Perceptions of Appalachian Students about Post-Secondary Education

A dissertation presented to

the faculty of

the College of Education of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Scott M. Powell

June 2008
This dissertation titled
Perceptions of Appalachian Students about Post-Secondary Education

by

SCOTT M. POWELL

has been approved for
the Department of Educational Studies
and the College of Education by

Francis E. Godwyll
Assistant Professor of Educational Studies

Renée A. Middleton
Dean, College of Education
ABSTRACT

POWELL, SCOTT M., Ph.D., June 2008, Curriculum and Instruction, Cultural Studies

Perceptions of Appalachian Students about Post-Secondary Education (212 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Francis E. Godwyll

This research is an exploratory inquest that seeks to examine the perceptions of Appalachian students about post-secondary education. The purpose of this research is to holistically study how Appalachian students view postsecondary institutions in order to understand the factors that promote academic achievement and the factors that contribute to the gender gap that exists in postsecondary education in Appalachia. The significance of this research is its ability to contribute to the knowledge base on Appalachian students and be useful to a variety of institutions and individuals helping historically underachieving students, including state and federal policymakers, federal and state agencies, educational institutions within Appalachia and other impoverished regions, and to academics and instructors.

This study employed an exploratory, qualitative, and face to face methodology to examine the perceptions of 17 male and 17 female 18 to 25 year old Appalachian students from two different universities, Ohio University in Athens and Shawnee State in Portsmouth. The sample from this research was obtained by purposeful sampling in order to gain an in-depth understanding about the issue under investigation. The instrument used in this analysis was a semi-structured in-depth interview guide, which allowed for the exploration of the student's own critical analytic insights into their perceptions about the phenomenon under investigation. This methodology enabled the researcher to gain a
more complete understanding of the social phenomena associated with the perceptions of Appalachian students about post-secondary education.

This research reveals that the issues related to the postsecondary educational achievement of Appalachian students require a holistic view incorporating economic, social, educational components. The findings specifically reveal, among others, that Appalachian students highly value education, suffer socio-cultural barriers to educational access, are very dependant on actors outside the family structure for motivation to pursue higher education, often lacked financial resources for college, often feel unmotivated in high school and college and suggest a multidimensional plan for Appalachian educational realization. Therefore, this research adds to the growing body of literature that seeks to eliminate racial, gender, social class, religious and ethnic discriminatory barriers to educational access and achievement.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Francis E. Godwyll
Assistant Professor of Educational Studies
DEDICATION

To my family and friends.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to recognize the assistance received throughout my three years as a doctoral student. I extend my appreciation to my committee members, including, Dr. Sandra Turner, Dr. Rosalie Romano, Dr. Diane Ciekawy, Dr. Lena Myers, Dr. Debra Henderson, and Dr. Najee Muhammad, for their invaluable guidance, expertise and support. I would also like to thank the incredible administrative staff for the help that they have given me since I began this program. My heartfelt appreciation goes to these people who have helped me immensely.

I would like to express special gratitude to Dr. Francis Godwyll. If it wasn’t for his encouragement and help throughout my time at Ohio University and the research and writing of this dissertation, I don’t think that I would have been able to finish. His tireless devotion to his students and their success makes him a great inspiration to us all. I am deeply indebted to him.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 3

Dedication ........................................................................................................................................... 5

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................................. 6

List of Tables .................................................................................................................................... 11

List of Figures .................................................................................................................................... 12

Chapter 1: Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 13

  Background of Study .......................................................................................................................... 13

  Subjectivity ....................................................................................................................................... 21

  Research Problem ............................................................................................................................. 22

  Research Questions ........................................................................................................................... 22

  Purposes of Research ....................................................................................................................... 23

  Significance of Study ........................................................................................................................ 24

  Delimitation ..................................................................................................................................... 25

  Definition of Terms .......................................................................................................................... 26

Chapter 2: Literature Review ................................................................................................................. 27

  Barriers to Educational Achievement ............................................................................................. 27

  Appalachia and Public Perception ....................................................................................................... 35

    Early History .................................................................................................................................. 35

    Beginnings of Present Appalachia .................................................................................................... 36

    Appalachia after the Civil War ......................................................................................................... 40
The Role of Ideology and “Ideological Management” in Creating the Appalachian Perception in the Public imagination.........................44

Historical Overview of Conceptions of Inequality in the United States........55

The Lived Experiences of Marginalized Populations.................................70

Theoretical Perspective.............................................................................82

Freirean Educational Theory...............................................................84

Dialectic Relationships.........................................................................84

Problem Posing Education.................................................................85

Understanding Language, Dialogue, and Dialectical Relationships...........88

Freirean Educational Theory and Educational Inequality....................89

Gramsci’s Theory of Education...........................................................90

Hegemony.........................................................................................90

Agency...............................................................................................91

Two Types of Intellectuals and Educational Practice.............................92

Chapter 3: Methodology.......................................................................94

Research Design..................................................................................94

Participants.........................................................................................95

Selection of Participants......................................................................96

Site Selection......................................................................................97
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Percentage of Adult Population Who Are College Graduates……………..…14
Table 1.2: Percentage of the Ohio Population (25 and over) with Degrees……………...15
Table 1.3: Appalachian Counties with Proportions of College Graduates above U.S.
                                      Average…………………………………………………………………………..16
Table 1.4: Educational Attainment of Young Adults……………………………………19
Table 4.1: Age Range of Participants…………………………………………………………109
Table 4.2: Area of Participants Residency by County……………………………………111
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Sub-Regions of Appalachia .................................................. 14
Figure 1.2: Educational Completion Rates of Appalachian Counties ........ 17
Figure 4.1: Findings Regarding Question 1 ........................................... 113
Figure 4.2: Findings Regarding Question 2 ........................................... 136
Figure 4.3: Findings Regarding Question 3 ........................................... 152
Figure 5.1: Powell’s Plan for Appalachian Educational Realization .......... 173
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

This study examines the perceptions of male and female 18 to 25 year old Appalachian students from two different Ohio universities, Ohio University and Shawnee State University, in order to gain insights into the lived experience of Appalachian students in two counties: Athens and Scioto. Appalachian voices are critical to understanding the worldview of Appalachian students. Research that is done in isolation from the perspective of the research subjects is undermining to the subjects and incomplete because it ignores the actual lived experiences of the research subjects (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

Both these universities are located in Appalachia. Appalachia is a sociopolitical region reaching from Mississippi into Pennsylvania. Appalachia is a sociopolitical region because it is defined by a combination of social and political factors. Consequently, Appalachia is both a social construct defined by a particular subculture of people and a political construct defined by boundaries that are determined by a county-by-county political process involving the allocation of federal subsidies. Appalachia has historically been one of the poorest regions of the United States. It significantly lags behind the rest of the nation in postsecondary education, especially in distressed counties, as illustrated by Table 1.1.
Table 1.1

*Percentage of Adult Population Who Are College Graduates*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Total</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachia Total</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Appalachia</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Appalachia</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Appalachia</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distressed Appalachian Counties</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.1: Sub-Regions of Appalachia

Source: 2000 Census and Appalachian Regional Commission
Ohio is a prime example of this lag, as illustrated by Table 1.2. In Appalachian Ohio counties, the rate of adults who have any college or technical school education beyond high school runs generally 20% below the state average (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008). Additionally, a very high percentage of the children from low income families who graduate from high school do not graduate from college (Kane, 1994; Heckman, Locher, & Taber, 1998).

Table 1.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of the Ohio Population aged 25 and over with College Degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Ohio County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian Counties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Appalachian County</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2000 Census

The reasons for the postsecondary educational lag in Appalachia are complex. Appalachia is not a monolithic region. Statistically, different counties fare far better than others do. In fact, this is part of the reason that Ohio University and Shawnee State University were chosen for this study. These universities are located in two very different Appalachian counties: Athens and Scioto. Ohio University is located in Athens County. Statistically, Athens County is doing well in postsecondary educational achievement. In fact, in Athens County, 32.24% of the population age 25 and older has a college degree, well above the state (27.03%) and national (24.4%) averages (US Census Bureau, 2007). This is rare in Appalachia because only 18 of the 410 counties in Appalachia have a
percentage of the population with college degrees above the national average, as illustrated by the Table 1.3 and Figure 1.2 below:

Table 1.3

*Appalachian Counties with Proportions of College Graduates above U.S.*

*Average (24.6%)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Percentage of Population that are College Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tompkins, NY</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelby, TN</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre, PA</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery, VA</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oktibbeha, MS</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison, TN</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwinnett, GA</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watauga, NC</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monongalia, WV</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knox, TN</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forsyth, NC</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee, GA</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenville, SC</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polk, NC</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athens, OH</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, NC</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.3 Continued

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buncombe, NC</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson, AL</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2000 Census

Figure 1.2: Educational Completion Rates of Appalachian Counties

Source: Appalachian Regional Commission

On the other hand, Scioto County, the location of Shawnee State University falls far short of the state and national averages with only 16.18% of the population age 25 and older having a college degree (US Census Bureau, 2007). The large graduate student population of Ohio University skews this data but only barely because the measure of educational attainment is only for the population aged 25 and above, which excludes all but a small fraction of the student population.
Shawnee State University is an open admissions institution that serves an Appalachian region where many students are first-generation college attendees. Shawnee State is the regional state university of Southern Ohio and is located in Portsmouth, the seat of Scioto County (Shawnee State University, 2007). Shawnee has 80 bachelors and associate degrees, at the lowest tuition rate among Ohio public universities (Shawnee State University, 2007). Enrollment at Ohio's newest four-year university is typically around 3,500 with over 60% of the students coming from Scioto and surrounding counties and over 90% coming from Ohio (Shawnee State University, 2007). Ohio University is located in Athens County and is the oldest public institution of higher learning in the state of Ohio and the first in the Northwest Territory (Ohio University, 2007). Admission to Ohio University is granted to the best-qualified applicants as determined by a selective admission policy (Ohio University, 2007). Ohio University has 18,000 students and more than 250 degree programs, including associates, bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees (Ohio University, 2007). 86% of the students enrolled at the Athens campus are Ohio residents, with the greatest number of students coming from Cuyahoga County (Ohio University, 2007). Consequently, Ohio University and Shawnee State are two very different Appalachian universities existing in two very different environments serving different student populations.

College serves a variety of important social/cultural functions for society and the individual, including training for the job market, developing the tools for social change, providing a right of passage for young adults, and helping to develop a technological society. However, from a strictly economic perspective, at least some college or post-
secondary training is becoming more and more necessary to obtain jobs that pay a livable wage (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2007). Consequently, it is critical that we close the college going gaps in the nation (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2007). Education is becoming an increasingly important tool to combat poverty and social inequality in society (Flournoy, 1982). There are many theories for the existence of persistent educational gaps for this population. Among these explanations include: low standards, lack of resources, lack of motivation, structural discrimination, cultural factors, and a host of other economic, political, psychological, and social factors. While factors can be examined and analyzed one by one, this complex problem will be analyzed using a holistic research-based approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem.

Gender will be another area of investigation in this study. Since World War II, more and more women have graduated from college. In fact, since the mid-1970s, in Appalachia and the rest of the country, more young women than men have graduated from college, as Table 1.4 illustrates (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2007).

Table 1.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment of Young Adults (ages 25-34), 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Sexes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian sub-regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE Tennessee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.4 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Kentucky</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>26.7 (5.8)</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE Ohio</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>32.0 (7.2)</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE Pennsylvania</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>27.9 (8.5)</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Total</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>32.3 (8.5)</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian sub-regions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Alabama</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>37.6 (7.6)</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE Tennessee</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>23.0 (5.2)</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Kentucky</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>30.7 (8.8)</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE Ohio</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>35.1 (9.1)</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE Pennsylvania</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>29.1 (9.5)</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Total</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>28.6 (6.6)</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian sub-regions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Alabama</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>28.3 (7.0)</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE Tennessee</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>8.8 (2.5)</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Kentucky</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>22.2 (5.3)</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE Ohio</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>29.0 (5.3)</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE Pennsylvania</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>26.8 (7.6)</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2000 Census and Appalachian Regional Association
This has resulted in a postsecondary educational gap between men and women in college graduation rates. Consequently, this research will also look at the differences in educational experiences and perceptions about post-secondary education among male and female Appalachian students.

**Subjectivity**

In qualitative research, disciplined subjectivity and reflexivity is vital to the research process (Mason, 1996). As an Appalachian male, this research relates closely to my background. I began my college career at Shawnee State University, where I studied History and Social Science. According to Weber (1949), there is no fact/value separation in social research. A person's social location in society shapes his ideas and viewpoints (Mannheim, 1936). The cultural context of social concepts cannot be purged, and socially meaningful action makes sense only in a cultural context (Weber, 1949, p. 3). Consequently, familiarity with the cultural context of social concepts is an essential element in accurately depicting the phenomena of educational gaps in the United States.

While I feel that my background was ultimately an advantage in this research, it did pose challenges in terms of value neutrality and objectivity. Effective social researchers try to learn the viewpoints of other people and empathize with all parts of society (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). They must adopt a relational position, apart from any other specific social groups, yet be in touch with all groups (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). This required me to be constantly aware of how my position, as an Appalachian male
student, affected my interpretation of social reality and keep the focus and goal of this research on the means and mechanisms of how the social world works, not on ends or normative goals (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003).

Research Problem

The research problems addressed in this study is the lack of a sufficient understanding of the actual lived experiences of students from Appalachia and the reasons why there exists a persistent post-secondary educational achievement gap between Appalachian students and the rest of the nation. Appalachian students come from an economically depressed area and may face unique issues in their pursuit of post-secondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Consequently, there is a need to examine the lived experiences of Appalachian students. Additionally, there continues to be a gender gap in Appalachian post-secondary education that warrants analysis. Research regarding the lived experience of Appalachian students is sparse. This research utilized qualitative methods to more clearly understand the actual lived experiences of Appalachian students, which produced information that can be used to aid many Appalachian students in becoming college graduates.

Research Questions

This research sought to examine the perceptions and experiences of Appalachian students related to post-secondary education in order to gain an understanding of the
actual experiences of these students. Consequently, the research questions that guided this research are as follows:

(1) What are the perceptions of Appalachian students in OU and Shawnee State about post-secondary education?

(2) What factors promote academic attainment of Appalachian students beyond high school?

(3) What are the differences in educational experiences and perceptions about post-secondary education among male and female Appalachian students?

**Purposes of Research**

Given the research questions, the purposes of this research are as follows:

(1) To understand the perception of Appalachian students in OU and Shawnee State about post-secondary education.

(2) To determine the factors that promotes the academic attainment of Appalachian students beyond high school.

(3) To examine the differences in educational experiences and perceptions about post-secondary education among male and female Appalachian students.

**Significance of Study**

This research sought to understand the perceptions of Appalachian students in Ohio University and Shawnee State about their post-secondary education experiences. In
addressing the post-secondary educational gap between Appalachia and the rest of the nation, it would be helpful to understand the attitudes, expectations, obstacles, hardships, or advantages, that this population identifies as either helpful or a hindrance to their college career. Increased knowledge about this population can foster ways to improve educational achievement in this impoverished region and discuss achievement gaps.

Educational research should contribute to knowledge, be useful, and meaningful to the relevant policy makers and practitioners (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). This research contributes to the knowledge base on Appalachian students and could be useful to a variety of institutions and individuals. This data could be useful to state and federal policymakers in their effort to improve educational efficacy and equality, to federal and state agencies searching for the best way to implement educational policy, to educational institutions within Appalachia seeking ways to better serve the surrounding community, and to academics and instructors developing pedagogical methods that can better assist Appalachians in achieving their academic goals.

There is also the significance of examining and fostering an accurate view of a population plagued by cultural stereotypes. Billings and Blee (2000) 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" (p. 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 a homogeneous population possessing a uniform culture" (Billings & Blee, 2000, p.
9). This conceptualization fueled Jack Weller's (1965) 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 (p. 67). Weller found that the people's unwillingness to change was the biggest reason that Appalachians were persistently poor. Weller and the researchers who followed him concluded that alleviating poverty in Appalachia meant changing the attitudes of Appalachian people. The view of Appalachians as backward hillbillies is still a strong discourse in the mainstream American consciousness (Weller, 1965). These stereotypes have enormous consequences on how we view and address the persistent poverty and educational inequality of Appalachia (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008).

