rank, 2004). It has given way to more structural explanations of poverty.

**Structural Paradigms of Poverty**

The culture of poverty thesis came under attack during the 1960’s and was largely discredited as a plausible theory by many academics. Charles A. Valentine was one of the first to argue against this perspective (1968). He found that the “culture of poverty” theory essentially constituted “prejudgments” of empirical questions. He argued that researchers advocating the “culture of poverty” theory were just assuming that the poor fit into existing middle class stereotypes. In short, Valentine found that the existence of a “culture of poverty” had never been proven by its promoters. Another early researcher, Roger Hurley, in his famous analysis of life in Central Ward in Newark, found that the poverty in this persistently poor urban area resulted far less from the personal inadequacies of the people living in the community than from the inadequacies of the social institutions (1969). The institutional racism embedded in the economic and educational institutions of Central Ward and the lack of jobs made it nearly impossible for the majority of the residents to escape poverty. Gerald Suttles came to the same
conclusion in his study of the poverty stricken West Side of Chicago. He found that many residents of the West Side worked their “fingers to the bone” for wages barely above the nation’s minimum wage (1972). These studies and various others led to a general scholarly consensus that American poverty has not been the result of a “culture of poverty”, but was more likely to be the result of structural constraints (David, 1977; Colombis, 1983; Portes, 1972). This broader understanding led to the development of structural theories of poverty.

While many critics chose to critique the culture of poverty with attacks on its logic, the most effective criticisms came from those who chose to disprove the theory with empirical evidence. These theorists found that the lack of economic opportunities, rather than dysfunctional pathological values of the poor are the primary cause of poverty (Hurley, 1969; Suttles, 1972; Katz, 1989). Presently, the bulk of social science research over the past decade has provided data supportive of structural failures, inadequacy of economic, social, health, educational and welfare institutions, rather than culture as an explanation of persistent poverty (Tickamyer and Duncan, 1988; Hays, 2001; Edin and Lein, 1992).

Previously, it was mentioned that a few conservative theorists viewed the “war on poverty” as a failure, because it didn’t help people escape poverty. They claimed that if you looked at the figures, poverty hardly declined at all (Kelso, 1994; Sowell, 1981; Gilder, 1981, Kaus, 1992; Frum, 1994; Murray, 1994; Tanner; 1994). In 1965, 19.5 percent of families were poor and in 1972 the proportion was 17.7 percent (Kelso, 1994). But, many theorists, such as Katz (1989) and Duncan (1999), point out that these figures
ignore the effects of transfer payments, which are the various forms of public assistance and social insurance that they were getting. Furthermore, despite the claims of right-wing ideologues, the expansion of social welfare did not retard economic growth, exacerbate social problems, or discredit old style liberalism (Katz, 1989; Shipler; 2004). As noted by Katz,

“In fact, data show quite the opposite. Between 1960 and 1980 the proportion of Americans living in poverty declined 60 percent, from 18 percent to between 4 percent and 8 percent. The reason was government programs, not economic growth. Although disposable income increased 24 percent between 1965 and 1972, without government programs 21.3 percent of Americans still would have lived in poverty in 1965 and 19.2 percent in 1972” (1989:269).

Also, modern researchers (Katz, 1989; Gilbert; 1977) argued that we have to take into consideration how the social welfare programs were restructured. The changes embodied in the “war on poverty” coincided with fundamental changes in how social services were delivered to the poor. Gilbert (1977) pointed out that as spending increased, legislation also altered social services to make them much more bureaucratic and costly. The spending ratio of government to non-government agencies for services was about ten to one, and the social legislation of the 1970s moved the government into areas previously claimed by private agencies. As a result, poor people began to receive a smaller share of their benefits as cash. Most of the money now went to administrators, not the poor (Katz, 1989). These studies and various others, such as Valentine (1968) and Rank (1994), contributed to a growing scholarly consensus that American poverty has not been the result of a “culture of poverty” but the result of structural failures, such as inadequate economic, social, health, educational, and welfare institutions. In
opposition to individual theories of poverty, structural theories have sought to answer the question of the causality of poverty by evaluating the failures of the social institutions of society. Supporters of the "structural" school of thought argue that most poverty can be traced back to structural factors inherent to either the economy and/or to several interrelated institutional environments that serve to favor certain groups over others, generally based on gender, class, or race (Jordan, 2004).

The current version of the structural paradigm of the causation of poverty began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, by social scientists that supported independence movements in the Third World, civil rights, black power, and affirmative action. Katz notes, “The implicit politics of cultural theories disturbed many critics. Social scientists sympathetic to national liberation movements argued that, as an idea, the culture of poverty reinforced colonial domination and obscured the structural sources of exploitation” (1989:37). These social scientists used empirical evidence to disprove key elements of the “culture of poverty” theory.

This originally came in the form of various case studies on the actual lives of the poor (David, 1977; Colombis, 1983; Portes, 1972; Suttles, 1972; Hurley, 1969). Not only did these studies disprove key theoretical assumptions of the “culture of poverty theory,” they also showed that the causation of poverty was “situational factors,” which stemmed from structural failures. Davison and Krackhardt (1977) conducted a case study on a large manufacturing firm’s special employment training program for poor blacks. They found that employees’ behavior reflected “situational realities” rather than the personalities of poor minority workers, who some conservative theorists placed in a
culture of poverty (Banfield, 1968; Weller, 1965; Kelso, 1994). Jaffe’s and Pogar’s (1968) case study on the slow progress of family planning programs was another study that provided empirical evidence against the existence of a “culture of poverty” and for structural inadequacies as a cause of poverty. They found that accessibility, rather than culture and motivation, determined the success of family planning programs. These studies and countless others (Gans, 1972; Gordon, 1972; O’Connor, 1973) added to the mounting empirical evidence that contradicted the culture of poverty thesis by proving a strong work ethic in the poor, by demonstrating that structural inadequacies are the most common source of poverty, and by showing that the poor experience no uniform set of characteristics. Modern social scientists have expanded on the theoretical foundations created by these early works (Hays, 2003; Duncan, 1999). They have examined the multidimensional and complex nature of poverty and greatly expanded our knowledge of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, “as a culture, the United States is not quite sure about the causes of poverty, and is therefore uncertain about the solutions” (Shipler, 2004:5).

**The Continuing Debate**

David Shipler (2004) argues that The American Dream, which supposes that any individual from the humblest origins can climb to economic well-being, is one of the discourses that are undermining efforts to address the real causes of poverty. Despite empirical evidence (Hays, 2003; Duncan, 1999; Rank, 2004) that examines the real lives of poor people and concludes that numerous structural factors prevent the poor from escaping poverty, the American Dream is still a strong force in the American psyche.
Shipler points out that the American Dream discourse is strengthening the view that poverty must be the result of individual failures, which has been repeatedly disproved by the substantial number of studies revealing that poverty is the result of structural factors, such as low paying jobs, discrimination, and lack of access to educational opportunities (Hays, 2003; Edin and Lein, 1992). While the “culture of poverty” theory is discredited in much of academia, the view that those in poverty harbor pathological traits or individual deficiencies has remained at the forefront of current poverty policies, such as welfare reform (Shipler, 2004).

Those researchers, who don’t ascribe to the “culture of poverty theory”, claim that current discourses that focus exclusively on pathological traits and individual deficiencies stigmatize the poor, by creating inaccurate and oppressive social identities. Duncan and Tickamyer (1988) note,

“Popular opinion reflects many misconceptions about who is poor and why. The prevalent image is that the poor are members of an underclass made up largely of female heads of households with numerous illegitimate children and no adult males present, concentrated in urban ghettos, unemployed and unemployable. Many believe that poor people do not want to work and welfare supports their disinclination for generation after generation, creating a permanent culture of poverty” (245).

Duncan and Tickamyer (1988) determined that there is high labor force participation among the rural poor. Their research dispels some of the myths and stereotypes about “deserving and undeserving” categories of the poor, which “continue to impede design and implementation of appropriate policy” (1988:243).
The “deserving and undeserving” categories of the poor are a consequence of the “culture of poverty” paradigm. Katz (1989) notes,

“The culture of poverty” theory placed in a class by themselves those whose behavior and values converted their poverty into an enclosed and self-perpetuating world of dependence. Although some of its exponents located the sources of poverty in objective factors such as unemployment, the new concept resonated with traditional moral definitions. The culture of poverty could not quite sanitize the poor; their ancient odor seeped through the antiseptic layers of social science. They remained different and inferior because, whatever their origins, the actions and attitudes of poor people themselves assured their continued poverty and that of their children (16).

Thus, the “culture of poverty” gave rise to a new category of poverty: the undeserving poor. A category of undeserving poor started with Banfield’s *The Unheavenly City* and has foreshadowed the major themes in conservative writing about poverty and welfare during the last two decades (Katz, 1989).

The debate between advocates of the cultural and structural paradigms continues to have enormous implications for the design and implementation of effective policy to combat poverty and protect societies most vulnerable. If a “culture of poverty” as defined by Banfield exists, then change can only come from the poor themselves. However, if poverty is primarily the result of economic and social barriers, it could be combated with social policy designed to remove these barriers.

Unfortunately, there is a rift between what empirical evidence tells us about poverty and the poor and what the American public, including many important political leaders, thinks about poverty and the poor. Mainstream views on poverty have
traditionally embraced the individual paradigm and its view of the causation of poverty, which focuses exclusively on the individual attributes. Research shows that if we were to ask the typical man and woman on the street today why people are poor, they would probably say it has to do with individual motivation and/or attitudes. For example, Kluegel and Smith (1986) conducted survey research on the perceived reasons for poverty and found that a majority of those surveyed said that lack of thrift, lack of effort, and loose morals and drunkenness are central reasons for poverty. More recently, Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government (2005) conducted a poll on poverty issues in America and found that most of the respondents felt that the primary cause of poverty in the United States was that people are not doing enough to help themselves out of poverty. This rift between adherents of the structural view of poverty and adherents of the individual view of poverty is the source of major poverty policy debates in the United States. This debate is especially important in persistently poor area of the United States, where millions of impoverished rural Americans face poverty and deprivation everyday. Appalachia is the largest of these persistently poor areas in the United States (Billings and Blee, 2000).

**Appalachian Poverty**

Although urban poverty currently commands more attention in the popular media, the rural poverty rate is 50% higher than in urban areas (US Bureau of Census, 2002a). In addition, it is estimated that 24 percent of rural children are living in poverty compared to 22 percent of urban children (Billings and Blee, 2000). No rural region in the United
States remains more deeply mired in poverty and economic distress than Appalachia (Billings and Blee, 2000). Appalachia is a sociopolitical region reaching from Mississippi into Pennsylvania, whose precise boundaries are determined county-by-county according to needs for federal subsidies. Appalachia has historically been one of the poorest regions of the United States. While improving, Appalachia still lags behind the rest of the nation in economic development, per capita income, and employment rates (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2004). Appalachia’s historic poverty makes poverty research particularly important to this region of the country. As Billings and Blee (2000) note,

“Today, there is a pressing need for public policy aimed at eradicating poverty in persistently poor areas like Central Appalachia, especially in light of policy demands to move people from welfare to work, but the ability to design effective programs for such areas is hampered by the paucity of basic research on persistently poor communities and populations” (3).