**Delimitations**

Due to the small sample size and limited sample area compared to the whole of Appalachia, the findings of this research do not represent a complete picture of the lived experience of all Appalachian students since only two different Ohio universities, Ohio University and Shawnee State, were represented in the sample. As a result, this study’s findings are only on Appalachian Ohio counties.
**Definition of Terms**

Appalachia = a sociopolitical region reaching from Mississippi into Pennsylvania, whose precise boundaries are determined county-by-county according to needs for federal subsidies.

Dialectic Relationship = a thesis, giving rise to its reaction, an antithesis which contradicts or negates the thesis, and the tension between the two being resolved by means of a synthesis (Hegel, 1802).

Holistic = incorporating the concept of holism in theory or practice.

Ideology = organized collection of ideas.

Inequality = the lack of equality in society.

Narrative Approach = the narrative approach emphasizes the active construction of life stories through the interplay of interviewer and interviewee during the telling of a life story (Miller, 2000).

Noumena= the perceiving consciousness.

Phenomena = the external world that we perceive

Post-Secondary Educational Experiences = any formal educational instruction beyond high school.

Qualitative Research = research that seeks an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern human behavior.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this dissertation is organized into four sections, each reviewing the critical points of current knowledge on a topic of interest in this study. The first section is entitled “Barriers to Educational Achievement” and consists of a brief examination of the barriers to educational achievement in the United States and the varying social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic context in which these barriers occur. The second section is entitled “Appalachia and Public Perception” and examines the history of how Appalachia and Appalachians have been conceptualized in mainstream society concentrating on the development of oppression, discrimination and stereotyping in the region. The third section is entitled “Historical Overview of Conceptions of Inequality in the United States” and examines critical points of current knowledge on the historical conception of inequality in the United States. This section of the literature review also examines select literature addressing the lived experience of marginalized populations. The final section examines the theoretical perspectives used in this study: Freireian educational theory and Gramsci’s theory of education.

Barriers to Educational Achievement

More than a half century after Horace Mann linked unequal educational opportunities to persistent poverty, educational inequality continues to put large numbers of students at risk of school failure (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). There are many troubling educational gaps within the United States, including gaps between racial
groups, social classes, and genders, but this study will focus on gaps based on spatial contexts.

Teaching and learning happen within the social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic contexts of a particular place (Carter, 1999). As a result, students from different parts of the country face different barriers to educational achievement because of the varying social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic context in which they live. Carter (1999) writes, “These contexts influence the opportunities students have to learn and what we expect of them” (p. 1). As a result, students from persistently poor areas face particular challenges. The challenges to education are particularly severe for children and young adults living in the nation’s 535 persistently poorest rural counties, most of which are in Appalachia (Carter, 1999).

College or postsecondary training is now necessary to obtain jobs that pay a decent wage (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Thus, education is becoming an increasingly important tool to combat poverty. Although urban poverty currently commands more attention in the popular media, the rural poverty rate is 50% higher than urban poverty rate (US Bureau of Census, 2002a). In addition, it is estimated that 24 % of rural children are living in poverty compared to 22 % of urban children (Billings & Blee, 2000). No rural region in the United States remains more deeply mired in poverty and economic distress than Appalachia (Billings & Blee, 2000). Appalachia is a 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, 2008). Most persistently poor communities developed from extraction-based economies and slave and sharecropper-based economies in the rural South (Carter, 1999). Carolyn Cater (1999) notes, Histories of inequality and outside control of resources have left many persistently poor communities with deep social stratification, low-performing (sometimes dual) education systems, and low expectations for students from poor families. Schools are asked to prepare students for jobs that are not available locally, and resources are often controlled by outsiders or local leaders who rely on access to a cheap labor force…Studies show a direct relationship between employment opportunities and the quality of schooling in distressed rural communities. (Smith & DeYoung, 1992, p. 1-2)

Consequently, spatial context is an extremely important element in educational equality.

One of the major reasons that Appalachians live in poverty is that Appalachia lags behind the rest of the nation in post-secondary education (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008). An important element of Appalachian educational inequality is the educational gaps that exist between upper income and lower income college students. A very high percentage of the children from low income families who graduate from high school do not graduate from college (Kane, 1994; Heckman, Locher, & Taber, 1998) When Lawrence H. Summers, the former president of Harvard, announced full scholarships to low-income students, he said, “We need to recognize that the most serious domestic problem in the United States today is the widening gap between the children of
the rich and the children of the poor.” This is the case throughout the United States and in Appalachia (Ellwood & Kane, 2000). The percentage of Appalachian students enrolled in college from upper-income families is substantially larger than those enrolled from lower-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Additionally, once in college, students from poorer families are more likely to drop out.

Even more disturbing is that some studies suggest that financial aid alone is not sufficient to compensate for the educational disadvantages. A recent study of Berea College students, a college whose student population are mostly Appalachian residents, found that even with full tuition scholarships, students from low-income families were at considerably greater risk of dropping out than students from more middle-class families (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). The authors concluded that family environment, limited expectations for educational success, and the lack of encouragement from teachers and mentors can be as great an impediment as the costs of college attendance (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003).

Another major barriers to educational equality in the United States appears to be tracking. A major researcher on tracking is Oakes (1985). In *Keeping Track*, Oakes (1985) examines twenty-five junior and senior high schools and the different educational experiences of these students. Specifically, she examines tracking and “how it both causes and supports differences in the lives of secondary students. Tracking is the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes” (P. 3). Oakes sees educational inequality as being the result of a function of our unequal educational system and ways of thinking about the
disadvantaged. Oakes (1985) points out that “most considerations of barriers to educational equality have focused on characteristics of students themselves as the source of the problem” (p. 4). She points out that these stereotypes and cultural misconceptions about the poor directly influence educational inequality because they are cognitive structures that directly influence the way an individual is perceived in society and often produce a self-fulfilling prophecy. Oaks (1985) notes:

“Seen as products of disorganized and deteriorated homes and family structures, poor and minority children have been thought of as unmotivated, noncompetitive, and culturally disadvantaged. But there is another view. It turns out that those children who seem to have the least of everything in the rest of their lives most often get less at school as well (p. 4).”

Oakes (1985) highlights the importance of understanding the social construction of difference that is at work in our educational system. There are many stereotypes and cultural misconceptions that exist about culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students and education. The ways in which public discourse and educational policy labels these students is an often unexamined part of the discourse on educational gaps in the United States. Oakes (1985) notes that, historically, marginalized students in the United States have been labeled into oppressive categories because it was believed to be in the best interest of the students. These practices stem from traditions in the school’s culture that are based on “deep-seated beliefs and long-held assumptions about the appropriateness of what to do in schools” (p. 5). These beliefs are ingrained into our consciousness and are treated as natural and unalterable by members of society.
“We rarely question the view of the world on which practices are based – what humans are like, what society is like, or even what schools are for” (p. 5). This, according to Oakes, "permits us to act in ways contrary to our intentions” (p. 5).

Oakes (1985) examines the social-historical contexts that lead to the development of these traditions and notes that these traditions emerged as a solution to a specific set of educational and social problems at a particular time in history. Oakes notes that prior to 1890, school attendance was infrequent and homogeneous. However, at the turn of the century, a population explosion fueled by a steady flow of immigrants changed the dynamics. This population explosion combined with a plurality of different post-secondary institutions with diverse curriculums lead to a crisis in secondary schooling in the United States. Prior to this crisis, schooling was considered a way to “develop an intelligent mass citizenry” but economic and social forces changed this goal into “preparation for the world of work and for differences in the future lives of students” (Oakes, 1985, p. 16). Consequently, the solution to this educational crisis was a comprehensive high school that fostered differential education for different students.

This new high school was developed using the concepts and ideas embodied in Social Darwinism. This “provided a scientific basis for seeing some groups of people as being of lesser social and moral development than others” (Oakes, 1985, p. 16). Social Darwinism is based on the belief that social organization is subservient to the laws of nature (source?). Consequently, social stratification is seen as the result of some individuals and groups having the requisite skills or attributes to compete and others lacking these traits. In other words, the rich deserve to be rich and the poor deserve to be
poor. This implied that biology was responsible for social poverty, social deviance, and crime. This also implied that schooling was unlikely to alter the situation of the poor. This led to the belief that children of various social classes were qualitatively different than each other. Children of the poor were stereotyped as “laggards, ne’er-do wells, hand minded, and socially inefficient, ignorant, prejudiced, and highly excitable” (Oakes, 1985, p. 35). Unfortunately, these labels are treated as real by members of society.

Thus, these faulty assumptions about the poor lead to view that tracking is based on meritocracy. Oakes (1985) identifies several erroneous assumptions that support tracking. The first assumption is that students learn better when grouped with academically similar peers. Oakes, points out that despite being universally held, empirical evidence indicates that homogeneous grouping doesn’t help any student learn better. Next, Oakes examines the assumption that slower students develop more positive attitudes about themselves and school if not placed with more capable students. Again, she notes empirical evidence that shows that “no group of students has been found to benefit consistently from being in a homogeneous group” (p. 7). On the contrary, she uses this evidence to effectively demonstrate that students placed in average and low track classes develop lower self esteem.

The third assumption examined is that “student track placements are appropriate, accurate, and fair” (p. 9). To examine this assumption, Oakes (1985) examines the logic behind it. She examines the criteria by which students are tracked: scores on standardized test, teacher and counselor recommendations, and students’ and their parents’ choices. She examines the legitimacy of the grouping process by challenging the legitimacy of
this sorting process. Oakes notes that “the criteria we use to classify and sort students are believed to assess their merit—their ability and especially past achievements—certainly not their race or ethnicity or socioeconomic position” but finds major problems with the logic of using standardized test, recommendations, and choices in grouping students (p. 9).

Oakes notes that standardized tests are measures of items that may not be the best determinants of academic achievement and that all we really know is that they “separate students along a continuum of low to high…, but, we continue to interpret large test-score differences to mean large absolute differences which demand large educational differences” (p. 10-11). Additionally, she notes that many researchers have examined the test content and test administration and have found both culturally biased. Consequently, “poor and minority students consistently score lower than whites” (Oakes, 1985, p. 11).

Next, Oakes examines research on counselor and teacher recommendations which revealed that “students were often placed into groups on the basis of counselors’ assessment of their language, dress, and behavior as well as their academic potential” (Oakes, 1985, p. 13). She points out that this is reflected in the outcomes, because more students from specific racial groups and social classes are recommended for lower track classes. This leads her to also question the legitimacy of student and parent choice in tracking. She points out that student and parent choices are informed by test scores and recommendations of counselors and teachers and are, thus, subject to the same biases.

Jeanne Oakes (1985) provides a valuable analysis of what happens within schools. Oakes examines what tracking has actually accomplished in American education and what its impact has been on students and society. Oakes’ analysis reveals that students
have radically different and unequal schooling experiences depending on their race and social class. According to Oakes (1985), much of the difference in school outcomes can be explained by what happens to students in schools, and much of that difference rests on tracking.

**Appalachia and Public Perception**

*Early History*

The history of Appalachia is full of oppression, discrimination, and stereotyping that stems, in part, from ideological domination. The original inhabitances of the region known today as Appalachia were members of various Native American tribes (Williams, 2002). The culture, customs and living habits of this native inhabitance were very diverse. Exact knowledge about the lives of the earliest Appalachian populations before European contact remains a mystery because Native American history relied entirely on oral traditions, most of which has been lost or destroyed (Drake, 2001). But, systematic stereotyping and dehumanization of this original inhabitance led to their near extinction at the hands of European settlers. European immigration devastated the Native American populations of the entire North American continent, including the entire Appalachian region.

Ideology and ideological management played a very large role in this devastation (Spring, 1996). Europeans settlers viewed the native population as inferior savages unworthy of basic human dignity (Spring, 1996). Native Americans, on the other hand, viewed European settlers as equals or superiors, because they were often seen as possessing supernatural powers. As a result of these psychological mindsets and inherent
greed, European settlers systematically exterminated the Native American population with disease and war. European settlers also took more and more Native American land, until Native American groups, with no land to grow food, were plunged into a state of dependency (Spring, 1996). The newly formed “democracy” was in reality a republic, in which only white males had inherent rights. This republic maintained the unequal power relations in society by ideological management. The United States government promoted myths and stereotypes about Native Americans being “warring heathens whose near extinction was justified due to the God-fearing, hard working nature of the American settler” (Appalachian Traveler, 2006). This discourse was used to justify the government’s removal and treatment of Native Americans and became the basis for re-education programs designed to assimilate Native Americans into European society (Spring, 1996).

**Beginnings of Present Appalachia**

Native Americans were not passive victims. They viciously resisted European settlement. They were fierce and skilled warriors who greatly outnumbered the European settlers (Williams, 2002). Unfortunately, Native American tribes were never able to form a unified front against the European colonists. As a result of their lack of unity and the loss of military support from the French, Native American tribes suffered key military defeats, such as the Battle of Point Pleasant (Drake, 2001). Eventually, Native American tribes were killed or forced from their lands to make way for European settlement. By
1820, the United States had claimed the entire Appalachian territory and the Native American populations were, in effect, marginalized (Drake, 2001).

As a result, another stereotyped and frequently discriminated against population emerged in the Appalachian region. In this new population, the seeds of the American Revolution would be born, but complex historical, social, and political developments would lead to their impoverishment (Abramson & Haskell, 2006). The settlement of the Appalachian region primarily consisted of immigrants of German and Scotch-Irish decent, whose political inclination played a large role in the American independence movement (Biggers, 2006). Political concerns were an important part of Appalachian society, especially for the Scotch-Irish who “had been interested in political matters since the sixteenth century, when Presbyterianism and the Reformation galvanized their interest in politics while still in Scotland” (Drake, 2001, p. 73).

The settlement of Appalachia is closely associated with the Regulator Movement (1767-1771) (Drake, 2001). The Regulator movement was a group of backwoods colonists who objected to the “extortionist policies of British officers and the uneven handling of justice in the backcountry (Biggers, 2006, p. 52). The Regulator Movement started out as civil disobedience and protest but soon turned violent. While this rebellion was eventually crushed, it spurred further Appalachian rebellions against British rule and the ideas that led to American and Appalachian independence movements. Many Appalachians, such as Samual Doak and the Overmountain Men believed that Appalachia and America had a higher purpose. They fought and advocated for Appalachia and
American Independence. Unfortunately, after helping to win American independence, the majority of Appalachians faced oppression and exploitation from a different source.

After 1820, Appalachia developed a farm and forest economy significantly different than Pennsylvania and the plantation South (Williams, 2002). Biggers (2006) notes:

The early mountain economy couldn’t compete with the lowland’s large-scale plantations of cotton, tobacco, and other crops; in the early nineteenth century, the mountain and hill regions had less than one plantation for every five large-scale plantations in the Deep South. Nearly a third of Southern Appalachia’s most remote counties possessed extremely low numbers of slaves. (p. 82)

Most of Appalachia’s economy was not dependent on slave labor but contained a social elite modeled on the plantation gentry of the lowland South (Williams, 2002). The development of the Appalachian elite came from structure of the local governments (Williams, 2002). After 1830, local governments were dominated by the interests of a group of social elite, a resident ruling class that “drew its most influential leaders from lawyers who specialized in land litigation and speculation” (Williams, 2002, p. 135). These elites monopolized land ownership and local political offices (Williams, 2002).

In Appalachia, all county governments were ruled by elite magistrates called “Justices of the Peace” who were appointed by state governors (Williams, 2002). These magistrates dominated county politics (Billings & Blee, 2000; Williams, 2002). They appointed the sheriff who supervised the elections for state legislatures (Williams, 2002). They had power over the judicial processes in the county and tried misdemeanors and
civil disputes. Eventually, leading property owning families would emerge from each Appalachian county. Williams (2002) writes that “in many ways, Appalachia counties became the locus for what might be called a federated oligarchy,” because key families would control or hold all important government offices (p. 139).

Despite its problems, Appalachia played a major role in the abolitionist movement. Perhaps, one of the most important contributions came from Samuel Doak, a clergyman and educator from Virginia, who opened Washington College. Doak was an abolitionist who taught critical thinking to his students (Biggers, 2006). He encouraged open debate on the evils of chattel slavery and some of his Washington College students became very important “for their contributions to the most divisive trigger issues in the early nineteenth century: the pioneering antislavery movement a generation before William Lloyd Garrison and Fredrick Douglas, the rise of Abraham Lincoln, and the irreconcilable currents that led to the Civil War” (Biggers, 2006, p. 84). Doak was just one of many, including Hezekiah Balch, Samuel Carrick, and Martin Delany, who sparked the abolitionist movement in the United States (Drake, 2001). In fact, until 1830, East Tennessee was the major center for abolitionism in the United States (Drake, 2001).

Appalachia’s elite-dominated political system, with its patron-client politics, continued until the Civil War (Williams, 2002). Before the Civil War, family and clan loyalties were the politics in Appalachia. In Appalachia, things were done politically because of who you knew. This system would leave a lasting impact on the social, political, and economic systems of Appalachia. However, the issue of slavery created a different dynamic in the Appalachia during the Civil War. The issue fiercely divided the
region. Appalachians tended to be both pro-slavery and pro-Confederate (Drake, 2001). Small farmers in East Tennessee, Northern Georgia, West Virginia, and Eastern Kentucky were mostly on the side of the union, but Southwestern Virginia and Western North Carolina mostly supported secession (Drake, 2001). In the southern mountains, class identification determined allegiance because elites tended to be pro-Confederate and common farmers tended to be pro-Union (Drake, 2001).

Some historians claim that the Civil War started in Appalachia, with John Brown’s raid in 1859 on the United States Armory at Harpers Ferry (Biggers, 2006). Regardless of the validity of this claim, the Appalachian Mountains were very strategically important to both sides during the Civil War (Williams, 2002). Major armies had to go through Appalachia from both sides. Control of Appalachian roads and railroads was an important and often fought over strategic resource. Appalachian guerilla fighters would make Appalachia a dangerous place. The cliffs, coves, and creek bottom lands of the bordering counties of Monroe and Polk in Tennessee and Cherokee in North Carolina became famous for the bushwhacking tactics of Appalachian insurgents (Williams, 2002). Appalachia was torn apart during this period; it was literally brother against brother (Williams, 2002).

Appalachia after the Civil War
In the post-Civil War period, the stereotype of Appalachians as violent mountaineers developed, because this was an era of feuds (Drake, 2001). Drake (2001) notes, “Recognized authority had evaporated during the Civil War, and it took many years to reestablish adequate trust in government. In the interim, the family and its kin networks stepped in and provided structures for law, order, and justice” (p. 109). After
the Civil War, Appalachia’s imbalance in land ownership led to an economic crisis (Williams, 2002). Subsistence agriculture supported most families and, as the population grew through natural increase, pressure on the land increased (Drake, 2001; Williams, 2002). This imbalance forced the majority of people to become wage laborers (Duncan, 1999).

As a result, an Appalachian middle-class never developed and Appalachian society became rigidly divided into the “haves” and “have nots” (Duncan, 1999). This division was based on race and social class (Duncan, 1999). The have-nots are socially isolated and outside the mainstream, because of the economic and political structure of local governments (Duncan, 1999). Their isolation and poverty was reinforced by the corrupt, undemocratic politics that prevailed in this kind of two-class system (Duncan, 1999).

Appalachian elite families, often, engaged in some bitter personal and political struggles (Billings & Blee, 2000). As a result, these elites used the state to fight for private control of government resources (Billings & Blee, 2000). It was, often, these elite fights that formed the framework within which both economic development and local politics were organized (Billings & Blee, 2000). Often, these “family feuds” involved hundreds of casualties and repeated interventions by the state militia (Billings & Blee, 2000). These feuds fostered the stereotype of Appalachians as primitive and violent (Billings & Blee, 2000). The result was a stereotyped society built on economic relations of hierarchy and dependency (Billings & Blee, 2000).
The power of the haves keeps the poor vulnerable, while the patronage that flourishes in job-scarce communities undermines efforts to bring about political change. The disproportionate power of the elites and the fear of losing their power made them corrupt (Williams, 2002). Widespread corruption, nepotism, fiscal irresponsibility, and mis-governance were the norm (Billings & Blee, 2000; Williams, 2002). During the nineteenth century local elites, in an effort to maintain power, aligned themselves with outside corporations, intent on gaining control of the region’s rich natural resources (Billings & Blee, 2000). The elites arranged deals with corporations that were devastating to local economies (Billings & Blee, 2000). Only the elite families profited from the sale of Appalachia’s rich natural wealth. The vast majority of Appalachians, without any claim on the region’s natural wealth, became a cheap labor source for exploitive companies (Billings & Blee, 2000). Consequently, wealth flowed out of Appalachia, leaving poverty behind (Williams, 2002). The 1920’s were a high point for business control of regional politics, but a worldwide financial crisis would create major changes (Drake, 2001).

On October, 1929, the New York stock market collapsed leading to a collapse of the nation’s banks and industry (Williams, 2002). This caused major hardships for the geographically isolated people of Appalachia. The Depression led to the resurgence of self-sufficient agriculture (Drake, 2001). National relief efforts came in the form of the New Deal (Drake, 2001). The New Deal created “agencies to put money into the pockets of those who had real need” (Drake, 2001, p. 166). Programs of the New Deal created short term jobs, improved area infrastructures, and promoted education. The welfare and
social security systems grew out of New Deal policies (Drake, 2001, p. 169). The welfare system was designed to insure the general welfare of all the nations’ citizens. Because of the great economic maladjustments in Appalachia’s major industries, particularly coal mining and agriculture, large numbers of people were able to qualify for welfare benefits (Drake, 2001, p. 169). New Deal recovery efforts, which focused on industrial and agricultural aid, left the structural causes of poverty in place (Drake, 2001, p. 168). Consequently, New Deal agricultural policies, ultimately did not improve a rural person’s condition unless he owned a fair amount of land and New Deal economic policies did not provide sufficient long term jobs capable of lifting most Appalachians out of poverty (Drake, 2001).

This started to change in the 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s spurred many progressive movements and brought more of a social consciousness to American society. These progressive movements were a great catalyst for efforts to end poverty in persistently poor regions and in the nation as a whole. As 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 (Katz, 1989). Unfortunately, the recession-plagued economy of the 1970’s and the conservative emphasis on dysfunctional individual attributes as the primary cause of poverty undermined faith in efforts to improve the structural causes of poverty. This was the beginning of a turn away from President Lyndon Johnson’s “war on poverty” belief that government could reduce
social-class divisions and eliminate poverty toward the view that educational and social inequality were primarily the result of inherent individual deficiencies of the poor and not systemic inequalities. This discourse would play a major role in perpetuating generational poverty in Appalachia and will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

The role of ideology and “ideological management” in creating the Appalachian perception in the public imagination

Poverty in Appalachia has been worsened by the way that Appalachia has been historically conceptualized by the rest of the nation. Billings and Blee (2000) 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” (p. 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, p. 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 (p. 67). The people’s unwillingness to change was the biggest reason that Appalachians were persistently poor. Weller and researchers, who followed him, concluded that to alleviate the poverty in Appalachia meant changing the attitudes of Appalachian people. The view of Appalachians as
backward hillbillies is still a strong discourse in the mainstream American consciousness. These stereotypes have enormous consequences on how we view and address the persistent poverty of Appalachia.

Since social interaction produces pragmatic symbolic definitions, knowledge is revealed to be rooted in the socio-historical and cultural context of a particular time and place. In other words, the social construction of knowledge is formed through the ideology and politics, of a particular society in a particular historical period. Hence, the key to understanding how knowledge, such as stereotypes, is constructed is to look at why it was pragmatically constructed the way it was in a specific socio-historical and cultural context.

**Stereotypes and Educational Gaps**

Understanding the way that knowledge is constructed has enormous implications in understanding how stereotypes and cultural distortions of persistently poor and historically disenfranchised groups contribute to the perpetuation of the educational gaps between students from culturally marginalized groups and students from the dominant culture. Knowledge is produced in a certain way and passed on for the pragmatic political purposes of those who have power in society (Berger, 1963). Culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised groups have long been the victim of socio-historical allusions designed to maintain unequal power relations in society. These groups have been persistently described as significantly less intelligent, less hard-working, and more
violent than individuals from the dominant culture. These stereotypes serve to justify and hide discrimination in a variety of social settings, education being no different.

This creates a condition in which public discourse ignores the perspective of the powerless and accepts existing social and economic arrangements as natural (Katz, 1989). This hegemonic domination is maintained by ideological management. Ideology is used as “the framework of thought that is used in society to give order and meaning to the social and political world in which we live” (Darder et al., 2003, p. 13). Ideology is a key mechanism for achieving domination, because the ruling ideas in society govern the general pattern of relations and the ruling class is the source of the ruling ideas in society (Elliot & Turner, 2001). Thus, ideology operates to transform historically and socially specific class-bound ideas into the universal moral and cultural categories of society (Elliot & Turner, 2001).

This is the process at work in Appalachia and other persistently poor parts of the country. Rich White Conservatives used ideological domination to justify and legitimize the elimination of government programs designed to help the poor and promote public policies that reinforce the existing social relations in society. They claimed 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. 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 ideologies that are undermining efforts to address the real causes of poverty.
Despite empirical evidence (Duncan, 1999; Rank, 2004, etc.) 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 (2004) 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.

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 public policies, such as Welfare Reform and No Child Left Behind (Shipler, 2004). Consequently, real efforts to address the conditions that cause Appalachian poverty are ignored and current policies serve to maintain and even increase the unequal power relations in society. The result is a social structure, in which ideological domination perpetuates and justifies existing class structures by perpetuating an oppressive and inaccurate perception of Appalachians and Appalachia in the public’s imagination. In order to combat social inequality, we must shift our understanding of social inequality and persistently poor places, such as Appalachia, in order to recognize the true impact of public policy on who is poor and who stays poor (Kozol, 2005).

This highlights the importance of understanding the social construction of difference that is at work in our educational system. There are many stereotypes and cultural misconceptions that exist about culturally marginalized and economically
disenfranchised students and education. The ways in which public discourse and educational policy labels these students is an unexamined part of the discourse on educational gaps in the United States. Historically, marginalized groups in the United States have been labeled into oppressive categories for reasons of convenience, power, or moral judgment (Katz, 1990). In other words, symbolic definitions are created for pragmatic political purposes. Unfortunately, these labels are treated as real by members of society. We assume that these verbal distinctions reflect natural or inherent qualities of people (Katz, 1990). This creates a condition, in which, policy and discourse ignores the perspective of the powerless and accepts existing social and economic arrangements as natural (Katz, 1990). Katz (1990) notes, “by mistaking socially constructed categories for natural distinctions, we reinforce inequality and stigmatize even those we set out to help” (p. 6).

These cultural distortions are embodied in the deficit model, which is often used to frame the discussion of the educational attainment gaps. When addressing the troubling educational gaps that exist between persistently poor and historically disenfranchised groups and the rest of the nation, much of contemporary public policy is designed to “fix” the poor (Fine & Weis, 1998). This concept is especially relevant to the debate over the No Child Left Behind Legislation, as illustrated in Jonathan Kozol’s (2005) The Shame of a Nation. In this book, Kozol (2005) examines the effect that the accountability movement is having on poor districts. Spring (2005) tells us that the accountability movement was a reaction to attempts to achieve community control of public schools. This is a prime example of how knowledge is produced in a certain way and passed on
for the pragmatic political purposes of those who have power in society. According to Spring (2005), the accountability movement was a reaction by conservative leaders who were concerned that the United States was on the verge of radical social change. As a result of this movement, power was restored to professional educators and government agencies and testing was restored to a central place in the educational process (Spring, 2005). Kozol (2005) sees this in the No Child Left Behind legislation. Kozol points out that high stakes testing and teaching for the tests has diminished the already inadequate education being received in some of the nation’s poorest schools. The result is a condition, in which, unequal power relations are perpetuated for the benefit of those in power.

Like the discredited “culture of poverty theory,” the accountability movement is based on the premise that the problems of the poor lie in inherent individual deficiencies of the poor themselves and not systemic inequalities. The theory is that stronger accountability will combat inequality, since schools will now face penalties if students do not meet expected goals. The underlying assumption being that the academic inequality experienced by our nation’s poor predominantly school districts is the result of teachers and students not working hard enough.

Culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised groups have long been the victim of socio-historical allusions designed to maintain unequal power relations in society and the No Child Left Behind policy embodies these beliefs. These groups have been persistently described as significantly less intelligent, less hard-working, and more violent than individuals from the dominant culture. 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 educational policy in the United States. As a result, information about persistently poor and historically disenfranchised groups has been simplified at the societal level, resulting in the development of oppressive stereotypes that thwart the development of successful and appropriate policies aimed at alleviating the educational gap between disadvantaged groups and the rest of the nation (Kozol, 2005).

Jonathan Kozol takes a comprehensive view of social stratification that combines structuralist and some Interactionist insights. Social stratification to Kozol is linked to Micro and Macro level social processes. In Kozol’s books, he explains how racism, power, socially constructed oppressive identities, and oppressive social structures reinforce each other to produce educational inequality. In *Savage Inequalities* (1992) and *Shame of a Nation* (2005), Kozol visits multiple neighborhoods, schools, and community leaders and examines the state of America’s public schools. Kozol documents the continuing and worsening segregation in public schools in the United States. Black, Latino and poor White children are forced to go to school in seriously under-funded and, often, dangerously neglected conditions, while their more affluent, mostly White and Asian, counterparts go to state of the art well-funded institutions. Kozol links this to racism, classism, innate structural inequalities, and the increasing influence of neo-conservative educational ideologies, based on a social-Darwin like view of social stratification and poverty. The White affluent elite have created and perpetuated
educational and economic policies that are grounded in racism and class discrimination, as evidenced by the racist nature of government spending.

Kozol (1992, 2005) presents policy recommendations that directly address both for the macro-level structural processes and the micro level cognitive processes that we use to know the world and ourselves. In terms of the macro level processes, Kozol recommends school funding reform to give every school district equal funding and giving each district “local control” of its finances, curriculum, and schools, and that policymakers end the system of segregation that is creating educational Apartheid in America’s schools. In terms of micro-level cognitive processes, Kozol advocates that we must shift our understanding of poverty so that we recognize the impact of public policy on who is poor and who stays poor (Kozol, 1992). Kozol points out that attempts designed to address these conditions are often based on racism and stereotypes of the poor and of minorities. For example, Kozol (1992) points out that high stakes testing and teaching for the tests has diminished the already inadequate education being received in some of the nation’s poorest schools. Like the discredited “culture of poverty theory” the accountability movement is based on the premise that the problems of the poor lie in inherent individual deficiencies of the poor themselves and not systemic inequalities. The theory is that stronger accountability will combat inequality, since schools will now face penalties if students do not meet expected goals. The underlying assumption is that the academic inequality experienced by our nation’s predominantly poor school districts is the result of teachers’ and students’ not working hard enough, a discredited culture of poverty view of social stratification. Kozol (1992, 2005) gives us a very vivid picture of
educational inequality and provides valuable insight for overcoming educational inequality.