Poverty in Appalachia has been worsened by the way that Appalachia has been historically conceptualized by the rest of the nation. Billings and Blee explain that during the late nineteenth century, writers such as James Allen and John Fox created an image of Appalachia as a place that was “vastly out of step, culturally and economically, with the progressive trends of industrializing and urbanizing late nineteenth-century America” (2000:8). This image inspired subsequent writers, such as Robert Frost and Henry Shapiro, to further contribute to the social construction of Appalachia as a “coherent region inhabited by an homogeneous population possessing a uniform culture” (Billings; Blee, 2000:9). This conceptualization fueled Jack Weller’s book Yesterday’s People,
which linked the traditional view of the uniform culture of Appalachia and the culture of poverty theory. Weller (1965) argued that “independence-turned individualism” had become a great obstacle for Appalachians finding a place in the economic and social systems of modern America. The people’s unwillingness to change was the biggest reason that Appalachians were persistently poor. Weller and researchers, who followed him, such as Rupert Vance (1965), concluded that to alleviate the poverty in Appalachia meant changing the attitudes of Appalachian people.

Another theory that builds upon the “culture of poverty” theory by linking Appalachian poverty with dysfunctional culturally transmitted traits attributes these traits to "the effects of [Appalachian] history” (Cattell-Gordon, 1990). These researchers theorize that the Appalachian history of extreme poverty has caused “social trauma” to the Appalachian people. According to Cattell-Gordon (1990), the long history of economic deprivation and unemployment in the Appalachian area, although not the initial cause of Appalachian poverty, has created dysfunctional cultural tendencies in the region, similar to the clinical manifestations of post-traumatic stress syndrome patients.

Another significant theorist that links the poverty of Appalachians to “cultural disadvantages” is Julia Porter (1981). She claims that Appalachians differ from mainstream Americans in their history and value orientations. In addition, she argues that Appalachian people have adopted many of the traits of the original Scotch-Irish settlers, especially valuing self-sufficiency and the family as a unit of consumption and production. According to Porter, these traits are often in direct conflict with the educational and economic traits necessary to thrive in mainstream America.
The view of Appalachians as backward hillbillies is still a strong discourse in the mainstream American consciousness. Today, Appalachians are deeply stereotyped by media programs like reruns of *The Beverly Hillbillies* and the film *Deliverance* (Katz, 1989). These stereotypes have enormous consequences on how we view and address the persistent poverty of Appalachia. Appalachia’s future hangs in the balance as the debate over the causation of poverty continues. Supporters of the “culture of poverty” view of poverty in Appalachia, such as Porter (1981) or Weller (1965), advocate that fighting Appalachian poverty means modernizing Appalachian culture. From this perspective, Appalachia is seen as a place insufficiently integrated into mainstream America. Thus, according to the “culture of poverty” supporters, by making poor Appalachians participate in modern institutions we, as a society, can help them to overcome their dysfunctional cultural ways. But supporters of the structural paradigm, such as Rank (2004) and Billings and Blee (2000), argue that the overwhelming emphasis of today’s policies on changing the behavior of poor individuals diverts attention from systemic causes of poverty and focuses entirely on systematic problems in a way that doesn’t help and makes things worse. These researchers point out that Appalachia is currently suffering from structural constraints, such as the lack of a strong economic base, geographic isolation, insufficient infrastructure, and lack of decent educational facilities, resulting in employment rates higher than the national average, declining real wages that are eroding the income base in rural areas where manufacturing jobs are leaving, and a per capita income lower than the national average (Billings and Blee, 2000). Thus, according to supporters of the structural paradigm, focusing on the beliefs and values of
the poor will only foster stereotypes of the poor and divert critical resources away from the real structural problems. There is a great deal of difference in how supporters of the structural and individual paradigms view and address Appalachian poverty, but one thing remains clear: there is a great need for continued research and understanding of underlying causes of persistent distress in Appalachia to settle this debate. As noted by Tickamyer and Duncan (1988), “…new research specifically aimed at rural poverty is essential to address the particular problems of the poor in rural areas” (256-257).

Research exists that provides empirical support for structural explanations of poverty. Billings’ and Blee’s (2000) study of Clay County Kentucky is one example. The authors argue that the emphasis on changing the behavior of the poor diverts attention from the question of how places become impoverished and results in policymakers constructing poverty relief measures that confront symptomatic but not systemic problems. Their objective was to conduct a longitudinal historical analysis of poverty in a rural Kentucky county in order to dispel the inaccurate and oppressive Appalachian stereotypes that are hampering the ability of policymakers to design effective programs to eradicate poverty in this region. The author’s longitudinal analysis demonstrated that persistent poverty started in the post-Civil War period, not as a result of cultural traits, but because of complex historical, social, and political developments. Billings and Blee also argue that an imbalance in land ownership led to an economic crisis. This imbalance concentrated land ownership in the lands of a small portion of the population which forced the majority of people to become wage laborers. This also created a small group of local elites, which gained control of the local governments. The
disproportionate power of the elites and the fear of losing their power corrupted them. As a result, these elites used the state to fight for state resources. In Clay County, it was these elite fights that formed the framework within which both economic development and local politics were organized. These feuds fostered the stereotype of Appalachians as primitive and violent. The result was a stereotyped society built on economic relations of hierarchy and dependency. Thus, according to Billings and Blee, it was these conditions along with other structural components that led to persistent Appalachian poverty, not inherent cultural deficiencies.

Another example of research that provides evidence for structural causes of Appalachian poverty is Duncan’s (1999) study of impoverished communities in the Mississippi Delta and the Appalachian coal fields. In this in-depth analysis of persistent poverty in historically depressed regions of the country, Duncan seeks to find out why some families stay mired in poverty generation after generation and why some regions of the country are chronically poor and depressed. Duncan views these chronically poor places as “micro” social worlds, in which poverty can only be truly understood by examining the social processes, especially those that involve structures of class and power, which cause poverty and underdevelopment in these regions. Thus, Duncan’s study focuses on how places become poor. Duncan examines the history and politics of two persistently poor regions of the United States, Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta, and a much more prosperous rural New England town, and finds commonality. In both the persistently poor regions, Duncan is able to see common patterns to the causation of the persistent poverty in these communities. She discovers that in both communities there
exists a ridged two-class system of “haves” and “have-nots”. In Appalachia these two social worlds are separated primarily by class based on economic relationships, while in the Delta, the separation is based on race as well as class. In these two-class systems, the “haves” control the resources and participate in mainstream economic political life while the “have-nots” are powerless and dependant on the “haves”. The “haves” use their economic and social control to keep the “have-nots” economically and socially dependent on them. In these communities, the two social worlds of the “haves” and “have-nots” are plagued with an atmosphere of distrust and corruption that emerged from the historical organization of local economies and from how these relationships evolved over time. One of the most devastating results of these two-class systems is the “social isolation” of the poor, which puts up barriers to obtaining social capital and social mobility, resulting in the poverty that both regions experience.

Duncan also offers suggestions on how to overcome the poverty experienced by these poor regions. When examining a more prosperous rural New England town that lacked the widespread poverty of Appalachia or the Delta regions, Duncan notices that the ridged two-class system is absent and that different social relations and patterns were present. In this community, trust, participation, a large middle class, and civic responsibility emerged from the historical organization of this community’s economy. Duncan theorized that the extraordinary power that employers had over workers and that whites had over blacks has maintained the inequality and long term poverty in the poor regions and that this can be corrected. Duncan theorized that policies that focus on rebuilding, preserving, and strengthening community institutions have the potential to
bring about the lasting social change that will alleviate poverty in all poor communities. This, Duncan argues, requires a stronger federal role in combating poverty and inequality, especially in education. Education, Duncan argues, “is not only the key to individual mobility in these communities, it is the necessary catalyst for political change” (208). Besides the general population of Appalachia, other groups within the region also suffer disproportionately from poverty.

Single Mothers in the Appalachian Region

Arguably, no segment of the population remains more deeply impoverished than single mothers. In fact, female headed single parent families make up half of all families in poverty (US Bureau of Census, 2002b). They are the group that has traditionally had the highest poverty rate in America. Single mothers face many obstacles in making ends meet for their families. They are often the sole source of income, the sole primary care provider for their families, and have less financial resources than traditional two parent families (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2002b).

It is not only single mothers who suffer, it is their children as well. Research has concluded that children who grow up in poverty have diminished socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical development (Vandivere, Gallagher, Moore, 2004). This research finds a direct link between a family’s income and a child’s emotional and physical health. As Vandivere, Gallagher and Moore note,

“In 2002, children in low-income families were more than twice as likely as their counterparts in higher income families to have a parent reporting symptoms of poor mental health. Also, low-income children were about three
times as likely as higher income families to be in fair or poor health themselves” (1).

Single mothers in rural Appalachia face specific and regional obstacles that mothers in more affluent urban regions may never have to encounter, such as the lack of adequate transportation or the scarcity of employment opportunities (Tickamyer, et. al., 2000). The University of Kentucky Appalachian Center determined that unequal economic development and the lack of good roads was a major factor in the persistent underdevelopment and poverty that plagues Kentucky and the rest of Appalachia (Collins, 1996). In the Appalachian center’s publication Kentucky Highway, Collins notes,

“Kentucky is a state with rich and poor areas. Some areas are vital links to the state, regional, national and international economy, while other parts barely get by because they are considered economic backwaters. Some areas have plenty of jobs. Others do not. Some areas have access to roads. Others do not. The areas without access to good roads are relatively isolated, especially in Appalachia. They tend to be out of the economic mainstream” (1996:5).

The spatial inequalities that single mothers face in rural Appalachian areas may produce specific and regional obstacles that need to be addressed in any strategy aimed at eliminating their poverty. Previous research concluded that urban and rural single mothers experience variations in the impacts of public policy. For example, Mills and Hazarika (2003) did an analysis of the differential benefits and costs of workforce participation of single mothers in non-metropolitan and metropolitan areas. They wanted to see if non-metropolitan families headed by single mothers suffer disproportionately negative impacts from recent welfare reform measures contained in the Personal
Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, commonly referred to as welfare reform, was domestic legislation signed by President Clinton in August 1996 that overhauled the federal welfare system. Mills and Hazarika concluded that both metropolitan and non-metropolitan families headed by single mothers show, on average, very low levels of economic well-being. However, single mothers in non-metropolitan areas faced more barriers to workforce participation and lower wages than single mothers in metropolitan areas. They concluded that metropolitan and non-metropolitan single mothers lived different lifestyles and did suffer disproportionately from various welfare measures. For the most part, single mothers in metro areas were less geographically isolated and were less likely to have transportation problems preventing them from getting to work or interviews. Furthermore, they had more access to other resources such as jobs and daycare which were more difficult to come by in rural areas. These issues made it more difficult for rural single mothers to gain and maintain adequate employment than their urban counterparts.