The same kind of thinking affects higher education. By the middle of the 20th century, it was becoming abundantly clear to educators and policymakers that the current higher educational system in the United States was inadequate and overburdened (Flournoy, 1982; Truman Report, 1947). Changing social and economic conditions had left the existing educational system antiquated in insuring the welfare of society and incapable of living up to the nation’s democratic doctrine as depicted in the Declaration of Independence (Truman Report, 1947). Consequently, in 1946, President Truman appointed a Presidential Commission on Higher Education to reexamine the objectives, methods, and facilities of the United States educational system in regards to its social purpose in society. The commission, headed by president of the American Council on Education George Zook, produced a report in six volumes: Establishing the Goals, Equalizing and Expanding Individual Opportunity, Organizing Higher Education, Staffing Higher Education, Financing Higher Education, and Resource Data (Flournoy, 1982). This report did not only highlight the necessity of reforming higher education for technological and economic innovation and development, but also highlighted the necessity of reforming higher education for the continued democracy and liberty of the American populous (Flournoy, 1982). Consequently, the key issue being addressed in this report was the policies and procedures that needed to take place to enable higher education live up to its social purpose by making a quality and adequate higher education equally available to all young people (Flournoy, 1982).
Understanding the social/historical context that the report was written in is fundamental to understanding the issues being addressed. Several factors influenced this report: the historical philosophical link between education and liberty in American democratic political theory, the end of WWII and the burden of rebuilding the democratic institutions of Europe and Japan, the increasingly more industrialized and complex economy, the onset of the cold war and the need for technologically advanced weapons, and the increasing need for intercultural communication and collaboration as highlighted with the formation of the United Nations (Truman Report, 1947).

In was in this context that the commission found the current higher educational system inadequate. Despite remarkable growth in educational access, educational access and attainment was still wholly insufficient for insuring the technological, social, and democratic well-being of the society (Truman Report, 1947). The report found that the current educational system was completely under-funded and in need of reorganization to meet the technological, economic, and social needs of society (Truman Report, 1947). The report noted that the less than one-half of one percent of the gross national product that we spent on higher education in 1947 was entirely insufficient and indefensible. Additionally, the report found that numerous institutional barriers were hindering the ability of society to provide a reasonable equality of educational opportunity to all citizens. Backed by empirical data the commission identified barriers to educational achievement based on economic, racial, religious discrimination, and restricted curriculum. The commission identified several severe consequences for failure to address an inadequately funded educational system riddled with discriminatory barriers to both
individual and social well-being, including the failure to live up to democratic ideals and
goals, retardation of the development of the native abilities of the general population,
lower economic productivity, and the lack of civilian preparation for personal, social, and
civic responsibilities (Truman Report, 1947).

The commission’s proposal was to enable higher education to live up to its social
purpose by making a quality and adequate higher education equally available to all young
people (Truman Report, 1947). To accomplish this lofty goal, the commission proposed
six recommendations. The first recommendation was to improve high school education in
order to raise the caliber of all students entering college. This was to be done by
improving the facilities and diversity of curriculum of all high schools in the nation. The
second was to make education through the fourteenth grade available in the same way
that high school was then available. This meant tuition-free college until a student’s
junior year in college. This meant eliminating the economic restrictions on programs in 2-
year junior colleges, community institutes, and community colleges. The third was to
provide financial assistance to competent students in the tenth through fourteenth grades
that would not be able to continue without it. The fourth was to reverse the trend of
higher and higher tuition costs by lowering tuition in public colleges and instituting a
sufficient scholarship and fellowship program. The fifth was to expand programs of adult
education to make education a lifetime pursuit. The final recommendation was to
eliminate racial, gender, religious and ethnic discriminatory barriers to educational access
and achievement. This would not only produce a more productive and educated citizenry,
but fulfill the nation’s civic, moral, and democratic goals and obligations.
The seminal policy question being addressed in the Presidential Commission on Higher Education was what policies are needed to enable higher education to live up to its social purpose and make a quality and adequate higher education equally available to all young people (Truman Report, 1947). This question largely depended on views on the social purpose of education and the nature of educational inequality. The Truman commission clearly saw educational inequality as being largely the result of systemic failures in our educational system. Unfortunately, the political will to completely remove all economic and social barriers to education remains unrealized due largely to conceptions of inequality in the United States (Flournoy, 1982).

**Historical Overview of Conceptions of Inequality in the United States**

The view that unequal education plays a role in perpetuating social equality has been around since the mid-nineteenth century (Kantor, 1991). This view started with the works of Horace Mann (1848), who argued that education prevents poverty. This view was based on widely held assumptions about the nature of poverty and about the role of the state and its relation to the economy (Flourney, 1982). Social stratification was seen as a result of unequal power relations in society. Unfortunately, despite the commonly held belief that equal educational opportunity was a necessary component of social equality, equality of educational opportunity never materialized in the United States. Because of various forms of discrimination and oppression, the social conscience and political will to create universal educational equality never fully developed, until the 1960s. Sadly, this trend was very short lived, because faith in education as a solution to poverty and social
inequality was undermined by stereotyping ideas about the nature of poverty and the disadvantaged.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s brought more of a social consciousness to American society. This era was marked by civil unrest over the racial discrimination in the social order. These progressive movements were a great catalyst for educational policies designed to promote universal educational equality. For example, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, under Thurgood Marshall, fought vigorously against educational discrimination and for equal educational opportunities. The NAACP gained one of its greatest victories, when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its landmark ruling in Brown v. Board of Education that stated that racially segregated education was unconstitutional. Progressives saw this as an opportunity to equalize educational opportunities for the disadvantaged and others saw this as a way to ease the social conflict caused by racial discrimination. In fact, improving educational opportunities for all became a center piece of President Johnson’s 1964 legislative program (Kantor, 1991).

As 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, the recession-plagued economy of the 1970’s and the conservative emphasis on dysfunctional individual attributes as the primary cause of poverty undermined faith in education as a solution to poverty and social inequality. According to an article (1976) in *Time*, the difficulties young people were having in finding jobs and the perceived continuing failures of the war on poverty educational programs to dramatically improve the lot of the poor was fueling a wave of anti-school feeling and growing questions about the worth of ever-lengthening periods of education for the masses. The article (1976) notes:

> Through the past two decades, the great American faith in the necessity and efficacy of education has been extended to include universal access to college, virtually regardless of aptitude. That affirmation of the belief in self-improvement, if not human perfectibility, has now fallen on hard times…Donald Fleming of Harvard reports on the intellectual war between those who see man as chiefly a product of his environment and those who credit heredity. If, as Fleming maintains, those who credit heredity are growing in influence, that raises some troublesome questions. If the wonderful hope that we can change man by changing his surroundings is fading, what is left but genetic engineering to
accomplish what even Alder admits education has not been able to bring about—a thoroughly improved human being. (p.29)

In other words, this was the beginning of a turn away from President Lyndon Johnson’s “war on poverty” belief that education could reduce social-class divisions and eliminate poverty toward the view that educational and social inequality were the result of inherent individual deficiencies of the poor and not systemic inequalities. Thus, the belief that liberal social welfare programs could reduce social-class divisions and eliminate poverty gave way to a move toward the view that poverty, unemployment and social inequality were the result of inherent individual deficiencies of the poor and not systemic inequalities. In the New York Times, Edwin L. Dale Jr. (1976) wrote:

How many jobless and how much more help?...The unemployment statistics themselves can be interpreted in various ways, none of them altogether conclusive on this subjective question of hardship or even moral damage from unemployment....Arthur F. Burns, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, has begun to argue that unemployment compensation has been liberalized so much, particularly the duration of benefits, that it probably induces some people not to seek jobs actively, but to simply collect benefit checks. Mr. Cox the economists, even suggests that generous unemployment and welfare benefits increase and perpetuate unemployment itself. (p. 1,4)

This reaction was fueled by the belief that the efforts of the “war on poverty” were met with minimal success at best (Kelso, 1994). Despite spending over $282 billion on targeted education and training programs, governmental efforts to improve the education
and training of the poor seemed 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, p. 5).

The belief that the poor were psychologically damaged perpetuated damaging and inaccurate stereotypes about oppressed groups. During the 1970s, Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s (1965) writings were some of the most influential and controversial during the debates about the war on poverty. In some of 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. An article in *Time* (1976) on social policy reads:

Daniel Patrick Moynihan discerns a national schizophrenia regarding the basic guideposts for social policy. He points out that earlier in this century the concept of human nature as essentially rational, responsible, and autonomous was dominant. That notion was a fundamental tenet of classical liberalism and thus
supported the political view that government’s role should be severely
limited…That view gave way, especially among Democrats, urban researchers
and the well-educated to what Moynihan describes as the “therapeutic ethic.” This
is the idea that human behavior can be changed and the welfare of a nation
improved by “curing” the “social ills” that provoke uncivilized action…..Through
the 1960’s, the expression of this thought led inexorably to the belief that it was
not individuals who deserve blame for their actions, but society that is the culprit.
If society is at fault, then society must be changed. Lyndon Johnson’s Great
Society program was the highest recent expression of that view…..The difficulty
of the new doctrine, as with the old lies in the uses to which it is put. If man was
once seen as too autonomous, the therapeutic ethic depicts him as too dependent.
If the tendency was once to exaggerate rationality, it is now the opposite-to
exaggerate dependency. (p.24)

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, p. 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
(p. 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” (p. 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.

The culture of poverty thesis came under attack during the 1960’s and was largely discredited as a plausible theory by many academics. Valentine (1968) was one of the first to argue against this perspective. 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, Hurley (1969), 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. 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. Suttles (1972) 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. 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 (Colombis, 1983; David, 1977; 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; Katz, 1989; Suttles, 1972). 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 (Edin & Lein, 1992; Hays, 2001; Tickamyer & Duncan, 1988).

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 (Frum, 1994; Gilder, 1981; Kaus, 1992; Kelso, 1994; Murray, 1994; Sowell, 1981; 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 (1989),

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 eight percent. The reason was government programs, not economic growth. Although disposable income increased 24 % 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 (p. 269).

Also, modern researchers (Gilbert; 1977; Katz, 1989) 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 previous 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, p. 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 (Colombis, 1983; David, 1977; Hurley, 1969; Portes, 1972; Suttles, 1972). 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; Kelso, 1994; Weller, 1965). 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 (Duncan, 1999; Hays, 2003). 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, p. 5).

Regardless of social reality, the belief that the poor were psychologically damaged had major social 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, 1994). The rhetoric of conservative theorists aided in the public’s disillusionment with government spending on social welfare programs. Many conservative theorists (Frum, 1994; Gilder, 1981, Kaus, 1992; Murray, 1994; Sowell, 1981; Tanner; 1994) argued that social welfare policies were 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 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 ninety-eight 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.

(p. 4)

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 (Duncan, 1999; Hays, 2003; 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 (Edin & Lein, 1992; Hays, 2003). 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. Tickamyer and Duncan (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. (p. 245)

Tickamyer and Duncan (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, p. 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. (p. 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 & Blee, 2000).
The Lived Experiences of Marginalized Populations

In order to understand educational inequality, it is essential that researchers examine the lived experience of marginalized students (Miller, 2000). Examining the lived experience of marginalized students enables researchers to elicit a comprehensive understanding of the social, cultural, economic, intrinsic, political and other dynamics involved in their educational experiences. We gain information about the lived experience of others from various sources. One such source is phenomenological studies. Phenomenology is an epistemological viewpoint that is concerned with describing basic lived experience of persons (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). These studies help us to understand the essence of human experience.

A notable example of phenomenological educational research is Willis’s (1981) examination of the lived experience of working-class London youths, collectively called “the lads”. According to Willis, the lads represent a counterculture that has been produced in antagonistic relation to the prevailing culture and ideological practices. Since the middle class and upper class cultural traits are treated with distain, the lads doom themselves to low level working class jobs. This is because the middleclass culture functions to socialize the individual in values and behaviors necessary to excel to the current workplace and basic structural inequality creates a situation in which working class youth develop different relationships with the institutions in society and develop their own informal values and behaviors. Willis notes that educational systems are not politically and ideologically neutral. Educational systems are sites of cultural
reproduction. Willis explains that this is because schools in capitalist societies legitimate a dominate culture as normal, but in fact belongs to the dominate group in society.

This is the theoretical framework that Willis (1981) uses to examine the state school in advanced capitalist systems. According to Willis, teachers and students enter into a “bargain”, in which education is a commodity. Teachers exchange knowledge for cooperation and authority. In upper-class schools, high status knowledge is valued for itself. In middle-class schools, knowledge is valued for what it can buy. But, in lower class schools, students see the knowledge as antithetical to their culture and a threat to their identity. In this situation, there is no reward for their labor in the classroom and the concept of work offered by the counter-school culture is superior. The school is seen as part of the conformist pressures of society. Consequently, the cultural form experienced by the lads “represent both a freedom, election, and transcendence, and a precise insertion into a system of exploitation and oppression for working class people” (Willis, 1977, p. 120). According to Willis, this creates a condition in which the lads value violence, sexism, and racism, because these traits enhance there own sense of superiority within their own informal social system.

Willis’ (1980) theoretical framework provides valuable insights into the nature of schooling in a capitalist society. These insights go against many cultural deterministic theories of hegemony and domination, in the sense that the cultural forces that perpetuate existing economic and academic inequalities are seen, at least in part, as being the result of conscious choices of working class individuals. Willis’ research can be a valuable tool for both policymakers and educators striving to end educational inequality in society. The
theory answers a lot of questions about our modern capitalist society. For example, it explains why and how social class seems to remain so stable and why working class individuals seem to engage in behavior that, on the surface, seems dysfunctional. Willis’ ethnographic study reveals that often psychological phenomena, such as the behavior of the lads, can only be truly explained by examining the social and historical context in which they arise. Willis provides a theoretical analysis, which helps to explain the phenomenon of social inequality and, as a consequence, provides valuable insights necessary to overcome educational inequality and, ultimately, social inequality.

Willis’ (1981) suggestions include being sensitive to the coding and double coding of institutional meaning to avoid misunderstandings, recognizing the structural limits that our current educational system places on pedagogic practices so that it is possible to develop strategies to avoid conflict while still maintaining institutional authority, use where possible small classes to promote group cohesion, and “take cultural forms, basic traditions, social attitudes sometimes as the basic texts for class work” (Willis, 1981, p. 191). Willis’ suggestions are not designed to lead to educational inequality by themselves. Willis’ suggestions are designed to create the fodder for long term structural change, a necessary prerequisite for educational inequality in Willis’ materialistic view of social change. Willis (1981) notes, “the identification and understanding of the cultural level is an action to bring it closer to self-awareness and therefore to the political, to recognize in the materiality of its outcomes the possibility of the cultural becoming a material force. Such a politicization of culture is actually one of the pre-conditions for, and an organic element of, longer-term structural change” (p. 192).
In another insightful phenomenological study, Ogbo (2003) conducts an ethnographic study on the Shaker Heights school and the surrounding community. The goal of this study was to understand community members' ideas about schooling, and to "observe how students actually went about getting their education, how their parents went about implementing their educational expectations, and how the school personnel went about educating the children" (Ogbo, 2003, p. xv) Using a cultural-ecological theory, Ogbo theorizes that social inequality is due to both structural inequalities and how disenfranchised individuals and groups interpret and respond to their treatment. Ogbo’s cultural-ecological theory of minority schooling “takes into account the historical, economic, social, cultural, and language or dialect situations of minority groups in the larger society in which they exist” (p. 45). Ogbo developed this theory to describe how race and ethnic differences affect educational and economic achievement. According to Ogbo, differences in the academic achievement “cannot be attributed to discrimination in society and school alone” (Ogbo, 2003, p. vii). Community forces of minorities also contribute to the differences in academic achievement. Consequently, Ogbo “suggests that there appears to be two sets of factors influencing the academic engagement and achievement of minority students”: Societal and school factors (the system), and (b) community factors” (Ogbo, 2003, p. vii).

Ogbo (2003) argues that beliefs and behaviors within the minority community regarding education are hindering the educational achievement of community children. Ogbo attributes this dysfunctional community influence to some minority students developing an "oppositional identity" to the mainstream culture. Three basic ideas guide
Ogbu’s work. First, is that “formal education in contemporary societies is a formula for preparing children for their future adult cultural tasks or roles” (p. 46). According to Ogbu, a public school education not only provides the specific skills and knowledge necessary to function in modern societies, “it also socializes the individual in values and behaviors necessary to adapt in the workplace” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 47). It is, therefore, by its very nature, functional. Ogbu notes, “It is unfortunate that, in the discourse on minority education, there continues to be a narrow, if not misinterpretation, of the purpose and function of public school education as cultural transmission” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 48). Ogbu notes:

The curriculum and language of the public school are not intended or designed to replace the cultures and languages of ethnic minorities with those of mainstream White Americans. These knowledge and skills are “White” only in the sense that schooling in the United States is based on White culture and language because White people are the dominate group in the United States that controls the economic and other positions in adult life. (p. 40)

According to Ogbu, the U.S. is a settler society, in which the ruling majority consists of immigrants from other societies “who have come to improve their economic, political, and social status, but there are also other non-White non-immigrant minorities who did not come to achieve the American Dream but were made a part of the U.S. society against their will” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 49). These involuntary immigrants have faced enormous social discrimination and oppression and have developed distrust in U.S. social institutions. On the other hand, non-White voluntary immigrant minorities have
immigrated to the United States for the same reasons as the White immigrants, to achieve the American dream, and have a pragmatic trust in some U.S. social institutions.

Consequently, the second idea is that “these two types of minorities have different perceptions of the United States, their place in society, and the role of the public school or American education system in getting ahead” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 49). Ogbu examines how the different identities of “voluntary minorities”, who come to a new environment with their collective identity intact, and “involuntary minorities”, who formed their collective identity in the context of oppression by a dominant culture, form different perceptions of U.S. society. This is a key difference, because the involuntary minority identities are constructed in cultures under oppression as a way of maintaining their ethnic identity. This, according to Ogbu, makes a whole lot of difference in the way individuals in these groups look at society, the way they interpret things, and the way they respond.

Ogbu (2003) explicitly explains how the different types of incorporation into U.S. society directly affect the social construction of how U.S. society works of voluntary and non-voluntary minorities. Voluntary immigrants understand that public school functions to prepare children for future participation in the corporate economy and that to learn the language and behaviors required at school does not require them to give up their own languages and cultures. Non-immigrants minorities are suspicious of the intentions of school curriculum and are less willing to adopt “White or school ways” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 54). This is reflected in the collective identity of involuntary minority communities.
Consequently, minority communities hold themselves back because of the ways they interpret and respond to schooling. This, according to Ogbo, is due to community forces that inform Black student success. These community forces include what Ogbo (2003) calls the “low-effect syndrome”, where students were not highly engaged in their schoolwork and homework (p. 17). This syndrome is part of what Ogbo calls the “norm of minimum effort”, a culture of just doing enough to get by (p. 23). This norm causes low engagement in schoolwork and homework, because traits that allow for educational success are discouraged. This, according to Ogbo (2003), is an under-examined partial cause of the achievement gap between Black students and their White counterparts.

Accordingly, the third idea is that changes in the conception of minority students will positively affect educational and economic achievement. Ogbo (2003) points out that until the 1960’s the American educational system was not a viable way for Black Americans to achieve the American dream. Discrimination and oppression prevented them from finding jobs and wages that were appropriate for their education. These experiences lead the black community to not develop a belief in education as a vehicle for social mobility. While acknowledging current discrimination still exist and warning about a “Pollyanna” view of racial discrimination, Ogbo (2003) notes that, “The Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s significant changes in the connection between minority education and opportunity structure” (Ogbo, 2003, p. 54). Blacks do “not face the same degree of discrimination in the opportunity structure experienced by their forebears. Many, like their White peers, could now get the same jobs, wages, and job promotions on the basis of education and ability” (Ogbo, 2003, p. 253). Despite these changes, Ogbo
finds in Shaker Heights a lack of “an instrumental or pragmatic attitude toward schooling” among involuntary minorities, because the students “did not view their present schooling as a preparation for their future participation in the adult opportunity structure” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 167).

Ogbu (2003) does not specifically recommend pedagogical solutions to educational inequality. Ogbu sees the value of his cultural ecological theory as being its ability to “help education authorities, including policymakers, teachers, and the Black community, to better understand why Black students are disengaged from their academic work” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 253). The key insight drawn from Ogbu is that the educational achievement gap that exist between “involuntary immigrant” Black students and the rest of the student population is due to systemic inequality and dysfunctional community forces that cause academic disengagement in Black students. Ogbu (2003) suggest that these findings be the basis for dialogue between the community, anthropologists, school authorities and the researchers who conducted this research on key recommendations for the Black community and school system.

For the Black community, Ogbu (2003) recommends that the community take a proactive role in increasing “the academic orientation, effort, and performance of their children”, including developing a framework for community action, developing supplementary educational programs, “developing a cultural context to increase the value of academic success and the visibility of academically successful Blacks as role models”, establishing a local version of the Afro-Academic Cultural and Scientific Olympics, developing a discourse on education that takes a pragmatic view of education that
understands that academic skills and knowledge are the properties and prerogatives of all people not just Whites, “developing and institutionalizing appropriate and effective parental educational strategies”, and develop strategies to teach children “to work hard and persevere to make good grades” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 274-281).

For the school system, Ogbu recommends that schools implement more programs to help all students improve their academic achievement and academic engagement, improve teacher expectations, increase parental involvement, and take steps to build trust between the Black communities and the school districts. Finally, Ogbu (2003) recommends that wider society take every step to eliminate the remaining vestiges of discrimination. Ogbu (2003) notes, “societal change is necessary if the efforts of the Black community, families, and individuals as well as the school districts are to be effective” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 289).

Jean Anyon

In yet another insightful phenomenological study, Anyon (1980) examines how schools in complex industrialized countries make different types of education and curriculum knowledge available to students in different social classes. Her phenomenological examination provides concrete examples of different learning experiences between students from different social classes. Her examination consists of an ethnographical study of curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices in five elementary schools (Anyon, 1980). In this examination, she finds that the curriculum and school experiences of the students from lower social classes are qualitatively different than that of students from affluent and even middle social classes. Anyon (1980)
explicitly describes the curriculum and subsequent knowledge that is given to each social class. She theorizes that differing curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices lead to different cognitive and behavioral skills in each social setting and this creates a condition, in which “children from different social classes develop different relationships to symbolic and physical capital, to authority and control, and to their own productive activity” (Anyon, 1980).

The first two schools examined are what Anyon (1980) calls the working class schools. The working class schools are schools where most of the parents have blue-collar jobs, work unskilled jobs, and whose incomes are at or below $12,000 a year. Anyon discovers that in the working class classrooms the curriculum is mechanical and routine, involving very little decision making or choice. The school work is rarely given meaning or significance by the teachers and the schoolwork is evaluated by the child’s adherence to rules and procedures. Consequently, the students are trained to follow rules, instead of learning to develop their cognitive abilities. Anyon, also, notices the same authoritative training going on in classroom operations. The teachers would control classroom time and space without consultation or explanation to the students. Consequently, the knowledge that is transferred is knowledge of how to blindly follow orders. Since the school work and subsequent real world work is degrading to the students, it denies their capacity for creativity, thus, they resist. This creates a condition, in which, working class children develop a conflict relationship with capital, authority, and their own productive activity (Anyon, 1980).
The third school examined is what Anyon (1980) calls the middle-class school. The middle class school is a school where there is a mixture of several social classes: the blue collar rich, working and middle class white-collar workers, small capitalist, middle management workers, and working professionals, such as accountants and doctors. Most family incomes are between 13,000 and 25,000 a year. Anyon discovers that in the middle class classroom curriculum, the work is focused on getting the right answer and creativity is not required. This includes some cognitive reflection and decision making, but the emphasis is on following the right directions and steps to a right answer. There is no emphasis and even ambivalence toward the development of critical thinking skills. The result is schoolwork that is unexciting and cold. The knowledge that is transferred is abstract and based on cold facts. The instruction fosters a bureaucratic view of work and the motivation for doing well is monetary: a good job. Consequently, the middle class children develop a bureaucratic relationship to capital. The bureaucratic curriculum trains them into bureaucratic roles and their income allows them to buy things to try to make up for their school work and subsequent real world work not satisfying their human need for engagement and self-expression.

The fourth school examined is what Anyon (1980) calls the affluent professional school. In this school the parents are at the upper level of the upper middle class and are predominately professional. Most family incomes are between $40,000 and $80,000 a year. According to Ayon, work in this school is creative activity involving individual thought, choice, and expansion and illustration of ideas and are judged on quality of expression and appropriateness of its conception to the task. Individuality and creativity
is stressed in the classroom. Knowledge in this school is individual creative ideas. Students are asked to express and apply ideas and concepts. The work for the upper class children fosters linguistic, artistic, and scientific expression and the creative elaboration of ideas into concrete forms (Anyon, 1980). The curriculum allows these children to develop a relationship with labor that useful, expressive, and fulfilling.

The fifth school Anyon (1980) calls the executive elite school. In this school the majority of the families belong to the capitalist class and most of the fathers are top executives in major multinational companies. There are no minority children and most of the families earn over $100,000 a year. In this school, work is developing one’s analytical intellectual powers. Students are encouraged to reason through problems and produce quality intellectually sound products that are logically sound and of top academic quality. Students are taught knowledge related to conceptualizing rules by which elements may fit together in systems and then to applying these rules in problem solving. The curriculum prepares students for leadership roles in society. Thus, the work in this school prepares students to achieve and excel in life and the students develop a relationship to capital that puts them in position to be leaders (Anyon, 1980).

Anyon’s (1980) theoretical framework provides valuable insights into the nature of schooling in an advanced capitalist society. These insights reveal a hidden function of our educational system: to perpetuate and preserve unequal social relations in society. Anyon’s research can be a valuable tool for both policymakers and educators striving to end educational inequality in society. The theory answers a lot of questions about our modern capitalist society. For example, it explain why and how social class seems to
remain so stable, it explains the existence of a symbolic relationship between capital and social class, and it explains how people are socialized into the hierarchical structure of the capitalist society. In the article, Anyon provide a theoretical analysis, which helps to explain the phenomenon of social inequality and, as a consequence, provides valuable insights necessary to overcome educational inequality.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical framework of this study attempts to lays the foundation for a comprehensive examination of Appalachian college students that addresses structural and ideological means of educational inequality. To this end, this study will use the insights of studies on educational inequality (Kozol, 2005; Sewell & Hauser, 1980; and Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003), Freireian educational theory and Gramsci’s theories on hegemony and education as starting points in the analysis of the perceptions of Appalachian students from Ohio University and Shawnee State. Social research is built on assumptions embedded in specific theoretical perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2000). These theoretical perspectives are critical to how a researcher looks at the world, interprets what is seen, and decides what is real, valid and important to study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Consequently, the question of methodology comes down to a researcher’s theoretical perspective, or their epistemology, their way of thinking about the world and how knowledge is gained (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

The theoretical framework for this study draws heavily from neo-Kantian philosophy, which included a radical distinction between phenomena, the external world
that we perceive, and noumena, the perceiving consciousness. This epistemological
tradition is particularly relevant to a study on perceptions because this epistemological
tradition is concerned with the ways in which we apprehend the world and focuses on
how human beings actively construct reality, including knowledge. Knowledge, in this
tradition, is rooted in the socio-historical and cultural context of a particular time and
place and mediated by symbolic language. A fundamental need exists in human beings to
impose meaning on the environment, to order, classify, and regulate (Bowie, 2000). The
world of meanings comes from our symbolic language, which we gain from social
interaction. Symbolic language is everything that has meaning. Thus, symbolic meanings
play an extremely important part in the process, which we use to know the world, others,
and ourselves.

This theoretical framework helps to explain how symbolic meanings are often
used to “typify” and “objectify” other human beings. The reality of everyday life contains
typificatory schemes on other human beings that, unless challenged, will hold and
determine how we interpret and interact with others. Poverty and educational policy and
public discourse have been shaped by the concept of a culture of poverty and the
subsequent prejudgments on the behavior, attitudes, definitions, and identities of the
disadvantaged. How we view the disadvantaged has enormous implications for the design
and implementation of effective policy to combat educational inequality and these works
help to explain how education, both in the public and institutional domains, can and must
be used as a tool to elevate social inequality. Freire’s and Gramsci’s theories will be
described in the following sections.
Freireian Educational Theory

Dialectic Relationships

Freire (1970) sees educational and social inequality as originating in both the macro-institutional and micro-individual level. For Freire, the source of oppression lies in the systematic dehumanization of individuals and the individual level dehumanization of themselves and others. This systematic dehumanization Freire incorporates Hegel’s (1802) master-slave dialectic to examine the oppressed-oppressor dialectic. Like in Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, the consciousness of the oppressed is dependant on the oppressor, because the conditions of their existence have led the oppressed to internalize the consciousness of the oppressors. Friere notes, “The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped” (p. 27). The dialectic exists within the oppressed in the form of the desire for freedom and the fear of freedom. Because the oppressed have internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, they are dehumanized and tend themselves to become oppressors (Freire, 1970). The unjust social order is dehumanizing to both the oppressor and the oppressed. This dialectic can only be broken if the oppressed seeks to restore the humanity of both oppressor and oppressed. Thus, the liberation of the oppressed depends on changing the dialectic relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed and the key to social inequality and, by extension, educational equality is in the struggle to be more fully human.

The oppressor is unable to lead the struggle, because he dehumanizes others and a critical awareness of oppression only comes through the praxis of struggle (Freire, 1970).
Thus, subjectivity plays an important part of Hegel’s (1802) and Freire’s (1970) view of human liberation. As Friere notes, “Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both….Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society” (p. 26-27)? The struggle to be more fully human leads to the restoration of “true generosity,” which is generosity that does not include injustices designed to maintain an unjust social order. True generosity leads to true solidarity with the oppressed. “As Hegel affirms true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these “beings for another”” (Freire, 1970, p. 31).

According to Freire (1970), a critical consciousness is the path to true generosity. A critical consciousness allows the oppressed to engage in “transforming action” to change an oppressive social system (p. 29). Consequently, systems of oppression are not viewed as “a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which the oppressed can transform” (Freire, 1970, p. 31). To Freire (1970), the key to instilling a critical consciousness into the oppressed is through a praxis that consists of “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 33). In other words, educational practice should be deliberately constructed to help the oppressed understand how they are being controlled and conceptualize ways to liberate themselves and others.

**Problem Posing Education**

This goal is embodied in Freire’s “problem-posing education.” Freire (1970) examines the narrative character of the traditional teacher-student relationship and
articulates his “problem posing education” as a liberating alternative. Freire (1970), again, applies Hegel’s dialectic master/slave relationship to examine the traditional teacher-student relationship. Freire (1970) notes that, in the current setup, the teacher sets up a specific fixed and compartmentalized narrative on reality that is often alien to the lived experiences of the students. This is the result of an authoritative relationship between a “narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)” (p. 52). This narration leads to mechanical memorization and what Freire (1970) terms the “banking” concept of education (p. 53). According to Freire (1970), the current “banking education” system assumes that the teacher knows everything and the students nothing. This is very similar to the slave-master and oppressed-oppressor dialectic, because in all three the oppressed internalize the consciousness of the oppressors. In fact, projecting ignorance onto the other is, according to Freire (1970), “a characteristic of the ideology of oppression” (p. 53).

In the banking concept of education, the teacher is seen as the “subject” of the learning process, while the students are containers to be filled by information. Consequently, this process warps reality, stifles dialog, inhibits creativity, and is an instrument of oppression that is used in conjunction with a “paternalistic social action apparatus” (Freire, 1970, p. 55). In this apparatus, the oppressed are regarded as the deviants from a “just, organized, and good society” (Freire, 1970, p. 55). This is done because “the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them” (p. 55). Consequently, Freire (1970) notes, “the oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must
therefore adjust these “incompetent and lazy” folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality” (p. 55). The banking concept of education is designed to make students internalize the word-view of the oppressed and integrate the oppressed into the structure of oppression (Freire, 1970).