Brown and Lichter (2004) also examined the lives of metropolitan and non-metropolitan single mothers. In a study using the National Survey of Family Growth, Brown and Lichter reported surprising similarities in the economic livelihood strategies of metropolitan and non-metropolitan single mothers. They found that cohabitation, employment and co-residence are very closely related to economic well-being in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan mothers. However, non-metropolitan single mothers are less likely than metropolitan single mothers to benefit economically from full time
employment, resulting in higher rates of poverty, greater barriers to welfare receipt, and lower economic returns from various livelihood strategies, such as co-habitation. From these findings, Brown and Lichter conclude that policies that make employment a condition of continued benefits are likely to be less effective in non-metropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas.

Poor single mothers, especially minority mothers, also have the disadvantage of being subjects of long-standing stereotypes. Sharon Hays (2003) points out that politicians and welfare critics have labeled poor single mothers as “wolves”, “alligators,” “reckless breeders” and “welfare queens”… “They have become throwaway people. And those powerful stereotypes have made them readily identifiable symbols of societal failures in family and work life” (Hays, 2003:21). Hays points out that Ronald Reagan immortalized the image of a Cadillac-driving “welfare queen” in various speeches on individual responsibility and welfare dependency.

Socially constructed social identities are key factors in creating and perpetuating inequality. As Hollander and Howard note, “Because these identity negotiations are strongly influenced by existing stereotypes and beliefs about social categories, ultimately they often reproduce social inequality” (2000: 33). Ironically, stereotypes are vital to our understanding of the world. In their significant research on stereotypes, Leyens, Yzerbyt, and Schadron (1994) indicate that, “People can’t afford, however, to do without stereotypes: were humans all unique, it would be impossible to describe only one of them (34). In support of this research, Macrae, Stangor, and Hewstone (1996) state that we all use stereotypes in order to understand the world. That is, “A basic human motive is that
of knowing, understanding, and predicting others, and one of the more basic functions of stereotypes is to provide useful information about others” (20). They further explain that the danger of categorizing useful information about others in this way is that through stereotyping communication can be simplified at the societal level with oppressive results. With this research in mind, it is clear that stereotyping has the potential to significantly impact the lives of poor people, as argued by Rank (2004) and Hays (2003). These stereotypes can not only warp the way that we conceptualize the poor, but can also hinder our ability to create effective policy to combat poverty.

Policy to Help the Most Vulnerable

The argument that stereotypes and cultural misconceptions hinder our ability to create effective and appropriate poverty policy often focuses on the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This act, commonly referred to as welfare reform, was domestic legislation signed by President Clinton in August 1996. This bill overhauled the federal welfare system and fulfilled Clinton’s 1992 campaign promise to “end the welfare system as we know it” (Hays, 2003). This legislation limited lifetime benefits to five years, denied some welfare programs and food stamps to illegal immigrants, and required that adult recipients work after two years of receiving assistance. This bill also gave states annual block grants to pay for programs and allowed them to set some of their own guidelines for deciding which potential recipients were eligible to receive benefits (Hays, 2003). Clinton signed the bill despite objections from many members of his party and administration, who
thought eliminating benefits would be cruel to many poor women and children (Lichter, 2002).

Welfare reform was based on the assumptions of the individual paradigm of poverty and was focused specifically on the individual obligations and behaviors of the poor (Burtless, 1995). It emphasized work, personal responsibility, economic self sufficiency, and strong families. Supporters of this program, such as Republican congressman Ed Royce and Democratic congresswoman Adrianna Huffington, felt that this legislation would improve the future of poor children by promoting parental employment over welfare, parental self-reliance over dependency, discouraging illegitimacy and teen pregnancy, and encouraging stable families (Burtless, 1995). Opponents of welfare reform, such as Congressman Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1996) and Congresswoman Carol Moseley-Braun (1996), argued that this legislation will create problems for single mothers who have to balance a job with raising their children. They, also, feared that numerous barriers to work, such as human capital deficiencies, personal and family problems, child care difficulties, and lack of available jobs would be exacerbated by this probably cruel legislation. Since its passage the success of PRWORA continues to be an important topic for debate.

The success of welfare reform is a very complex topic. Welfare reform has succeeded on many levels, but its overall effect on society is debatable. As Daniel Lichter (2002) notes,

“The welfare reform literature reveals many positive changes: reduces poverty rates, lower out-of-wedlock childbearing, greater family stability, and little indication of more spouse abuse or child neglect. But it is too early to
claim success and many questions remain unanswered. Poverty remains high among single mothers and their children; welfare recipients experience serious barriers to stable employment; and poor women and children face uncertain economic and social future as welfare eligibility is exhausted and the economy wanes” (117).

In his analysis, Lichter (2002) evaluated the success of the 1996 welfare reform bill, by synthesizing literature about declining caseloads with literature focused on the social and economic well-being of fragile families, single mothers, and children. Lichter concluded that welfare reform has led to short term successes, but warns that the lack of longitudinal or panel data on families and children, both before and after PRWORA, prevents a full assessment of potential consequences of welfare reform. He notes that we don’t know the consequences for women and children who have exhausted their benefits or have temporarily lost benefits due to non-compliance with welfare guidelines (i.e. sanctions). We don’t know whether work at low wages translates into positive outcomes in the longer term or leads to additional suffering. We don’t know if welfare reform will foster work values and traditional families. More importantly, Lichter notes, that we do not know the impact on poor children (2002).

Unfortunately, there is every reason to suspect that welfare reform has failed in critical areas. Current supporters claim success strictly by the number of people on the welfare rolls. They note Department of Health and Human Services statistics, which state that welfare reform has helped to move 4.7 million Americans off welfare dependency within three years of enactment, and reduced the number of welfare cases by 54% since 1996 (Schram and Soss, 2001). But, Cecilio Morales notes, “former recipients are working more than ever before, their poverty has not significantly diminished, and
their deprivation has in many instances increased. One-third to one-half of welfare leavers report serious economic struggles in finding food” (2005:15). According to Pamela Loprest, “Almost 40 percent (former welfare recipients) report problems in paying rent, and while welfare leavers have jobs similar to those of low-income mothers, leavers are less likely to have employer-based health insurance” (2005:15). In a study of those who left welfare within the first five years of reform, Loprest found that roughly 33 percent had to cut the size of meals or skip them altogether and thirty-nine percent were unable to pay rent, or other bills and the hardest hit continues to be single mothers, with a poverty rate of over 30% (Loprest, 2005).

There is still considerable debate on the effectiveness of current public policy and its impact on the poor among politicians. Although most modern scholars firmly reject culture as the root cause of poverty, the debate between adherents of structural and cultural paradigms of poverty has had, and currently has, enormous implications for the design and implementation of effective policy to combat poverty and protect society’s most vulnerable, especially single mother and their children. There is a great need for research that gives us an accurate picture of poverty, its effects, and its cause, so that we can provide compelling data to overcome the stereotypes and misconceptions and settle the debates over how poverty should be approached in society. Only when the people designing poverty reducing policies have an accurate view of poverty, its effects, and its causes can poverty be effectively combated in our society.
Feminist Research as an Essential Asset in Determining Causation

A lot of the current research on single mothers in poverty is done using a feminist methodology. In general, feminist methodology attempts to give a voice to women and to correct the male-oriented perspective that has predominated in the development of social science (Kreuger and Neuman, 2003). This is why feminist research is action-oriented research that seeks to facilitate personal and societal change. Feminist researchers argue that much of non-feminist research is sexist, because of larger cultural beliefs and a preponderance of male researchers. Thus, the research “over-generalizes from the experience of men to all people, ignores gender as a fundamental social division, focuses on men’s problems, uses males as points of reference, and assumes traditional gender roles” (Kreuger and Neuman, 2003:90). A feminist perspective also sees researchers as gendered beings. “Gender has a pervasive influence in culture and shapes basic beliefs and values that cannot be simply isolated and insulated in the social processes of scientific inquiry” (Kreuger and Neuman, 2003:90). Much of feminist research is not objective or detached. Feminist researchers interact with their research subjects.

Edin and Lien’s study of low income single mothers is a good example of how micro-level feminist research can increase our knowledge of social phenomena, including inequality (1997). They take an interactionist, feminist, and phenomenological approach to understanding the major problems that poor single mothers face in making a better life for their children and themselves and how they deal with these problems. By looking at the lived experiences of low income urban single mothers who received welfare or have low paying unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, Edin and Lein (1997) were able to determine
that the hardships endured by welfare recipients and low-wage earning mothers were caused by a labor market that failed to provide these women with stable jobs that generate a decent enough income to afford the basic necessities needed to raise a family. As they note, “The primary lesson we have taken from their stories is not that the welfare system of the early 1990s engendered psychological dependency or encouraged the formation of a set of deviant behaviors. The real problem with the federal welfare system during these years was a labor-market problem” (234). Overall, Edin and Lein dispelled popular myths about welfare mothers being lazy and unmotivated and noted that, “All else equal, almost all mothers said they would rather work than rely on welfare” (230).

Perhaps, the most important finding of Edin and Lein’s 1997 study is the fact that poor mothers are not getting enough resources from work or welfare to take care of their families. “Poor mothers, whether working or on welfare, constantly faced a yawning gap between their income and expenditures. Each month they pursued a wide range of strategies aimed at filling the gap and providing for their families” (227). They conclude their research by stating that current welfare policies are increasing the material hardships of poor single mothers, by placing undue blame on single mothers and not on the labor market where it belongs. In addition, they note, “either substantial wage supplements or high-quality training are essential if the current population of unskilled and semiskilled women is ever to attain self-sufficiency through work. In addition, each of these solutions must include affordable access to reliable child care and health aid” (235).