As opposed to the “banking concept” of education, Freire’s (1970) “problem-posing education” is designed to help the oppressed perceive the reality of oppression and conceptualize ways to “struggle to free themselves” (P. 31). Feire’s pedagogy is based upon a democratic relationship between teacher and student that is a partnership in which both are simultaneously teacher and student. This requires a “humanist, revolutionary educator” that engages students in critical thinking and a “quest for humanization” (Freire, 1970, p. 56). In other words, the student is seen to possess the cognitive capacity to teach while being taught (Freire, 1970). In Freire’s view, all human beings are capable of teaching because they are at least in part self educators. Human beings have agency and are active agents in constructing their own worldview, there is no objective reality that can be known, and realities are constantly changing. Thus, reality is jointly constructed, as opposed to being constructed based on the teacher’s narrative on reality. This is done through dialog. Freire (1970) illustrates how this is done:

The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier consideration as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the doxa (a Greek word
meaning common belief) is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the logos (the power of reason residing in the human soul). (p. 62)

This process is guided by the teacher, who increasingly poses problems relating to the students and their world. This process, according to Freire (1970), incites inquiry, creativity and critical thinking, because reflecting on themselves and the world increases the scope of an individual’s perception and allows him or her to “direct observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena” (p. 63). Consequently, this process teaches people to look at their own lived experiences and eventually realize how they are being controlled. Reality is now seen as fluid and dynamic not static and fixed. Students realize that current situations are historical realities susceptible to transformation because they are now open to alternative possibilities (Freire, 1970). Since how somebody perceives the world and themselves in the world directly affects the kind of actions they take, problem posing education becomes revolutionary fodder because it expand the students thinking to include alternative possibilities.

**Understanding Language, Dialogue, and Dialectical Relationships**

Freire (1970) explains the necessity of dialogue for learning and dialogics "the essence of education as the practice of freedom" (Freire, 1970, p. 69). Educators must understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed (Freire, 1970, p. 77). This means understanding how language affects the dialectic nature of the oppressed. Dialogue, according to Freire (1970), “is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world (Freire, 1970, p. 69). Dialogue is an act of creation; thus, discourse that perpetuates oppression cannot
be dialogue (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) explicitly describes the characteristics of dialogue. Freire (1970) explains that true dialogue has to be infused with love (commitment to others), humility, faith in people, hope, and critical thinking. Dialogue must be used by educators to help students reflect on their situation in the world.

Where the subject-object relationship is explored and the notion of 'generative themes' and how these may awaken critical consciousness is examined (Freire, 1970). Feire (1970) points out that “man is the only one to treat not only his actions but his very self as the object of his reflection” (p.78). This gives man the ability to conceptualize ways to transform the world with his own actions. A student’s “generative themes” are codifications of experiences, which an individual uses to understand the world. Consequently, empowering education must foster “generative themes” from the students own point of view. This is also how problem posing education as continuing praxis can permit men and women to “simultaneously create history and become historical-social beings” (Freire, 1970, p. 82).

**Freirean Educational Theory and Educational Inequality**

Freire’s (1970) theoretical framework is a concise examination of human consciousness. He uses Hegel’s (1802) theories on the dialectic relationship between master and slave to develop a general theory of oppression, which explains how the oppressed in society adopt the consciousness of the oppressor. From this theory, Freire (1970) examines the current dialectic relationship between teacher and student in contemporary educational systems and explains how this forces oppressed students to
adopt the consciousness of the oppressors. Thus, Freire develops an alternative educational pedagogy that does not dehumanize the oppressed or oppressor, but seeks the humanization and liberation of both. Freire’s (1970) theoretical framework provides valuable insights for examining educational inequality, because it reveals hidden oppressive practices in contemporary education, provides concise explanations for oppressive practices, and provides a valuable tool, in the form of his problem posing education pedagogy, for achieving a critical consciousness in oppressed populations and overcoming educational and social inequality.

**Gramsci’s Theory of Education**

*Hegemony*

Antonio Gramsci’s theory of education is based on his theories of hegemony, agency, and intellectuals. Gramsci was a leading Italian Marxist thinker who rejected the economic determinism in Marxism. The main goal of Gramsci’s writings was to “formulate a revolutionary strategy for social transformation in Western Europe” (Mayo, 1999, p. 35). The central concept of Gramsci’s theories was that of hegemony, which he borrowed from Lenin (Mayo, 1999). Hegemony is a group-based ruling system of ideas and institutions which establish the general context of cultural life (Elliot & Turner, 2001). Hegemony is a process of domination that one group in society uses to control all others. The process of domination is not the result of economic determinism as in traditional Marxism, but is contingent on a process of continual bargaining, negotiation, force, and resistance (Elliot & Turner, 2001). Unlike traditional Marxism, hegemony
gives every individual a degree of choice and freedom, because domination is achieved “through the exercise of influence and the winning of consent” (Mayo, 1999, p. 36).

Education, according to Gramsci, plays an important role in perpetuating existing hegemonies. Controlling education is critical for securing consent for the ruling way of life (Mayo, 1999). Schools traditionally prepare students for economic and political positions within the current social order (Borg, et al., 2002). Gramsci, being a Marxist, linked this hegemonic domination to the current mode of production. Gramsci argues that securing consent for the ruling class requires education to be “supportive of and supported by the prevailing mode of production” (Mayo, 1999, p. 36). This type of education narrowly instructs children for a specific occupation and prevents them from developing general ideas and a general culture (Mayo, 1999).

**Agency**

The concept of hegemony allowed Gramsci to develop a Marxist analysis of culture that respects human agency and rejects cultural determinism (Wolfreys, 2002). Hegemony has a “non-static nature,” because “it is constantly open to negotiation and renegotiation, and therefore to being renewed and recreated” (Mayo, 1999, p. 38). This allows for the possibility of human agency. Human agency is human action that has the possibility of transforming social arrangements, through the intended or unintended consequences of that action (Giddens, 1998). Human agency, according to Gramsci, can transform social arrangements by contesting dominant ideologies and ideas in specific areas of civil society (Mayo, 1999, p. 38). This is done through a “war of position, a
process of wide-ranging social organization and cultural influence” (Mayo, 1999, p. 38). Intellectuals play a key role in Gramsci’s “war of position” (Borg et al., 2002). Gramsci (1971) saw all men and women as intellectuals as they all carry on some level of intellectual activity, but only some are intellectuals in the functional sense.

**Two Types of Intellectuals and Educational Practice**

There are two classes of intellectuals in the functional sense. The first type is the traditional professional intellectuals, whose role is to produce consensus on the dominant ideologies and ideas of a hegemonic society. Traditional intellectuals “set themselves the task of developing and sophisticating the existing paradigms of knowledge” (Hall, 1996, p. 46). These intellectuals purposely try to set themselves apart from the people by putting themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group and this “illusion perpetuates the separation of intellectuals from the people” (Borg et al., 2002, p. 127). The second type is the organic intellectuals, who emerge as cultural or educational workers in response to particular social-historical developments (Mayo, 1999). “Organic intellectuals are actively involved in society, that is, they constantly struggle to change minds and expand markets (Mayo, 1999, p. 41). Organic intellectuals are organically linked to a particular social class (Borg et al., 2002). They become the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental-social class and function to direct the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong (Hoare & Smith, 1971).

Every social group creates organic intellectuals, which function to create group homogeneity and an awareness of its own functions in the economic, social and political
fields (Hoare & Smith, 1971). In the “war of position,” organic intellectuals can serve the interest of the dominant class/group or subordinate groups, depending on which group/class they are organically linked to. Organic intellectuals who are organically linked to the dominant class/group “serve to mediate the ideological and political unity of the existing hegemony” (Mayo, 1999, p. 41). On the other hand, organic intellectuals who are organically linked to a subordinate group/class aspiring to power engage in the war of position that enables the group/class to secure alliances and succeed (Mayo, 1999).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions and experiences of 34 Appalachian students related to postsecondary education in order to gain a greater and more accurate understanding of their experience. This chapter discusses the methodology used in this research.

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological exploratory methodology. This study is phenomenological because it is an attempt to understand the perceptions and perspectives of Appalachian students. Phenomenological research seeks to gain an understanding of the lived experience of research subjects (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). This research was exploratory in nature, because it sought an initial understanding of the perceptions of 34 Appalachian students from two different institutions of higher education. Exploratory research seeks an initial understanding of examine areas that have not been studied and in which a researcher wants to develop initial ideas and a more focused research question (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003, p. 556). Exploratory research is often done using qualitative methods, because the fundamental nature of qualitative research makes it an ideal choice for exploratory research. The fundamental nature of exploratory research is to develop initial understandings and qualitative research generally aims to develop hypotheses, where quantitative methods seek to test hypotheses (Thyer, 2001).
This research benefited a great deal from the use of a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research methods are instrumental in understanding the social world. Much of the social world cannot be expressed with the objective numbers of a quantitative analysis. A qualitative face-to-face research methodology enabled this research to examine the perceptions of Appalachian students holistically in their social context than a quantitative approach. Qualitative research is particularly relevant to the study of how individuals and groups view and understand the world and construct meaning out of their experiences, which is what this research seeks to do (Flick, 2002). Without a qualitative methodology and a phenomenological philosophy, this research would not have been able to gain an understanding of both the lived experience of the interview participants and their perceptions.

Participants

The sample for this research was drawn from college students, enrolled in either Shawnee State or Ohio University who meet the following criteria: enrolled in the institution, between the ages of 18 and 25, and from the Appalachian region. The sample size for this study was 34 individual students, 16 from Shawnee and 18 from Ohio, half male and half female. The sample size of approximately 15 from each institution was chosen because the interview of approximately 15 male and 15 female students will provide as broad an understanding of the lived experience of Appalachian students as possible given the time and resources available for this study. For the purposes of this study, the operational definition of enrolled was being currently registered for at least two
4 credit hour classes at a particular institution, because this will ensure that the participants are enrolled at the institution at least half time.

**Selection of Participants**

This study was based on data obtained in purposeful sampling. In order to gain an in-depth understanding about the issue under investigation, a purposeful sampling method was used to select information-rich cases. Purposeful sampling is a type of nonrandom sampling technique in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult to reach population (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003, p. 563). There are a number of strategies to do this, but this study incorporated two strategies customized to each institution under investigation. At Ohio University the primary researcher worked with OU’s Appalachian scholars program and used convenience sampling to identify 9 female and 9 male undergraduate Appalachian students for the study. The exact convenience sampling technique used in this study consisted of approaching random students, asking if they wanted to participate in the study, and asking questions to see if they qualify for the research. Additionally, a short demographic survey given before the interview verified the sample consisted of the desired population. At Shawnee State, where the majority of students come from the surrounding Appalachian region, the sample was taken by approaching and interviewing students on campus at university libraries, student centers, and other common areas, who met the following criteria: enrolled in the institution, under 25, and from the region. Eligibility was determined by inquiring as to where the student is from and verified by a
short written demographic survey (Appendix A) given before the interview to insure that
the participant is enrolled in the institution, under 25, and from the region.

**Site Selection**

These sites were selected for this study because they represent two different
institutions that exist in and serve very different populations: Shawnee State and Ohio
University. Shawnee State University is an open admissions institution that serves an
Appalachian region where many students are first-generation college attendees. Shawnee
State is the regional state university of Southern Ohio and is located in Portsmouth, the
seat of Scioto County, where only 16.18% of the population age 25 and older has a
college degree. Shawnee has 80 bachelors and associate degrees, at the lowest tuition rate
among Ohio public universities (Shawnee State University, 2008). Enrollment at Ohio's
newest four-year university is typically around 3,500 with over 60% of the students
coming from Scioto and surrounding counties and over 90% coming from Ohio
(Shawnee State University, 2008).

Ohio University is located in Athens County where 32.24% of the population age
25 and older has a college degree. It is the oldest public institution of higher learning in
the state of Ohio and the first in the Northwest Territory (Ohio University, 2008).
Admission to Ohio University is granted to the best-qualified applicants as determined by
a selective admission policy (Ohio University, 2008). Ohio University has more than 250
degree programs, including associate, bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees and
18,000 students (Ohio University, 2008). Eighty-six percent of the students enrolled at
the Athens campus are Ohio residents, with the greatest number of students coming from Cuyahoga County (Ohio University, 2008).

Examining these sites gave insights into the different experiences of Appalachian students, the issues affecting Appalachian students, why some areas are faring better than others, and the effect of attending a university that predominantly serves local populations versus one that predominantly serves non-local populations. The specific insights to these issues came out in the analysis and have been incorporated into the findings in chapter 5.

**Methods and Approaches**

While there are many data collection instruments used in qualitative research, including direct observation, interviews, focus groups, and the qualitative analysis of documents, the method used in this analysis was qualitative interviewing. Qualitative interviewing is a data collection instrument that lets the researcher understand experiences and reconstruct events that they do not experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Likewise, qualitative interviewing lets researchers extend their "intellectual and emotional reach across age, occupation, class, race, sex, and geographic boundaries" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3). This enabled the researcher of this study to understand experience that are alien to his own lived experience and more fully understand the perspectives and worldviews of the research participants. Consequently, qualitative interviewing was instrumental in creating a more complete understanding of the social world of Appalachian students and was invaluable for examining the social and political
processes in society that affect educational inequality. This study focuses on the perceptions of Appalachian students. Perceptions are inherently individualistic. The type of qualitative methodology used in this study allows the participants themselves to define and convey their perceptions in their own terms. This methodology enables researchers to gain a more complete understanding of the social phenomena associated with Appalachian students than research done without the viewpoint of the students themselves.

This study adopted a narrative approach to social science research. This central idea of this approach is to elicit a comprehensive response to a researcher's inquiry about the lived experience of a research subject (Miller, 2000). The narrative approach emphasizes the active construction of life stories through the interplay of interviewer and interviewee during the telling of a life story (Miller, 2000). The narrative approach focuses on understanding the interviewee’s changing perspective as it is mediated by context (Miller, 2000). “In the narrative perspective, ‘context’ includes both positioning in the social structure and time and, just as important, the social context of the interview itself” (Miller, 2000, p. 12). This approach allowed the interviewer and the interviewee to be collaborators in constructing the narrative of the interviewee’s life. This postmodern perspective sees reality as situational and fluid (Miller, 2000). Thus, the insights created by observing the interplay between the interviewer and interviewee is the only social reality available (Miller, 2000). These insights about structure and process are based on the particular time and place of the interview and information about any other context is indirect (Miller, 2000). The focal point of this perspective is the lived experience of the
research subject/subjects (Miller, 2000). Consequently, this perspective broadens the focus of inquiry to include the past and present. Additionally, this perspective broadens the scope of inquiry to include past and present social networks, because social networks, like families and friends, can be central to understanding the lives of individuals (Miller, 2000). This enabled the researcher in this study to expand the research to include the social networks of the interviewees, in particularly the Appalachian student’s friends, families, educators, and parents. Adopting the narrative approach and examining Appalachian students within an ongoing and evolving social structure further enabled this research to gain a more in-depth and complete understanding of social phenomena associated with Appalachian students.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this analysis was audio-taped, semi-structured, face to face, in-depth interviews, because they provide the opportunity to analyze a subject’s own words. The use of 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 was also 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 perceptions of Appalachian students about post-secondary education.

The semi-structured interview instrument used in this study consisted of 18 open-ended questions (Appendix A). This instrument was pre-tested to ensure reliability,
effectiveness, and applicability to research questions. Reliability is the “extent in which results are consistent over time” (Joppe, 2000, p. 1). Consequently, reliability for this instrument was tested in the pre-test by insuring that the pre-test answers to the questionnaire were relatively similar to each other. The instrument was refined using content validity. Content validity insures that a measure represent all the aspects of the conceptual definition of a construct (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). To ensure content validity, two steps were taken. First, each construct was clearly defined. Second, all parts of the construct was incorporated in the measure. Additionally, the instrument was pre-tested using face validity. This was accomplished by the peer review of at least three doctoral students. The areas covered in the instrument was the perceptions of Appalachian students about post-secondary education; the factors the student’s perceive as contributing to the perceptions of Appalachian students about post-secondary education; the factors that the student’s perceive as promoting the academic success of Appalachian students beyond high school; and the factors that the students perceive as contributing to the gender gap between Appalachian men and women that exists in postsecondary education. A brief survey was also given to respondents to collect demographic information on the participants. The survey contained the following questions:

1. What is your age
2. Where did you grow up?
3. Where do you live now? What county?
4. Are you enrolled in a college or University? Which one?
5. How many hours are you currently enrolled for?
6. What are you studying?
7. What is your gender?
This survey was administered before the start of the semi-structured interviews and consisted of closed ended questions. This information was used to help analyze and interpret the results of the semi-structured interviews and determine eligibility of participants.

**Description of Researcher: Strengths and Challenges in Terms of Research**

I grew up in a small Appalachian community, as the child of an impoverished single mother. My mom went through a lot raising my twin brother and me, but she still managed to adequately prepare us for the challenges of life. Seeing the obstacles and challenges that she faced on a daily basis gave me a desire to combat social inequality and help society’s most vulnerable and exploited members.

I began my college career at Shawnee State University, where I studied History and Social Science. My ultimate goal was to gain an understanding of the social structures and processes that shape all our lives, especially in the context of social inequality. My studies in History and Sociology have opened my eyes to the interactive effects of race, gender, and class on social inequality within every historical and contemporary society. I graduated with undergraduate degrees in both History and Social science with honors. This interdisciplinary background served me well as I entered Ohio University’s exceptional Masters Program in sociology.

I loved the sociology program at Ohio University. At Ohio University, I gained a strong fundamental grounding in sociological theory, sociological methods, and sociological inquiry. My ultimate goal in the sociology program was to learn how to...
contribute to sociological research that can help researchers and policymakers understand and solve problems that confront every society, such as poverty and inequality. This is why I chose to examine the lives of single mothers in the Appalachian region for my Master's thesis. This research was a study of the real lives of single mothers in the Appalachian area. Female headed single parent families make up half of all families in poverty. They are the group that has traditionally had the highest poverty rate in America (Census, 2002). I felt that we needed to look past possible 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.

While I feel that there are many worthy ways to examine social inequality in society, I feel that examining it in relation to education is the most interesting to me. Educational systems are situated in the context of culture, knowledge, and power and are critical to perpetuating and combating social inequality. I feel that understanding the dynamic relationship between schooling, education, popular culture, politics, and society is essential to understanding and combating social inequality. Consequently, I entered the Cultural Studies in Education program at Ohio University program to concentrate on a special interest, social inequality and education, and have examined social, institutional, and policy barriers to post-secondary educational experiences by Appalachian students for my dissertation.

My background as a low-income Appalachian student was an asset to my research, because it enabled me to understand the cultural context of specific social
concepts that relate to educational inequality in Appalachia. This is due to the subjective view of social reality embedded in the theoretical framework of this research. According to Weber (1949), there is no fact/value separation in social research. A person's social location in society shapes his ideas and viewpoints (Mannheim, 1936). The cultural context of social concepts cannot be purged, and socially meaningful action makes sense only in a cultural context (Weber, 1949). Consequently, familiarity with the cultural context of social concepts is an essential element in accurately depicting the phenomena of educational gaps in the United States.

While I feel that my background was ultimately an advantage in this research, it did pose challenges in terms of value neutrality and objectivity. Effective social researchers try to learn the viewpoints of other people and empathize with all parts of society (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). They must adopt a relational position, apart from any other specific social groups, yet in touch with all groups (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). This required me to be constantly aware of how my position, as an Appalachian student, affects my interpretation of social reality and keep the focus and goal of this research on the means and mechanisms of how the social world works, not on ends or normative goals (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003).

**Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Delimitations**

To assure credibility and trustworthiness in the research findings a variety of methods were used. First, the research was checked for theoretical clarity. In designing the survey coding the data, and analyzing the findings, an unambiguous, clear theoretical
basis was used to help insure credibility. Theoretical clarity came from insuring a coherent and systematic depiction and implementation of the theories used in this study. In qualitative research using grounded theory, the theoretical foundations of the research must “fit the empirical world it purports to analyze, provide a workable understanding and explanation of this world, address problems and change that make the core theory useful over time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 527). The theoretical foundation of this research accomplishes this task because it sees perspectives as fluid and this research seeks to understand these perspectives. The theoretical basis used in this research is based on interpretive constructionist educational theories (Frierean educational theory and Gramsi’s theory of education) that draw heavily from the Chicago school and neo-Kantian philosophy, which includes a distinction between phenomena, the external world that we perceive, and noumena, the perceiving consciousness. Consequently, these theories provided a workable understanding of the social world that is a good fit for an analysis of perceptions by describing the ways in which we apprehend the world and how human beings actively construct reality, including knowledge.

Second, credibility was established by insuring the findings match the evidence. This was done by; ensuring the data is sufficient to merit the researcher’s claims, insuring the systematic comparisons between data and categories, covering a wide range of empirical interpretation, providing strong links between gathered data and arguments and analysis, and providing enough evidence to allow independent agreement with the claims (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 527).
Third, interview data was coded and examined over seventeen times to insure theoretical saturation. Coding involved reading all the data numerous times to identify and break down segments of data into manageable segments, while constantly comparing and contrasting various successive segments of data and categorizing them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This laid the foundation for the analysis of the data.

The delimitations set on this research were a limited sample size and sampling area. These delimitations are based on practicality and economic feasibility. Consequently, due to the small sample size, the findings of this research may not represent a complete picture of the perceptions of Appalachian students about postsecondary education. However, the method of sampling and the variability of counties still provide a fairly general depiction of the students’ perceptions.

**Data Analysis**

All audio-taped interviews were lettered 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 letter that was used to identify specific interviews.

The audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and stored on CD-Rs by interview letter. The CD-Rs were stored under lock and key until completion of the study. Only the researcher and his advisor had access to the transcriptions on the CD-Rs.
This study has taken an inductive approach toward analyzing the interview data. This approach was selected because the purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions and experiences of 34 Appalachian students related to postsecondary education in order to gain a greater and more accurate understanding of the actual lived experiences of those struggling with inequality.

The goal of this analysis was to use themes as analytic tools for gaining an in-depth understanding of the lives of 34 Appalachian students as a whole and as part of a specific institutions and regions. 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 findings. During the coding process, the transcribed interviews were examined numerous times. As the data is coded, new concepts about the data were developed. These concepts and generalizations permitted me to gain a better and more complete understanding of the lived experience of 34 Appalachian students. Additionally, a general approach called "constant comparative analysis" was used for comparative analysis between Shawnee and Ohio University students and between male and female students. This approach involved taking one piece of data and comparing it with all others that may be similar or different in order to develop conceptualizations of the possible relations between various pieces of data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

Overall, a number of important findings emerged from the analysis of the research data. This chapter will discuss the findings of this research. First, the results of the short demographic survey will be presented. Next, the findings of this analysis as they relate to each of the three research questions will be presented. Then, in the third section, conclusions will follow.

Short Demographic Survey Results

The sample for this research consisted of 34 Appalachian students, 18 from Ohio University in Athens and 16 from Shawnee State University in Portsmouth. The sample for this study was obtained using a purposeful sampling in order to select information-rich cases. Fifty percent of interviewees from both institutions were male and fifty percent were female. A short demographic survey was given before the interview to verify eligibility of participants and collect data for analytical purposes. According to the survey results, the most common age range of both the Shawnee State University and Ohio University students was 18-20 years, but the Shawnee state students were on average older, having a higher percentage of participants in the 21-22 and 23-24 age ranges (see Table 5). This is not surprising because the average age of full time Shawnee State undergrads is 23 (26% are 25 and over, 74% are 24 and under), while the average age of full time Ohio University undergrads is 20 (5% are 25 and over, 95% are 24 and under) (State of the University: Shawnee State University, 2006; Office of Institutional Research: Ohio University Fact Book, 2008; XAP, 2008).
The sample consisted of students from all undergraduate levels (Table 4.1). Forty-four percent of the Ohio University students and thirty-three percent of Shawnee State students were freshman. The average age of Ohio University freshmen was 18.75 years, while the average age of Shawnee State freshmen was 19.4 years. Twenty-two percent of Ohio University students and nineteen percent of Shawnee State students were sophomores. The Ohio sophomores had an average age of 20.5 years, while the average age of Shawnee sophomores was 20.1 years. Twenty-two percent of Ohio University students and twenty-five percent of Shawnee State students were juniors. The Ohio juniors had an average age of 20.5 years, while the average age of Shawnee juniors was 21.5 years. Eleven percent of Ohio University students and nineteen percent of Shawnee State students were seniors. The Ohio University seniors had an average age of 21 years, while the average age of Shawnee State seniors was 22.2 years.

**Table 4.1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Ohio University</th>
<th>Shawnee State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>83.4%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-22</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-24</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data

A possible implication of these post-secondary age discrepancies is that Shawnee State students may require more help to brush up on their study skills, since they have been out of high school for a little longer when they start college, and may experience
additional costs, because the demographic data suggest that Shawnee students were taking longer to progress in their programs due to the fact that only 26% of Shawnee undergrad students graduate in six years compared to seventy-one percent of Ohio University undergrads.

This discrepancy in six year graduation rates seems not to be due to Shawnee State students taking fewer classes than Ohio University students. The interviewed Ohio University students were taking an average of 15 quarter hours of credit, while those from Shawnee State students were taking an average of 14 semester hours of credit. The conversion equation for converting quarter hours to semester hours is: one semester hour to one and a half quarter hours. Since full time students take an average of three quarters or two semesters of credit a year, we can say that both groups of students were earning similar amounts of credits, Shawnee Students earning the equivalent of 42 quarter hours of credit and Ohio University Students earning around 45 quarter hours of credit. The implication being that Shawnee students, despite taking on just as much college credit as Ohio students, take considerably longer to progress in their programs and graduate.

The students interviewed were all living in counties surrounding the postsecondary institution they attended. All Shawnee State students interviewed were still living in the county they grew up in, while only 78% of participating Ohio University Students were still living in their home county (Table 4.2). Shawnee State is primarily a commuting campus with only thirty-two percent of freshmen living in student housing compared to ninety-six percent of Ohio University freshmen doing the same. Participating students from Shawnee were from Scioto County (62.5%), the home of Shawnee State, Pike
county (6%), an Ohio county adjacent to Scioto County to the North, Greenup County (6%), a Kentucky County adjacent to Scioto County to the south, Lawrence County (6%), a Ohio county adjacent to Scioto County to the east, and Gallia County (19%), a county adjacent to Lawerance County further to the east. Participating students from Ohio University were from Athens County (50%), the home county of Ohio University, Washington County (11%), a county adjacent to Athens to the east, Meigs County (11%), a county adjacent to Athens County to the south, Hocking County (16.6%), a county adjacent to Athens county to the northwest, and Jackson County (11%) a county adjacent to the Hocking County further to the northwest.

Table 4.2:

Area of Residency by County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A = Athens</th>
<th>W = Washington</th>
<th>H = Hocking</th>
<th>M = Meigs</th>
<th>J = Jackson</th>
<th>S = Scioto</th>
<th>G = Gallia</th>
<th>Lawrence = L</th>
<th>Greenup = Gr</th>
<th>Pike = P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OU</td>
<td>69 100 100 100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data

There was also diversity in the participants’ programs of study in both institutions. All of the Ohio University students were in four-year programs, while only twenty-five percent of Shawnee State students were enrolled in four-year programs. The majority (75%) of
interviewed Shawnee students were enrolled in two-year programs designed to lead directly into a career, such as nursing, electromechanical engineering, and business management (Appendix I). This trend is reflected in the graduation rates of the university, because in 2006 nearly forty percent of Shawnee States graduates received associate degrees compared to a little over one percent for Ohio University graduates in the same year. While most college degrees lead to higher paying jobs, the general rule is that more education means a better job (US Department of Education, 2008). Consequently, graduates of Shawnee State University with associates’ degrees will statistically make less money, because the more education you have, the more money you tend to make (Digest of Education Statistics, 2006).

**Research Question One Findings**

Research Question one asks, “What are the perceptions of Appalachian students in OU and Shawnee State about post-secondary education?” The examination of the interview data revealed three key findings that shed light on this question. Each one sheds light on a different aspect of how these participants view postsecondary education and their postsecondary educational experiences thus far (see Fig 4.1).
Fig 4.1. Findings Regarding Question 1

The first findings are on how the students themselves view the value of education and the generational gap that exists regarding the value of education. These findings speak directly to motivational and resource factors influencing Appalachian students in terms of postsecondary education. The second finding looks at the perceptions of the interviewed Appalachian students on how Appalachian students are academically prepared for postsecondary education. This finding examines the impact that the quality of education that Appalachian students receive during their secondary and primary school years impacts their post-secondary educational experiences. The third finding examines how Appalachian students in Shawnee State, a non-traditional open-admissions institution
serving primarily Appalachian students, perceive the institution and the education that they are receiving at the institution. These findings, taken in aggregate, provide insight into the perceptions of Appalachian students in Ohio University and Shawnee State about post-secondary education and each of these will be examined in the preceding sections.

Perceptions Regarding Value of Education

From these interviews, there was no indication that education was devalued in the Appalachian student population, but, conversely, there was significant evidence that the all the interviewed students valued and wanted to attend and succeed in college if given the opportunity. A Shawnee State female junior (participant V) even compared obtaining college degree with not winding up flipping burgers;

College is essential now. If you want a decent job that is. When we go shopping or out to eat I ask myself, “Do you want to be that person behind the counter flipping burgers”? And you know what, I don’t. They (her parents) were rushed to low wage jobs or the military and now later they have seen what has come from it and I don’t want to suffer like they have. Besides, I love college. It’s fun.

Likewise, a male Ohio University sophomore (participant D) proclaimed;

Not going to college was not an option for me. Without college, I don’t think I will get a good job nor have a good life. Basically, I need a decent education to survive. You need that college experience to get a taste of what you can achieve. I don’t want to waste my life and I want to reach my full potential.

The significance to this finding lies in the question, “If Appalachian students want to get an education, why is it not happening?” There is debate on why educational gaps exist. Is
it due to lack of funding for poor students? Is it due to lack of motivation? Is it due to other factors? What is the cause? The remainder of this chapter sheds light on these questions.

Appalachian perceptions regarding the value of education have noteworthy importance to the development of appropriate educational policies, from effective classroom learning environments to post-secondary funding. Kozol (1992, 2005) points out that attempts designed to address educational inequality are often based on stereotypes of the poor and of minorities. It is easy to see what he is referring to. In fact, when addressing the troubling educational gaps that exist between persistently poor and historically disenfranchised groups and the rest of the nation, much of contemporary public policy is designed to “fix” the poor (Fine & Weis, 1998). Kozol (1992) explains that educational policy, such as the accountability movement and No Child Left Behind, erroneously view the academic inequality experienced by our nation’s predominantly poor school districts as the result of teachers and students not working hard enough. As a result, information about persistently poor and historically disenfranchised groups has been simplified at the societal level, resulting in the development of oppressive stereotypes that thwart the development of successful and appropriate policies aimed at alleviating the educational gap between disadvantaged groups and the rest of the nation (Kozol, 2005).

Generational Gap in Value of Education

According to the interviews, not only are the perspectives of students important to post-secondary educational success, the perspectives of a student’s parent/s plays a very
critical role, as well. Parents are key providers of resources for college students (Hauser, 1980). Lower parental financial help can be a key obstacle for Appalachian students, but lower educational expectations and a devaluing of the utility of higher education on the part of their parents can have considerable effect on the educational success of Appalachian students in ways that have little to do with financial support. Lack of parental support could affect Appalachian student’s educational self confidence as well as their educational aspirations. Sewell and Hauser (1980) note, “The failure of many able lower status children to have high aspiration levels is at least as likely to result from the student’s perception of lack of encouragement by parents and teachers as it is to lack of financial resources” (p. 65).

An important finding of this study is that there seems to be a perception gap between Appalachian students and their parents regarding the value of education and educational expectations. This gap appears with regards to both college education and education in general. Both are important to higher educational attainment, because of the significant impact that secondary and primary education has on post-secondary educational attainment. A quote from a male Appalachian junior (participant M) from Ohio University illustrates this theory;

I think parent involvement is very important. My parents don’t help me much with school. My father doesn’t understand why I need to go to school. He tells me to get a manufacturing job and rants about how he supported us without college. It’s different now and I don’t think he understands that.