Tickamyer, Henderson, White, and Tadlock (2000) provide yet another example of how micro-level qualitative feminist research can increase our knowledge of social
phenomena. They take an interactionist, phenomenological, and feminist approach to understanding the impact of welfare reform in rural Appalachian communities. They theorize that welfare reform, like most government policy, incorporates a “behavioral model that assumes that individual actors operate as rational entities to calculate self-interest or utility and act accordingly” (173). Tickamyer et. al. (2000) compared this assumption of welfare reform with the way the program is actually implemented. The authors use the voices of women on welfare to illustrate the contradictions in the “top-down goals” of welfare policy and the “bottom-up” perceptions of their outcomes. Some policymakers, from both the liberal and the conservative camps, thought that a system of rewards for work and self-sufficiency and punishment for dependence and deviance would lead any rational human being to employment and self-sufficiency. This didn’t turn out to be the case. Tickamyer et. al. (2000) found that, except for women that were closely affiliated with the human service agency, most women were uncertain about the purposes, goals, and outcomes of welfare reform. They failed to see any logic to sanctions, which often produced a sense of anger and injustice. In addition, they had strong distinctions between deserving and undeserving recipients that mirrored the views of the larger culture, but the women’s primarily allegiance were to their children and their families. Unfortunately, the assessment of welfare clients as purely rational calculators of economic benefits didn’t acknowledge that their family’s well-being came first. As Tickamyer et. al. (2000) note, “Women on welfare see a different set of contingencies, and the end result is a mismatch between the intentions and design of welfare programs and poor women’s needs, priorities, and actions” (185). This, the authors point out,
demonstrates how the perceptions of women on the receiving end of large-scale changes in policy are rarely heard or acknowledged when policy is debated and evaluated. The authors recommend that future policy be responsive to needs as welfare participants understand them. “The view from the bottom up must inform the policy making process” (190).

Sharon Hays’ study of low-income single mothers is an excellent example of research that gives us a clearer picture of the poverty experienced by a very vulnerable segment of our population, single mothers in urban areas. This research adds an important and relevant piece to our broader understanding of American poverty. Sharon Hays’ qualitative study of the real lives of welfare clients seeks to examine the true effects of welfare reform on poor people. The success of welfare reform has, traditionally, been measured by the declining welfare rolls. However, this measurement fails to take in account the actual real life implications of inequality for single mothers (Hays, 2003).

In her study, Hays (2003) theorizes that a nation’s laws reflect a nations values and one can examine these values as reflected in welfare reform. She gives us a look at the true effects of welfare reform by examining the real lives of welfare clients and demonstrating the actual impact it is having on their lives. She points out that the welfare reform legislation stresses that getting a job and earning working wages should be clients ultimate goal, yet it also initiates punitive measures to reinforce a limited view of “family values, failing to acknowledge that most of the clients on welfare cannot maintain self sufficiency due to structural inequalities in the system and not a lack of will. In general,
her research shows that most welfare clients would rather work than be on welfare, but jobs that could support their families, adequately, are often not available. Hays finds that welfare reform reflected the often conflicting values of self sufficiency and of a narrow vision of traditional “family values”. Welfare reform promotes “traditional values” by new rules such as the “family cap”, which refuses aid to children born to mothers on welfare, or the requirement that all single mothers disclose the identity and social security number of the fathers of their children before they receive any aid. Welfare reform also attempts to promote self sufficiency by having lifetime caps on how many years you can get assistance and mandatory work requirements.

Hays explains how these often inconsistent values, based largely on cultural distortions and exclusionary stereotypes, made the welfare reform law into a policy, which punished the poor for circumstances beyond their control, failed to address the much more serious problems of ever growing social inequality, and increased the poverty of countless women and children, and worked to discredit the values that the law was supposed to champion. While she acknowledges some successes in welfare reform, she states, “Yet in the long run and in the aggregate, poor mothers and children are worse off now than they were prior to reform” (7). Thus, Hays demonstrates that welfare reform is not helping the majority of poor families, but is increasing their problems and endangering their survival. Hays’ research demonstrates that we need to look past stereotypes and cultural misconceptions about the poor in America. We need to take a closer look at the actual lived experiences of single mothers, if we are to help single
mothers overcome poverty, make ends meet, and provide a better life for their children and themselves.

Hays’ feminist methodology allowed her to critically analyze commonly held beliefs about the causation of single mother poverty, and gain unique insights into the lives of low-income single mothers in urban areas. By dispelling many stereotypes and cultural misconceptions about single mothers in urban areas, Hays’ research demonstrates how important it is for researchers to incorporate the perceptions of single mothers into their efforts to gain a more complex and complete understanding of the single mother poverty. However, I believe that adapting her study to the Appalachian region could expand our knowledge of American poverty even more. Research (Brown and Lichter, 2004) has demonstrated that rural and urban single mothers face differing structural inequalities and benefit differently from government programs. Research (Duncan, 1999) has also demonstrated that Appalachian single mothers suffer additional problems by being in a region of the country that suffers from persistent poverty due to the historical organization of the areas economy. Thus, studying rural Appalachian single mothers will build upon Hays’ work and could provide us with often neglected insights into the nature of single mother poverty and inequality, particularly in a rural setting.

This chapter examined both structural and cultural theories about the causation of poverty. In so doing, it revealed that, despite being discredited by much of academia, the “culture of poverty” theory has remained a powerful political force shaping poverty policy in the United States. As a result, information about single mothers has been simplified at the societal level, perpetuating oppressive stereotypes about single mothers
that hinder the development of effective and appropriate poverty policies. This chapter has also demonstrated the enormous impact that feminist research has had on dispelling cultural misconceptions about poor single mothers and expanding our knowledge of their actual experiences so that we can design better poverty policies. This chapter lays the groundwork for further investigation of this issue in an attempt to gain a better and more complete understanding of the real lives of all single mothers. In particular, this research will examine the life experiences of rural Appalachian single mothers, an often invisible group of single mothers whose very survival is determined largely by public policy.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Perspective

Poverty is a major problem in the United States. The United States has the largest income gap between the rich and the poor among all industrialized nations (US Bureau of Census, 2002b). The nation’s official poverty rate rose from 12.1 percent in 2002 to 12.5 percent in 2003 (US Bureau of Census, 2002b). In the United States, poverty is measured by comparing annual income with the poverty standard which the federal government created in the 1960’s and updates annually for inflation (Katz, 1989). In 2002, the poverty standard was $9,183 for an individual, $11,756 for a family of 2, $14,348 for a family of 3, and $18,392 for a family of 4 (US Bureau of Census, 2002a).

Poverty has become a major crisis for women in the United States. The Census Bureau’s annual poverty statistics show that women in the United States are far more likely to be poor than men. Women were over 40% more likely to be poor than men in 2002, with a poverty rate of 12.3% compared to 8.7% for men (US Bureau of Census, 2002a). Almost one of every eight women was poor, compared to about one of every twelve men. Also, 60% of adults who were extremely poor, income less than half the poverty standard, in 2002 were women (US Bureau of Census, 2002a). Women were 40% more likely to be extremely poor than men, with an extreme poverty rate of 4.9% compared to 3.5% for men. About one of every twenty women was extremely poor, compared to about one of every thirty men (US Bureau of Census, 2002a). Among women, the most impoverished group was single mothers. In 2002, 33.7% of all single women with children were poor (US Bureau of Census, 2002a).
Female headed single parent families make up half of all families in poverty (US Bureau of Census, 2002b). The feminization of poverty has become a significant problem for countless women and children in the U.S. and the discrimination that women face on a daily basis is a major source of this problem. According to information released by the Census Bureau (2003) on the earnings difference between women and men, the median income for women who worked full time and year round was 24.45 percent less than men working the same type of job (SEE TABLE 1). The feminization of poverty is a reason that a feminist theoretical perspective is used, because a feminist perspective recognizes the importance of gender in conceptualizing poverty, oppression and inequality. A feminist perspective gives a better understanding of the issue and how it impacts the women. A feminist theoretical perspective attempts to give a voice to women and to correct the male-orientated perspective that has predominated in the development of social science (Neuman and Kreuger, 2003). Feminist research is action-oriented research that seeks to facilitate personal and societal change.

A feminist theoretical perspective is what gave Hays’ (2003) research its capability to look past stereotypes and cultural misconceptions, about poor single mothers. The feminist perspective gave Hays the ability to recognize that the poverty of low income single mothers is linked to gender inequality in our society. Hays recognized that poverty is largely a gender issue. The vast majority of adult welfare recipients, over 90 percent, are mothers and nearly all are raising children alone (Hays, 2003). She recognized that these women are caught between the competing discourses of family values and self sufficiency embedded in welfare reform. Using a feminist perspective,
Hays is able to give voice to a group that has been historically oppressed and transcend the stereotypes and cultural distortions that society places on them. Society has labeled single mothers on welfare as “wolves, alligators, and reckless breeders, but the feminist perspective gave Hays the tools to challenge these labels and facilitate societal change.

Hays research demonstrated how welfare reform embodies a futile attempt to promote a vision of “independent working motherhood” that is largely unobtainable in the current economic environment. Her research also provided valuable information on the actual lives of single mothers that policymakers could use to design effective and appropriate policy to combat the poverty experienced by one of societies most vulnerable groups, but more research is needed. If we are to design effective and appropriate policy to help all single mothers, we need to examine the lives of both urban and rural single mothers. Sharon Hays’ research was done in urban areas: an average-size city in the Southeast and a larger urban area during the economic boom of the late 1990s. As a result, the current study will adapt Hays’ methodological approach to study single mothers in a rural locale. In economically depressed areas of Appalachia where the obstacles that poor single mothers face in making ends meet may be different than those faced by single mothers in more affluent regions, the needs of single mothers may be different as well (Brown and Lichter, 2004). Appalachia has traditionally been one of the poorest regions of the United States. While improving, Appalachia still lags behind the rest of the nation in economic development, per capita income, and employment rates (US Bureau of Census, 2002a). Single mothers in Appalachia may face specific regional obstacles that mothers in more affluent regions never have to encounter, such as the lack
of public transportation or the scarcity of employment opportunities. The goal of this project is to gain a better and more complete understanding of poverty experienced by single mothers by examining the life experiences of rural Appalachian single mothers, an often invisible group of single mothers. Adapting Hays’ theoretical and methodological approach to study poor rural Appalachian single mothers will build upon previous work and provide us with often neglected insights into the nature of single mother poverty and inequality.
Chapter 4: Methodology

This research is exploratory in nature, because it seeks to examine the conditions of Appalachian single mother poverty and the reasons that underlie it, whether they are structural, the result of personal agency, or a combination of both. A qualitative analysis was done because an inductive route in conceptualizing the data offers a more in-depth understanding of the issue. The causation of single mother poverty is a complex social phenomenon and qualitative analysis let the data speak for itself. The lives of poor single mothers are shaped by their experiences and by economic, cultural, and political structures of society. Thus, examining the actual lived experiences of single mothers is essential to understanding poverty, welfare, and inequality. The qualitative research allowed me to be open to the unexpected and present an in-depth analysis of the lives of Appalachian single mothers. The use of a transcendent qualitative perspective allowed me to study the complex problems that single mothers face from their point of view. This methodological approach also allowed me to discover themes for my analysis that cannot be expressed with the objective numbers of a quantitative analysis, such as the impact of cultural misconceptions, stereotypes, and gender inequality on single mother poverty. It is important for researchers to incorporate the perceptions of single mothers in order to gain a more complex and complete understanding of the single mother poverty in Appalachia, because it is insufficient to study inequality in isolation from the lived experiences of the people who experience it.

In this research on rural Appalachian single mothers, I adapted Hays’ methodology of a micro-level analysis using semi structured in-depth interviews. Semi
structured, face to face in-depth interviews were used because they can provide the women’s own critical analytic insights into the causation of their poverty. This is important in that past research (Hays, 2003) has demonstrated that there are differences between the actual lived experience of single mothers and how most of the population, including many policy makers, conceptualizes the social situation and the actions of low-income single mothers. These in depth semi-structured interviews allowed for the flexibility to add or drop questions when necessary and probe interesting and insightful responses from the interviewees. Semi-structured interviews are also a viable tool for this sample because they allow for focused open communication between subject and researcher, which results in rich data to investigate the broader question of poverty.

The interview schedule used in this research consisted of 20 open-ended questions that collected information on the actual lived experience of single mothers. A brief survey was also given to respondents to collect demographic information on the participants. This survey was administered before the start of the semi-structured interviews and consisted of ten closed ended questions. This information was used to help analyze and interpret the results of the semi structured interviews.

**Sampling**

The sample for this research was drawn from the low income single mother population in Southeastern Ohio. Initially, posted notices and newspaper advertisements were used to identify and recruit prospective participants for this research (SEE APPENDIX A). Posted notices were put up strategically in various locations around
Southeastern Ohio. The locations for the notices were chosen because they were places where low income single parents may frequently be found. These areas are public libraries, laundromats, discount department/grocery stores, county Departments of Job and Family Services, county welfare offices, and fast food restaurants. In addition, advertisements were placed in papers that serviced various locations of Southeastern Ohio to reach as many different parts of the region as possible. Referrals from previous participants were also requested thus allowing for the use of a snowfall sampling technique to recruit additional prospective participants. In all, interviews were conducted with 10 single mothers, most of who responded to the notices placed in public libraries. Although the N is small, it allowed for me to get a broad understanding of the issues single mothers in the region face.

In order to participate in the current study, respondents had to meet the following criteria: be a single mother at least 18 years of age, be poor, and reside in the Appalachian region of Ohio. For the purposes of this study, single mothers were defined as unmarried women, either divorced or never married, raising one or more children. While the federal poverty measure is often used in research, I did not use this measure in this study to determine which single mothers are poor. This decision was made in part because past research has demonstrated that the current poverty measure is a not a sufficient indicator of material need. In 1992, a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study panel, established by congress, issued a report, entitled *Poverty: A New Approach*, stating that the current poverty measure is inadequate. Even the federal Food Stamp program makes its guidelines at 130 percent of the poverty threshold. For the purpose of
this study, poor single mothers will be defined as a single mother who is eligible to receive or is currently receiving any type of government need based aid, such as TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families), child care subsidies, or food stamps. Overall, this definition allows for a more appropriate measure of who is poor and who is not. The specific geographic boundaries of what is considered Appalachia vary (Billings and Blee, 2000). This varies for a combination of political, economic, and social regions. The Appalachian Regional Commission is the government agency that is in charge of determining what regions are considered Appalachia. This agency defines the Appalachian region as “a 200,000 square mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia” (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2005). This study defines Appalachia in the same way that the Appalachian Regional Commission defines it and focuses primarily on counties in Southeastern Ohio. Thus, all the respondents for this study were from four Ohio counties (Athens, Pike, Jackson, and Vinton) which fall in the Appalachia region, as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Sample Characteristics

Based on an analysis of the brief survey, demographic characteristics were compiled for the sample in this study (SEE APPENDIX B). Because this study was done in rural Appalachia, it was not surprising that 100% of the mothers for this research were
Caucasian, since rural Appalachia is predominately white. The mean age for the sample was 31.3 with a range from 22-45 years of age. Thirty percent of the mothers had never been married and seventy percent of the mothers were currently divorced. The average number of children in the sample was 3.2 with forty percent having 4 or more children. The highest level of education achieved by the majority of the women was a high school degree or GED (80%), while thirty percent of the mothers had some college. In terms of household income, seventy percent reported household incomes were below $10,000 per year, with thirty percent reporting no income and still living with their parents.

A comparison between the demographic characteristics of the sample to the overall demographics of the counties that the sample was taken reveals that the mothers in this sample differ significantly from the average individual in their county (See Table 2). The mothers in the sample have a much lower average per capita income ($6,571) and significantly higher unemployment (30%) and poverty rates (100%) than the averages for their respective counties (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2004).

**Interview Procedure**

Interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participants. Most of the interviews took place in public and college libraries, while one interview took place at a fast food restaurant. Prior to each interview, I arrived at least twenty minutes early and set up two tape recorders in as private a location as possible.

Upon arriving at the interview location, prospective participants were advised of the purpose, procedures, and risks of their participation in the research. Next, prospective
participants were informed that the interviews were anonymous and confidential. Thus, no identifying information would be attached to their interviews. However, interviews would be audio-taped for research purposes only and destroyed at the end of the study. At this time participants were asked to read and sign a written informed consent form (SEE APPENDIX C). Once consent was acquired, participants were asked to fill out a short survey designed to collect demographic information. After completing the short survey, the tape recorder was turned on and participants were advised that they did not have to answer questions if they did not want to, could request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time, and could stop the interview if they so desired.

At this time, the semi-structured in-depth interviews were administered to the participants. The length of the interviews varied from 30 minutes to nearly two hours, but most of the interviews were under an hour. The instrument used in these interviews consisted of 20 open-ended questions that collected information on the actual lived experience of single mothers (SEE APPENDIX D). In order to gain an in-depth knowledge about the women’s lives, the open-ended questions covered everything from general topics, such as what they feel is the best thing about living in the Appalachian region, to specific topics, such as what they view to be their greatest obstacle to providing for their families. All the questions were oriented toward gaining as clear picture as possible of the lived experiences of these women.
Interview Analysis

All audio-taped interviews were numbered with no other identifying information and stored in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher during the duration of this research. In order to insure confidentiality, at no time were the names of the participants ever used in the interviews or ever associated with the number that was used to identify specific interviews.

The audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and stored on CD-Rs by interview number. The CD-Rs were also stored under lock and key. Only the researcher and his thesis advisor had access to the transcriptions on the CD-Rs.

Like the research completed by Hays’, this study has taken an inductive approach toward analyzing the interview data. This approach was selected in that the main purpose of this study is to contribute new insights into the poverty experienced by single mothers and an inductive approach allows the data speak for itself.

The goal of this analysis was to use themes as analytic tools for making generalizations about the lives of poor Appalachian single mothers. This involved finding concepts that were grounded in the interview data. This process of concept formation took place when the data was being coded. The data was coded by organizing it into categories on the basis of themes. During the coding process, the transcribed interviews were examined numerous times. As the data was coded, new concepts and generalizations about the data were developed. These concepts and generalizations permitted me to gain a better and more complete understanding of the real lives of poor Appalachian single mothers.
Survey Format

In addition to the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured in-depth interview, a brief survey was given to the participants. This survey collected demographic data on the participants to aid in the analysis of the interview data. The primary goal of this survey was to determine similarities/differences between the participants. In other words, to determine if the sample was homogeneous or if there existed critical differences in the single mother population being examined.

The short survey took the form of a questionnaire with 10 closed ended questions. (See APPENDIX E) The participants completed the survey independently, but were asked if they needed assistance in understanding or reading the questions. The survey took about ten minutes to complete.

Survey Analysis

The analysis of the survey data consisted of calculating the percentage for each variable. This allowed me to determine similarities/differences between the participants of the study and get a good idea of the demographic characteristics of my sample.

Age was determined by asking respondents how old they were. Education was determined by asking respondents what was the highest grade they completed and by asking respondents how many years of college, if any, they completed. Income was measured by asking respondents how much they made from their work in a year. Race was determined by asking respondents to self identify their racial/ethnic background.
Marital status was measured by asking respondents whether they were always single or whether they are divorced. The number of children was measured by asking respondents how many children they had. Place of residence was determined by asking respondents what state and county they currently resided in. Living arrangements were determined by asking respondents if they live at home with their parents, live alone with their children, or to explain any other type of living arrangements that they had.
Chapter 5: Results

Overall, four themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data concerning poor Appalachian single mothers:

1. Most of the single mothers interviewed wanted to work, but often structural factors prevented them from achieving self-sufficiency.

2. Most of the mothers faced rural specific problems, such as the lack of jobs, public transportation, opportunities for their children, and infrastructure.

3. Most of the single mothers saw distinctions between deserving and undeserving poor that mirror the views of the larger society even as their lived experiences were at odds with what larger society would predict.

4. There existed two distinct types of single mothers in the interview data: those who were striving for self sufficiency, either by necessity or motivation to provide a better life for themselves and their family and those who were supported entirely by their families.

As stated above, there are four important themes that emerged from an inductive analysis of the interview data. Each of these themes will be discussed in depth in the following sections.

Desire to Work

The first notable theme that emerged from the data was that most of the single mothers interviewed wanted to work and be self sufficient. This was not surprising considering prior research on single mothers (Hays, 2003; Edin and Lein, 1997) suggests that most single mothers want to work, but often structural factors prevented them from achieving self-sufficiency through employment. The current research had similar findings. The culture of poverty theory would expect “the existence of an outlook and
style of life which is radically present-oriented and therefore attaches no value to work, sacrifice, self-improvement, or service to family, friends, or community” (Banfield, 1974:235). But, contrary to what the individual paradigm of poverty would predict, most of the Appalachian single mothers were not enmeshed in a “culture of poverty”. The results of the current study indicate that the majority of this sample of women had no such outlook or style of life. In fact, the findings demonstrated that the majority of these single mothers had good work ethic and a general commitment to mainstream economic values, including education, sacrifice, and self improvement. Seven out of ten of the single mothers were working at least half time. During the interviews, most of the mothers empathized their enthusiasm for work itself. The remarks of one mother were representative of the broader group, as she said,

“I love to work, I have been working since I was 16. I just wished that Kroger paid us a little better… I want to work because not working makes me feel like a leech. Besides, I want to set a good example for my kids”.

Another mother made a similar comment that spoke to the strong desire to work. However, she also addressed the issue of limited wages that many of the mothers earned while working. She said,

“I always worked. My mom and dad always worked. I just don’t make that much money……I work harder than some who make tons more than me. ”

This commitment to mainstream economic values included a dedication to education and self improvement. Many of the mothers clearly articulated that they valued education. They saw education as a way to gain the basic skills needed to find well-paying jobs. One mother noted,
“…..having an education is really important if you want a decent job. But, when I had my first kid, going to school was not the most important thing to worry about. Food and stuff was the only thing I was worried about.”

While many of these mothers valued education, they also provided specific educational plans and career goals that didn’t work out for a variety of reasons, the most common being the economic and time constraint due to having a full-time low-wage job and being the sole care provider for their children. One mother points out,

“I always wanted to be a nurse, I got good grades in school and even started college, but I had to quit. I had no place to put my kids when I was in school or doing homework or something”.

Another mother had trouble going back to school, because there was no time between work and her family responsibilities. This mother notes,

“I work all day at work and I work all night at home…I want to go to school, but I can’t…I already work over forty hours a week and we need that money”.

Rather than being enmeshed into a “culture of poverty” the majority of the mothers in this study were hard working women committed to family, sacrifice, and self improvement. So, why do these women suffer from persistent poverty? Both, Hays (2003) and Edin and Lein’s (1997) studies suggest that the main cause of the poverty experienced by poor single mothers is the lack of jobs with wages sufficient enough to allow these women to pay their bills and provide for their children. Not surprisingly, this research found that Appalachian single mothers face the same problem. When asked about why they were on public assistance, a significant pattern in the interviews was that
employment and a strong work ethic alone were not always sufficient for the achievement of financial self sufficiency. One single mother said,

“When I had my first child, I was determined to support me and him. I didn’t want to be no welfare mother. Unfortunately, the jobs I got only paid minimum wage, no insurance. When he (the baby) got sick, I had no choice”.

Most of the single mothers expressed similar experience when discussing public assistance and self sufficiency. As another mother stated,

“I have a full time job, I go to school, and I still depend on food stamps. It roughly breaks down to about 10 bucks a day, but with four kids I need it to survive”.

Another issue that participants discussed when responding to questions about work, self sufficiency and assistance was the financial burden of childcare. One mother expressed concern about the fact that a babysitter would cost as much as she would earn working. She notes,

“I got rent, bills. How can I afford a babysitter? I can’t work until my baby gets older. The babysitter would get more than me”.

The findings of this study suggest that commitment to work is often in conflict with a commitment to their family’s well-being. Many of the mothers were underemployed or unemployed, because they decided not to work additional hours in the best interests of their children. When asked about the problems that they faced as single mothers in the workplace, one mother responded,

“Having kids really hurts me at work. At work, they don’t give us many hours. The only way to get them is to be called in. When they call, I can’t go because who’s going to watch the kids?…..I don’t trust many people to be with
my kids. You never know what’s going to happen or what they’re picking up.”

Other mothers indicate that moral responsibility was another reason they limited their time at work. As one mother indicated, the moral training of her son took precedence over work,

“I don’t work Sundays, because of church. I want my son to have religion. Our busiest day is Sunday and that’s when we get the best tips”.

The theme that most single mothers wanted to work reflects the findings of Hays (2003) research that suggests that single mothers are caught between the competing discourses of family values and self sufficiency. These women often have to make hard choices, such as not working Sundays, for the best interest of their children. This research suggest that the persistent poverty of these single mothers is not the result of a lack the values, but is more a result of structural constraints, such as low paying jobs, preventing these mothers from having the ability to meet the requirements of both the social values of self sufficiency and family devotion at the same time.

**Rural Specific Problems**

Prior research (Brown and Lichter, 2004; Mills and Hazarika, 2003) suggests that many single mothers face rural specific problems. In Brown and Lichter’s (2004) study on urban and rural single mothers, they found that both groups of mothers faced high levels of low wages, chronic distress and economic insecurity, but there were spatial differences in the structural disadvantages that single mothers face. They found that, despite similar survival strategies, non-metropolitan single mothers are less likely than
metropolitan single mothers to benefit economically from full time employment, because of less access to higher paying jobs. Similar findings emerged from the data of this study. When asked if single mothers in rural Southeastern Appalachian Ohio face any regional disadvantages that mothers in other parts of the country may not have to face, the majority of the mothers cited either the lack of jobs, public transportation, and opportunities for their children as major drawbacks of living in rural Southeastern Ohio. Many of the mothers also indicated that family ties and not wanting to live in rural environments prevented them from leaving the area in spite of the drawbacks of living in rural Southeastern Ohio.

The lack of jobs or lack of jobs paying a living wage was the most common response that the women gave when asked if there were any unique disadvantages that rural Appalachian single mothers face. One mother said,

“There’s nothing here……..The only places to work are fast food places. They don’t pay no money. Money seems to be the root of all the problems of single mothers.”

Along similar lines of thought, another mother responded,

“There’s not much around here. This is Pike County. We got the Mill’s Pride place, but that’s about it. It’s hard to find good jobs. I’m very fortunate to get the job I have. I got lucky.”

Some of the mothers were not as fortunate in that good paying jobs are not always available, as one mother noted,

“I haven’t been able to find anything (jobs) decent, but I’m still looking. Until then, I’m going to continue delivering papers.”
Many expressed fears that the lack of jobs in Southeastern Ohio was only going to get worse. When asked to give her opinion about the future of single mothers in the area, one mother responded,

“What do I think is the future of single mothers around here? Well, even the little bit of good jobs that we got are leaving. I don’t think it’s going to be pretty”.

The fear that the lack of jobs will get worse led some of the mothers to worry about their children’s future in the Southeastern Ohio area. One mother responded,

“I hope my kids get out of here (Southeast Ohio). What are they going to do around here? There’s no place decent to work. I want my kids to go where they can have more opportunities to do what they want to do…… I love my kids, but what are they going to do around here.

Fears over having adequate transportation was another common response that the women gave when asked about unique disadvantages of rural Southern Ohio single mothers. While public transportation is available in urban areas, it is non-existent in many isolated rural communities (Mills and Hazarika, 2003). This lack of public transportation is a major obstacle for the rural poor, who need reliable transportation to and from work, school, and stores. However, it was particularly problematic for single mothers in these areas. Single mother households have the highest poverty rate in America (US Bureau of Census, 2003) and most single mothers are the sole provider for their children (Hays, 2003). This makes single mothers in general, and Appalachian single mothers in particular, vulnerable to obstacles preventing them from making ends meet for their families. The response from one woman was representative of the majority of the other women interviewed as she stated,
“Transportation. I have to drive an hour, just to get to work. That makes it hard. Car, gas, and everything”.

When asked to explain a little more about her transportation problems, she responded,

“I’m usually late paying my insurance and I get suspension notices. My insurance is very important. If I lose it, I lose my license. Then I can’t work.”

Voicing similar concerns about transportation problems, another mother responded,

“I don’t know how long it (her truck) will hold up. It’s on its last legs. Where we live, I can’t go anywhere without a vehicle.”

When asked if single mothers in Southeastern Ohio face any regional disadvantages that mothers in other parts of the country may not have to face, the majority of the mothers cited either the lack of jobs, public transportation, and opportunities for their children as major drawbacks of living in rural Southeastern Ohio. In addition to structural drawbacks, many of the mothers indicated that one of the biggest disadvantages of being a single mother in an isolated area is the lack of emotional support. These responses of the mothers demonstrate that regional differences do impact single mothers and that this needs to be addressed in public policy. Assumptions about single mothers being a homogeneous population all facing the same problems ignores the reality of the diverse regional obstacles that many single mothers face. The next section reveals that the mother’s responses also demonstrated that they themselves had assumptions about the poverty experienced by single mothers.
Deserving and Undeserving Poor

Prior research (Katz, 1989) tells us that there is an enduring attempt to classify poor people by merit, which has led to artificial categories that separate people, who cannot survive by themselves into the “deserving and undeserving poor”. Katz notes, “The issue becomes not only who can fend for themselves without aid, but more important, whose behavior and character entitles them to the resources of others” (Katz, 1989:10). While deserving poor, such as veterans, the elderly, and the disabled, got help from programs created by public policy without stigma, poverty became a stigma for most of the poor, notably single mothers. Mainstream discourse about poverty still reflects these artificial categories about the poor, which stigmatizes the poor and hides the true causes of poverty (Katz, 1989).

Discrimination plays a major role in creating and strengthening these oppressive categories of deserving and undeserving poor people. Single mothers face powerful stereotypes that have made them readily identifiable symbols of societal failures in family and work life (Hays, 2003). Much of the discrimination that single mothers face comes from patriarchy and racism (Hays, 2003).

Many single mothers indicated that they have faced discrimination. For example one mother noted,

“[The county that I live in] tends to discriminate against women. If a man has a piece of paper that says he’s married to a woman. He can do what he wants to her despite what the law says. [The adjacent county] tends to be the same way. My ex-husband attacked my 12 year old. He is abusive. The law won’t do anything. Says a father has a right to discipline his kids. I want better for my kids when they’re grown”.
When asked if there was any disadvantages or discrimination that single mothers face in the workforce one mother replied,

> At work men tend to get paid better because the bosses think they got families to support. My friend Jamie’s son Michael got hired where we work and now he’s making more than both of us”.

The discrimination that single mothers face creates a process of cultural distortion and exclusion that translates social and moral complexity into stereotypes that obscures the more difficult dilemmas and the more disturbing social inequalities involved in single mother poverty (Hays, 2003). In Hays’ (2003) research, she found that many single mothers expressed support for programs, like the Personal Responsibility Act, because they have internalized the moral categories of the “culture of poverty” theory. According to Hays, these moral categories of “deserving and undeserving poor” construct moral distinctions between “bad” and “good” welfare mothers and aids to disseminate negative images of welfare mothers.

The current research suggests that most of the Appalachian single mothers saw distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor, even as their lived experiences were at odds with what the “culture of poverty” would predict. Most of the mothers interviewed expressed feeling to varying degrees that the majority of single mothers in broader society are part of a culture of dependency. That is, they believed that single mothers should be more self sufficient and were exploiting the support systems of larger society. For example, one mother said,
“I think that a lot of the single mothers out there need to set a better example for their kids. All some do is sit at home and collect checks and their kids end up doing the same.”

However, when discussing their personal experiences they viewed themselves as different from other mothers and not representative of the culture of dependency found in larger society. For example, one mother indicated that a culture of dependency existed in the Appalachian area when she stated:

“Unemployment and there’s a culture here where people feel that everything should be given to them. People don’t want to work.”

Another mother indicated that a culture of dependency exists in a low income housing complex that she used to live in. She notes,

“When I first got divorced, I lived in low income housing and hmm. I don’t mean to sound like a snob or anything, but the people, we were all in the same boat to speak: single mothers, kids. But I see that after 20 years these kids are back. Living in the same complex, getting public help and stuff. I think certain people tend to rely on it too much. They don’t go out and try to find a job get education or whatever”.

Interestingly, while the mothers expressed beliefs that the majority of single mothers were caught in a culture of poverty, they felt that they themselves had escaped. For example one mother stated:

“I almost got caught in that (culture of poverty) myself….if you get help in the welfare department, you can end up just relying on that forever”.

Another mother explained how she escaped a culture of dependency by having a work ethic. She notes,
“I was blessed with the notion to go out and do for yourself. Often I think people, maybe, don’t have that and my heart really goes out to them. I’ve lived here for eight years. I’m from up North, by Dayton. You see a lot of that in cities. Down here too.”

Racism is a factor in the broader discrimination that single mothers face and plays a major role in creating and strengthening oppressive categories of deserving and undeserving poor people (Hays, 2003). Because the sample in the current research was entirely White, none of the mothers reported being the victim of racial discrimination. But, sadly, racial stereotypes were used by some of the mothers in the survey to classify others as the “undeserving poor”. In some of the interviews, there existed an underlying theme of subtle racism that wasn’t anticipated. For example, when asked to describe the circumstances that led to her becoming a single mother, one mother replied,

“My husband left us…. I didn’t plan it. I’m not from the Ghetto or anything.”

Along similar lines, when asked if single mothers face discrimination, another mother said,

“They (African Americans) do it themselves. Like if you’re in an inner city, with black people. How they talk and act. Baby’s Momma! It just perpetuates what everybody in the world already thinks about them.”

Katz (1989) points out that racism is one of the forces that splits peoples image of the poor into undeserving and deserving categories. In general, the current research supported the prior work of Katz. This study finds that racism, inaccurate stereotypes, and cultural misconceptions are stigmatizing the poor and obscuring the true causes of poverty even among the poor themselves.
The process of cultural distortion and exclusion that translates social and moral complexity into stereotypes also obscures the differences in the single mother population itself by fostering the assumption that all single mothers are alike (Hays, 2003). This process has translated social complexity into simplified slogans, such as the welfare mother, that ignores the true complexity of the actual single mother population.

**Two Different Types of Mothers**

Prior research (Hays, 2003) suggests that there exist differences in the single mother population that spatial inequality cannot account for. In Hays (2003) research it is apparent that some mothers have a harder time making ends meet than others. Hays examines mothers that her “middle-class neighbors” might interpret as trapped in an “alien culture of poverty”. She finds that these mothers view their work as taking care of their children. Hays notes, “It (the choice to stay home and out of the workplace) is simultaneously heartfelt, rational, theoretically sound, and the result of practical circumstances. Weighing what is offered by Burger Barn against what is offered by her four loving and well-behaved children. (209)”

The interviews from the current research also found that single mothers, who might be labeled by broader society as living in a “culture of poverty,” were in fact making a rational and understandable decision to stay home with their children. The current study exposed that there were two distinct types of single mothers in the interview data: those who were in the workforce and had little if any family support, and those who were unemployed and supported almost entirely by their parents. For the purposes of this
research those mothers who were in the workforce were called the “workforce moms” and those supported primarily by their parents were called “home moms”. The majority of the mothers (70%) were categorized as the workforce moms. These mothers were striving for self sufficiency, either by necessity or motivation to provide a better life for themselves and their children. One workforce mom noted,

“Being a single parent is hard…..The stress is the worst part. My income is all we got. I work as much as I can so I can give my kids what they need”.

Along similar lines, another workforce mom noted,

“I put up with it (a job that she doesn’t like) for my kids…..I want my kids to have more than I had. I want to let them play sports and have some of the extras that they want”.

The rest of the mothers (30%) were the stay at home moms or “home moms”. These mothers didn’t stay at home because they lacked a work ethic; they stayed home because they felt that taking care of their children was their first priority. These mothers expressed a strong dedication to their children and to the belief that having a mother at home is the best thing for a child. As one mother notes,

“I still live with my mom and dad. It’s a good place to be. I like it a lot. I don’t want to work right now. I want to stay home and be there for my daughter. She’s three and wants mommy around”.

Another mother expressed similar concerns when she said,

“I’m very fortunate. I don’t have to work right now. I stay with my mom. My kids need me. I am just not going to work at Bob Evans until my kids get older. They need a stay at home mom.”
These women demonstrated a traditional vision of the family, with a stay at home mother, and seemed committed to giving this environment to their children even in a fatherless home. Hays (2003) research tells us that single mothers are torn between the often competing values of self sufficiency and family responsibility. This research found that Appalachian single mothers often do not have a choice between these values. Home moms stay at home because they feel it is their responsibility as a parent. Likewise, the workforce moms concentrate on self sufficiency because they have a more urgent need to provide ends meet for their family.
Chapter 6: Discussion

This study builds upon Hays’ work by helping to bring about a better and more complete understanding of the real lives of all single mothers, by examining the life experiences of rural Appalachian single mothers, an often invisible group of single mothers. The four themes discovered in the analysis of the research data support a lot of what Hays (2003) found in her analysis of the lived experiences of urban single mothers. Hays found that, despite being discredited by much of academia, the view that those in poverty harbor pathological traits or individual deficiencies has remained a powerful political force shaping public perception of single mothers in the United States. As a result, information about single mothers has been simplified at the societal level, resulting in the development of cultural distortions about single mothers that thwart the development of successful poverty policies. This happens because the process of cultural distortion and exclusion translates social and moral complexity into stereotypes that obscures the hidden causes and solutions of single mother poverty. The findings of this study suggest that Appalachian single mothers also are victims of the cultural distortions stemming from the assumption that those in poverty harbor pathological traits or individual deficiencies. But the findings of the current research expands on Hays’ (2003) research by demonstrating that rural Appalachian single mothers face regional specific challenges, such as the lack of public transportation, which single mothers in urban areas may never encounter.

Many of the findings of the current study were not unexpected because research suggests that both urban and rural poor have some similar experiences in trying to make
ends meet (Brown and Lichter, 2004). As in Hays (2003) study of urban single mothers, the findings of this study make it clear that the sources of Southeastern Ohio single mother poverty can be attributed to neither purely structural nor individual factors. Purely individual paradigms such as those supported by Banfield (1974) or Murray (1984), fail to acknowledge the overwhelming structural barriers that single mothers face in making ends meet for themselves and their children and purely structural paradigms fail to acknowledge the complexities of single mother life. The research by Hays (2003) suggests that most single mothers wanted to work, but structural factors often prevented them from achieving self-sufficiency through employment. The participants in the current study also had a will to work. However, like the mothers in Hays’ study, they lacked access to the type of jobs and affordable services, like childcare, necessary to make work a viable path out of poverty and into self sufficiency. Brown and Lichter’s (2004) report that the structural barriers that single mothers face in making ends meet vary due to spatial differences in the regions in which single mothers live. Rural areas are more geographically isolated and were more likely to have inadequate public transportation. Also, jobs and daycare are harder to come by in rural areas. Similar to findings by Tickamyer, et. al., (2000) the women interviewed noted that the lack of jobs and inadequate public transportation in rural Appalachia made it harder to find and keep a good job.

These mothers clearly shared mainstream American values and many had dreams of education and successful careers, but the hardships prevented them from achieving mainstream stability. Unfortunately, poor Appalachian single mothers are labeled by
mainstream society as part of the undeserving poor, whose behavior and character do not entitle them to the resources of others (Katz, 1989). Thus, popular opinion reflects many misconceptions about why single mothers are poor and what to do about it. The prevalent image that the poor are members of an underclass caught in a culture of poverty that do not want to work is nothing more than the combination of cultural misconceptions, and inaccurate oppressive stereotypes, fueled by racism, classism, and ignorance. This research suggests that most poor Appalachian single mothers were either working or wanted to work if jobs with living wages were available. This finding would indicate that these mothers were clearly not part of a culture of dependency.

These stereotypes and misconceptions do not only affect how society sees single mothers, but how single mothers see themselves. This is potentially the most damaging consequence of the stereotypes affecting single mothers. Most of the single mothers saw distinctions between the deserving and undeserving single mothers that mirror the views of the “culture of poverty” theory even as their lived experiences were at odds with what it would predict. Not only do these stereotypes obscure the true problems facing single mothers, they prevent single mothers and other concerned groups from joining together to advocate for real solutions to the social inequalities and dilemmas that are the primary cause of their poverty. Katz (1989) notes, “by diffusing an image of poor people as split into two sharply divided groups, the underclass helps to perpetuate their own political powerlessness by strengthening the barriers that for so long have divided them against each other” (235). These stereotypes enable oppressive policies such as welfare reform
to find legitimacy within the very population that would be most hurt, allowing the continued oppression of one of the most vulnerable groups in our society.

Just as individual paradigms fail to recognize structural barriers, purely structural paradigms fail to acknowledge the complexities of single mother life. These themes that are from the data in the current research suggests that single mother poverty is caused by individual factors as well as structural factors. But, contrary to what the “culture of poverty” suggest these individual factors are not dysfunctional or pathological values stemming from a sub-culture of poverty. The individual factors that contribute to the poverty of the single mothers interviewed are the desire to give their children the best environment possible and the belief that a stay at home mother is the best option for a child. Hays (2003) research tells us that single mothers are torn between the often competing values of self sufficiency and family responsibility. In the present research there existed two distinct types of Appalachian single mothers that reflected this conflict of values: those who were in the workforce and had little if any family support, and those who were unemployed and supported almost entirely by their parents. There were a few demographic differences between the “workforce moms” and the “home moms” (See Table 3). The most significant being the average income. The “home moms” chose not to work. These mothers had not been driven to stay out of the workforce by laziness or any other dysfunctional value, but an individual choice to do what was best for their children. Many middle class mothers and fathers take time off to be with their young children (Hays, 2003) and some of the mothers in the interviews made the same decision. The difference lies not in the single mothers, but in how society interprets their choices.
When middle class parents stay at home with their children, it is seen as the result of a deep commitment to their child’s well-being. Unfortunately, when poor single mothers make the same decision it is seen as an avoidance of work.

Other demographic differences between the “home moms” and the “workforce moms” include differences in age and number of children. The average age for the “home moms” was 35.33, while the average age for the “workforce moms” was 26.86. The average number of children for the “home moms” was 4.33, while the average number of children for the “workforce moms” was 2.28. These demographic differences bring up many questions as to why “home moms” are older and have more children. Is because they have more family support or could it be reasons yet discovered? While this research doesn’t address this issue, further research, to explain how their lived experiences impact the decisions of single mothers to stay at home or work, can contribute significantly toward developing policy and research that will address the needs of all single mothers.

Due to the small sample size, the findings of this research may not represent a complete picture of the lived experience of Appalachian single mothers. However, the method of sampling and the variability of counties suggest that the data contained a fair depiction of the lives of Appalachian single mothers. Additionally, the findings of this study do demonstrate that single mothers in the Appalachian area are the victims of cultural distortions and exclusions that translates social and moral complexity into stereotypes that obscures the hidden causes and solutions of single mother poverty. As an adaptation of Hays’ (2003) research, the current study was able to adopt the feminist
theoretical perspective that gave her research its capability to look past stereotypes and cultural misconceptions, about poor single mothers. The feminist perspective gave the current study the ability to recognize that the poverty of low income Appalachian single mothers is linked inequality in our society. Also, adopting Hays’ (2003) study’s semi structured in-depth interviews allowed the current research to examine the mother’s own critical analytic insights into the causation of their poverty. Semi-structured interviews were a viable tool for this sample because they allowed for focused, open communication between subject and researcher, which resulted in rich data to investigate the broader question of poverty.

The finding of this research demonstrates that single mother poverty is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomena that has been simplified into stereotypes that obscures the true lived experience of single mothers. The findings also demonstrate that rural Appalachian single mothers experience regional specific problems that need to be addressed. Thus, it is critical that future research focus on learning as much as possible about all the single mothers in our society. It is only with an accurate and sufficient knowledge of the true lived experience of single mothers that we can create effective public policy to combat the hidden causes and find the hidden solutions to the persistent poverty experienced by all single mothers. This will not only increase our understanding of the inequality faced by single mothers, it will also contribute to the cumulative body of knowledge on social inequality by revealing that the causes and solutions to inequality can be hidden and perpetuated by cultural misconceptions and stereotypes.
Policy Recommendations

Overall, these themes tell us a great deal about the direction that future public policy should take. First, the existence of spatial differences in the struggles that single mothers face demonstrates the need to develop policy that includes these differences. For example, single mothers who live in rural Appalachia need access to reliable transportation in order to make up for the lack of public transportation and the geographic isolation of the area. A program that provides vehicles to low income single mothers in isolated rural areas and helps with the payment of car insurance would be a very effective way to assist these mothers in acquiring what they need to help make ends meet.

Single mothers also demonstrated a need for higher paying jobs. The results from this research demonstrate that single mothers want to work, but often structural factors prevented them from achieving self-sufficiency through employment. A raise in the minimum wage would help all poor people and a raise in the minimum wage would be a particularly effective way to help all single mothers. In addition, rural Appalachian regional development would be a good way to increase the amount of adequate paying jobs available to rural Appalachian single mothers.

Furthermore, the existence of two distinct types of single mothers within the Appalachian population demonstrates the need to develop policy that recognizes even greater differences within all single mother populations. The two types of single mothers found in the current research had very different needs. For example, earned income tax credits and a higher minimum wage would probably not be the most effective way to help the home moms, but food stamps, medical cards, and job training for when the kids get
older would be beneficial. The home moms have fewer needs because they have family support. Likewise, food stamps, medical cards, and job training may not be the best way to help the workforce moms, because they may have more urgent need for resources, such as daycare, car insurance, and gas for the car, that the extra income that an earned income tax credit or a higher minimum wage would provide. The point is, attention must be paid to the amount of family support that a single mother has. The workforce moms should have expanded services because they have no family support. Additionally, there may also be distinctions in the needs of rural and urban moms in both categories. Assuming that poor mothers have identical needs is harmful to the most vulnerable, because it can easily mismatch people with the services and support that they need. Thus, instead of one program to address the needs of all single mothers, we need to offer a variety of different services that mothers could choose from.

Also, future policy must be based on a more accurate and complex understanding of the lives of single mothers. Racism, sexism, and classism has simplified information about single mothers at the societal level resulting in oppressive stereotypes and cultural misconceptions. The result is that single mothers are seen as lazy cheats that are unworthy of obtaining aid from government programs, despite providing an important, possibly the most important service, to society: raising the children. This perspective hinders the development of appropriate poverty policy, by obscuring the importance of service that these women provide for our society. In order to correct this, future policy needs to treat all human beings with the dignity and compassion that they deserve. More particularly, it should be based on empirical evidence about the lives and problems that
single mothers face, instead of stereotypes or misconceptions. In addition, future policy must provide single mothers with the same safety net that we provide for the elderly or the disabled. Arguably, mothers have the most important job in society: raising the next generation. Female headed single parent families make up half of all families in poverty (US Bureau of Census, 2002b). They are the group that has traditionally had the highest poverty rate in America (US Bureau of Census, 2002b). Poverty is known to have far reaching effects on physical and mental health. Besides structural improvements, providing emotional support for single mothers and their children would be a great way to help this vulnerable portion of the population. Thus, an economic safety net and emotional support for single mothers and their children is necessary to ensure the physical and mental health of the next generation of Americans.

Taken together, these recommendations call for the creation of poverty policies that recognizes differences in the needs of single mothers and the distinctive experiences based on the local in which they live. Thus, we must also treat all human beings with dignity and compassion. This includes giving welfare benefits to those who need it without stigma or criticism. Poverty is not a personal failure, but failing to help the poor is.
References:


APPENDIX A: NEWSPAPER AND FLYER POSTING

Newspaper/Flyer Posting

Single mother research volunteers needed:

My name is Scott Powell. I am a Sociology Graduate Student at Ohio University. I am doing a study of lower income Southern Ohio single mothers as my thesis. In this research, I intend to talk with lower income single mothers in Southern Ohio to find out what they think are the major problems that they face in making a better life and how they deal with these problems. It is my hope that this will help give us a better understanding of the problems faced by single mothers in the Appalachian region, which could, ultimately, give us a better direction for making new policy that may help them. Volunteers will be asked to participate in an interview, which should take about 1 hour.
## APPENDIX B: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS (N=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 and younger</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 to 30</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and older</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school/GED</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children in Household</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Income ($US)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 15,000</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000 to 25,000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working for Pay</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital History</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Title of Research: Overcoming stereotypes about single mothers: Understanding their actual lived experiences.

Principal Investigator: Scott Powell
Co-Investigator: ____________________________
Department: Sociology/Anthropology

Federal and university regulations require signed consent for participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statements below, please indicate your consent by signing this form.

The goal of this research project is to broaden our understanding of the lived experience of Appalachian low income single mothers. There will be a one-time semi structured interview that will be audio-taped for research purposes. This is the only time you will be interviewed; after the interview, you will not be contacted again.

The questions in the interview will be about your experiences as a single mother in Appalachia. Thus, some of the questions may be about your income, family, and hardships. If you feel uncomfortable, you may stop the interview at any time.

There will be no immediate benefits for participation, other than helping to alleviate stereotypes and misconceptions about Appalachian single mothers.

At no time will your name be released to anyone other than the immediate interviewer. From that point on, the data you provide will be identified by number only. The tapes will be destroyed once the project is complete.

There is no compensation for participating in this research.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Scott Powell at sp979003@ohio.edu or 707-1212 or Debra Henderson at henderd2@ohio.edu or 593-1382.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.
I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.

Signature_________________________________________ Date ______
Printed Name________________________
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I would like to start the interview with a few general questions about single mothers and raising a family in Southern Ohio.

1) In your opinion, is Southern Ohio a good place to raise a family? Please describe why you feel this way.
2) In a poor area like Southern Ohio, are there unique problems that families must deal with when they are trying to make ends meet? Please explain.
3) Do you believe that single mothers also deal with these problems? What do you perceive to be the main problems that single mothers in this area face? How do they deal with these problems? Explain.
4) Do you think that single mothers in this region have the things they need to successfully provide for their families? What else might they need to be successful?
5) Describe any disadvantages single mothers in the area face in getting, and keeping, a job. Describe any advantages that single mothers have when trying to get a job or while working.
6) Do you think that some single mothers in Southern Ohio have a harder time than other single mothers in the area? Why?

Now, let’s discuss your experiences as a single mother.

7) How long have you been a single mother? Please describe the circumstances that led to you becoming a single mother? Tell me a little bit about your children.
8) Describe how being a single mother has impacted you and your child(ren). Has your being a single mother had any impact on the rest of your family? Explain.
9) What are the main problems that you face as a single mother? How do you deal with these problems? Explain.
10) Do you have what you need to successfully provide for your family? How does being a single mother affect your ability to make ends meet? Describe how you manage to make ends meet and provide for your children.
11) Describe any disadvantages you have faced in getting a job or in the workplace, because you were a single mother? How did you deal with them? Are there any benefits for you in being a single working mother?
12) Do you ever need help to make ends meet? What kind of help do you get? What kinds of help do you wish you would get?
13) Do you get any help from the father of your child(ren)? If yes, explain. If no, why doesn’t he help?
14) What is the best part of being a single mother? What is the worst part?

We are almost finished. I would like to ask you a few final questions about helping single mothers in the area.

15) What is the best way to help single mothers in Southern Ohio?
16) Are there any current programs that you think are helpful in assisting single mothers in meeting the needs of their families? What other kinds of program(s) do you think would be helpful?

17) What will the future be for single mothers in the area? Will it be better or worse? Please explain.

18) If you were able to tell the president one thing about what single mothers face in Southern Ohio, what would it be?

Is there anything that I missed in my questions that you think I should know to help me understand what it’s like to be a single mother in Southern Ohio? Is there anything else that you would like to say? Thank you for your time and for sharing your thoughts with me.
APPENDIX E: SHORT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

(1) Currently, how old are you?

(2) What is the highest grade that you completed in school?

(3) How much college have you had?

(4) Do you work? (If so how much do you make in a year?)

(5) What is your ethnic background? White, Hispanic, etc..

(6) How many children do you have?

(7) Have you always been single or are you divorced?

(8) Which State do you currently live in?

(9) Which county do you currently live in?

(10) Do you live at home with your parents, live alone with your children, or do you have another living arrangement? (If so, please explain)
TABLE 1: Poverty Rates in 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Poverty</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All adults (18 or above)</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals living in Extreme Poverty</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parents</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2002 Census Data
### TABLE 2: COMPARISON BETWEEN SAMPLE AND COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

TABLE 2: Comparison between sample and county demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Category</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Athens</th>
<th>Pike</th>
<th>Jackson</th>
<th>Vinton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>$ 6,571</td>
<td>$ 19,805</td>
<td>$ 19,772</td>
<td>$ 19,496</td>
<td>$ 16,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>Per Capita</td>
<td>Per Capita</td>
<td>Per Capita</td>
<td>Per Capita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of adults with at least a high school diploma</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>70.1%</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2004 Appalachian Regional Commission
### TABLE 3: “HOME MOM” AND “WORKFORCE MOM” DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Poverty</th>
<th>Home Mom</th>
<th>Workforce Mom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>35.33</td>
<td>26.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average income from work</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$9071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Children</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>