Additionally, a female Shawnee freshman (participant AA) noted;
My mom and dad don’t understand how important college is. They tell me that a decent job can be obtained without a college degree, if I just look. A lot of people’s parents are baby boomers and didn’t have much trouble trying to find good jobs without college and now a lot of people their age still have that misconception.

There is also a trend of lowered educational expectations on the part of the parents in both student populations. A Shawnee State senior (participant Z) noted;

I’m a first generation college student like most of us at Shawnee. I don’t think that a lot of older people in the Appalachian area value education as much as my generation does. Because of the poor economic system here, they see no use for it. Think about it. If you don’t expect education to be of any use, why push your children academically? If the parents don’t expect much education for themselves or their children it can become a vicious cycle.

This student brings up an important point. Research indicates that parent expectations or aspirations toward their children affect educational achievement (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Hanson et al., 1997; Reynolds & Gill, 1994). Parents with higher expectations for their children are more likely to set higher standards for their children's schooling than parents with lower expectations and are more likely to transmit the values of doing well in school and of getting along well with teachers and peers (Zhan, 2005). In another example of lowered educational expectations on the part of the parents, a female Ohio University Student (participant G) articulated;
My folks say that around here, a college education is not necessary to get a good job. They say that there are many power plants around the area that a lot of people can get a decent living out of. Low cost of living and stuff. When I tell them I’m going to college, they act as if I’m wasting my time. Every time I go home, my mom asks me what am I doing they’re not going to give you a degree anyways.

The responses of the interviewees give a clue as to the source of this discrepancy. The reason for this perception gap seems to stem from the changing economic conditions in Appalachia and the United States as a whole. Many interviewees mentioned that the economy of Appalachia and the United States as a whole has changed in recent years making it more necessary to have a post-secondary education.

Perception is not separated from our lived experience of the world. It is not surprising that there exists a generational perception gap in such a quickly changing economy. Appalachia’s economy, like the rest of the country’s economy, has moved into a post-industrial stage where higher levels of knowledge and skills are needed to participate (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008). Previously, extraction industries, such as coal mining and logging were the primary ways of making a living in most of the region. This kind of work required very little education. In fact, most workers were high school dropouts. Today, a high school dropout earns an average of only $21,332 per year and this income is not sufficient to support a family of four above the federal poverty line (Appalachian Regional Association, 2008).

Both, the U.S. Department of Education and the Appalachian Regional Commission argue that at least some college or postsecondary training is becoming more
and more necessary to obtain jobs that pay a livable wage. A U.S. Department of Education commissioned paper on workforce and job-opening projections reveals that by the year 2008, sixty-four percent of all jobs and sixty-nine percent of all new jobs will require at least some postsecondary education (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2002; Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Appalachia is particularly impacted by the changing national economy, because, historically, its resources have benefited only a fraction of its 15.3 million people. After the Civil War, an imbalance in Appalachian land ownership led to an economic crisis (Williams, 2002). Subsistence agriculture supported most families and, as the population grew through natural increase, pressure on the land increased (Drake, 2001; Williams, 2002). This imbalance forced the majority of people to become wage laborers (Duncan, 1999). As a result, an Appalachian middle-class never developed and Appalachian society became rigidly divided and wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few elites (Duncan, 1999).

During the first part of the twentieth century, widespread corruption, nepotism, fiscal irresponsibility, and mis-governance by these local elites led to outside businesses controlling regional politics in Appalachia (Billings & Blee, 2000; Williams, 2002). These businesses exploited the resources and cheap labor of Appalachia and contributed relatively little to the local economies. The result was large segments of the Appalachian population dependent upon outside sources of capital and upon a single-industry, extractive economy. These conditions got even worse during periods of economic turmoil, such as the stock market crash of 1929 and the collapse of various extraction
industries. The outcome is a region characterized by a ridged economic stratification with a large population of vulnerable and impoverished people (Duncan, 1999).

**Perceptions Regarding Access to Higher Education**

The interview data also demonstrate that the vast majority of the Appalachian students interviewed perceived obtaining a college education as difficult. Most (85%) of the Appalachian college students, (100% of Shawnee and 83% of Ohio University students) interviewed perceived obtaining a college education as difficult due to either a lack of preparedness, the cost, time, or the lack of resources available to them. The burden of paying for college was listed as a major problem facing Appalachian students by over 91% (100% of Shawnee students and 83% of Ohio University students) of the participants in the study. This is not surprising considering Appalachia has historically been one of the poorest and economically underdeveloped regions of the United States (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008).

Paying tuition is a major problem for students from poor areas. A good number (53%) of the participants linked educational success with local economic development. This is supported by previous studies (Blackburn, Bloom, & Freeman, 1989; Carter, 1999; Davis & Johns, 1982) that link the overall health and composition of a regional economy to educational access. These studies found that areas with persistently low socioeconomic development tended to have persistently low post-secondary educational rates. Stafford, Lundstedt, and Lynn (1984) point out that this creates a cycle that is self-reinforcing due to an insufficiently educated labor force. Consequently, the lower than average per capita income in persistently poor areas, like Appalachia, has a reciprocal
relationship with lower than average post-secondary educational rates and both have to be addressed simultaneously.

Many (35%) of the students interviewed reported that Appalachian students have to work two jobs, sacrifice sleep, work long hours, and delay marriage and family. A male Shawnee freshman (participant S) noted,

Several students have to work more than one job to pay tuition and, like, live and stuff…. because this is such a poor area there are not a lot of jobs that pay enough on their own. I know a few people that work jobs, but they don’t go to school. They can’t. It takes too much time and they can’t do it. Minimum wage. What is it? 6.75? You can’t live on that. Let’s not even talk about saving for tuition or books.

Research (King, 2002) demonstrates students who work long hours will not only lengthen the amount of time it takes to get their degree, but also increase their likelihood of dropping out. While 80 % of college students work while enrolled in college (U.S. Department of Education, 2008), Appalachian students may have to work longer hours due to scarcity of decent paying jobs and rigid economic stratification that exist in the Appalachian area. This is particularly significant due to the increasing costs associated with attending an institution of higher education. Some students even said that they often had to sacrifice sleep in order to meet the demands of being a student in Appalachia. A male Shawnee State junior (participant X) with two jobs noted,
I often have to stay up all night and go to school the next morning and sleep through class. I don’t know how I’m going to do this. In college you have to get the sleep that you need in order to focus.

Furthermore a female Ohio University sophomore (participant Q) noted,

I have a two year old daughter and, by the time I get home from Wal-Mart, I have to spend the whole night doing my stuff for school. If I want to see her I can’t sleep.

A number of participants (44 %) even felt that they had to choose between starting their adult life and going to college. The students of this research fall between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. An individual’s late teens and early twenties is often a time of change and opportunity. Many young people choose to get married, start a family, go out with friends or pursue any number of other personally fulfilling endeavors.

Unfortunately, in order to earn an income while in college, students have to sacrifice. The existence of economic constraints means that students faced choices, and thus sacrifices. Students cannot satisfy all their wants, but must choose to go without some goals in order to accomplish others. This is the situation of all students, but low income students face even tougher choices due to the limited resources available to them.

A female student (participant AD) from Shawnee alluded to this during her interview,

The main problems staying on track at my age is that a lot of people want to live their life, but you can’t. So many people I know quit because they get married or get pregnant or are just in a hurry to start their life. Most of Shawnee is commuter students. They are often isolated from events on campus, so they are more bored.
Likewise, a male Ohio University student (participant A) noted,

I can’t do anything. I feel that life is passing me over. You know wasting my life.

It’s hard; I can’t wait to get out of here.

All students make decisions that affect their ability to complete a degree. They often weigh these choices carefully. Yet, not all students have the same choices. Often, the sacrifices of the most economically disadvantaged must be greater. With choices and sacrifices comes doubt. This was seen in this study, in that some (43%) of the participants from both institutions told of moments of doubt concerning their decision to go to college in seeing the lives of others of their own age. One female Ohio University junior (participant R) confessed;

I see some of my friends my age having babies and I think to myself, why are you in college, what are you doing this for?

Doubt can have a profound impact on the likelihood of completing a degree. The economic position of a student can significantly impact educational achievement. Interviewees reported that the perceived difficulties associated with getting an education generates a feeling in Appalachian students that college is beyond their reach. Previous research supports this assumption. In-fact, Pelavin and Kane (1988) found that low income students are less than half as likely to even pursue higher education as higher income students and a very high percentage of the children from low income families who graduate from high school who do not go on to college (Kane, 1994; Heckman, Locher, & Taber, 1998).
Perceptions Regarding Academic preparedness

An adequate high school education is a major factor in post-secondary educational success (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Unfortunately, students from many rural Appalachian school systems do not get exposed to the same quality of information and study methods that are provided in other regions of the country (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008). This is reflected in the findings of this research. Many Appalachian students (53% total, 75% of Shawnee students and 33% of Ohio University students) claimed that their sub-standard high school educational background will significantly prolong their college graduation. The participants reported, as some of the reasons, lack of resources in their high school, insufficient high school curriculum, insufficient motivation, an emphasis on bringing “slow learners” up to minimal standards to satisfy No Child Left Behind funding standards to the detriment of more advanced pupils, favoritism for students considered college material, and lazy unmotivated teachers. For example, when answering a question about whether Appalachian students have what they need to achieve their educational goals, a female freshman from Ohio University (participant G) noted;

No not really. To be honest, in my high school the teaching curriculum was weak. We didn’t have a lot of advanced classes. Of course the instructors it seemed like they were just giving grades a lot of time. There will be a lot of people sleeping in my class and stuff and this No Child Left Behind thing, it holds a lot of people back because I had a lot of teachers that was like, they would work with the slow learners, while we just sat around and joked and did a bunch of nothing. I think
the result is poor ACT scores for the more advanced students and a lot of people not getting the funding they could use in college.

This was a trend in both colleges as illustrated by this quote by a male Ohio university sophomore (participant D);

I started last year, knowing the campus. But I didn’t really know what to expect. I feel like now that I didn’t have the preparation that I needed. Studying techniques and the way that the schedules are set up is so different. And this is just a big difference between high school where again I don’t feel that I was properly prepared for college. In Federal Hocking the courses weren’t really that challenging and I just didn’t feel like I was being pushed. I believe, because I wasn’t totally prepared for what college has thrown at me, I am going to take longer to complete my degree and I know that it will be more expensive because I’m retaking classes. I don’t know how I’m going to pay for the extra time.

It’s not only the prospect of retaking classes that the students claim is prolonging their college education, it’s the developmental courses that they have to take, as illustrated by this quote by an male Shawnee freshman (participant AG);

Many students here have to take developmental courses. You know English 99, Math 98 and stuff like that. It’s frustrating to start college and be behind. I never took much Algebra in High school. I don’t know why they didn’t make me take it. But, imagine taking all these courses so you can begin to earn your degree. A lot of students get so frustrated that they quit. I wanted to go into engineering, but all the courses have high math prerequisites. There’s this environmental engineering
program that looks good, but it’s going to take me a year before I can begin taking those classes.

A male Ohio University Freshman (participant F) portrayed similar feelings;

I’m not too good in math and stuff, so I have to take all these lower courses….These classes are hard on me. It’s hard to take criticism when you start to feel like failure. A lot of students don’t have good academic backgrounds and this can be very discouraging when you struggle.

Students from both institutions also claim that the lower educational expectations that poorer students receive during high school considerably impacts their educational achievement. An female Ohio University junior (participant R) noted;

I would definitely think that some do have it harder. From an educational standpoint is probably not up to a standard as far as high school goes. When they come to college some of them feel as if they weren’t prepared. I know with my college experience it could have been a lot better as far as classes are concerned. I think that if you don’t expect enough of your students then they don’t expect enough of themselves.

Likewise, a male Shawnee freshman (participant S) noted;

I actually went to a good sized high school and then another small school. The area was poorer. Many students were poorer there, because they come from low social economic families. With the teachers there was a difference in the level the classes were taught at. The richer students had more attention and harder work. How do you compensate for that? Lower expectations.
Previous research (Arnold, 1985; Rampaul, Singh, & Didyk, 1987; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) seems to support the assertion that lower expectations considerably impact a student’s educational achievement. Cotton (1989) reports of research conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968 in a San Francisco elementary school. This research involved giving teachers false information about the learning potential of certain students in grades one through six and concluded that the student’s intellectual development is largely a response to what teachers expect and how those expectations are communicated (Cotton, 1989). Students from both institutions note that the unequal educational funding that poorer districts receive results in lower-income students having less motivation to achieve academically. A female Ohio university freshman (participant C) quote illustrates this;

I think with this area…our school district is one of the biggest school districts in this area it spans from the Hocking river to the edge of Washington County and that’s the whole bottom part of Athens County. It’s one of the poorest parts because we don’t have big business here that brings in revenue. Ohio schools are based on property taxing and we don’t have a lot of that. Our high school is 1.18 million dollars in debt. There is a huge controversy about the school board and what parents would like to see done with the school. It’s hard to encourage southeastern Ohio students, because I feel that they get discouraged because they see what’s happening in other schools and they may have friends up north and they see that they have a huge school all this funding and they might get a little bit
discouraged. They don’t want to further their education because they feel like they can’t compete.

A Shawnee student (participant Y) articulated similar concerns;

It’s really an eye opener knowing that people have it better than I do. I don’t like the fact that because we are from Portsmouth it seems like everyone is getting better educations. Yea, it’s very hard. Students, who come from richer areas like Cleveland or a huge city like Cincinnati, do better than us. They come here and they don’t have to take the stuff we have to take. We don’t have the education they have gotten in northern Ohio.

As we have seen, many of the participants reported feeling that the perceived inadequate high school educational background experienced by themselves and other Ohio Appalachian students will create a significant obstacle to post-secondary educational success. These obstacles included time consuming and expensive developmental courses, insufficient learning strategies, delayed graduation, feelings of educational and intellectual inadequacy, inability to meet college admission standards, feelings of de-motivation and helplessness due to unequal high school funding, and feelings of post-secondary educational fatalism.

Researches (ACT, 2004; Kirst, 2004) support this assertion and suggest that the low rates of postsecondary persistence and attainment may be attributable to the general lack of preparedness of high school graduates for postsecondary education. Multiple reports have shown that minority and poor students who enter postsecondary education are academically ill-prepared (Martinez & Klopott, 2004; NCES, 2004). According to
Kirst and Bracco (2004), almost half of the students who enter higher education and a little less than two-thirds of the students who go to community colleges must first enroll in remedial, non-credit-bearing courses and programs (Martinez & Klopott, 2004). Another study by the National Center for Educational Statistics showed that 40% of entering college students had to take at least one remedial course (Martinez & Klopott; NCES, 2005). Consequently, it seems that quality in higher education is closely connected to equality in K-12 education, because equal higher educational opportunity requires all incoming students be given the tools necessary to succeed in college.

Quality of high school education remains a major factor in college-level access and success. Improvement of rural schools faces special challenges, because of limited funding. School funding issues are a root cause of K-12 educational inequality (Spelling Report, 2005). School funding has been a very contentious problem for Ohio. Wealth-based disparities permeate the current educational system and are a major obstacle to providing a quality education to children from poorer districts.

The Ohio State Constitution requires "a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the State." Traditionally, this has been interpreted to mean that every student is entitled to an education that meets the state’s minimum standards (Miller v. Korns, 1923). In 1991, the Ohio Coalition for Equity & Adequacy of School Funding filed a lawsuit (DeRolph v. State) challenging the constitutionality of the current educational funding system in Ohio and, as a result of this lawsuit, the state Supreme Court declared the state's education finance system unconstitutional in 1997 (DeRolph I) and in 2000 (DeRolph II) and ordered the state to change. Governor Taft revised the
funding system and increased state funding for education, but the court again found the system unconstitutional (DeRolph III) and directed the General Assembly to remedy the deficiencies. In 2003, the Ohio Coalition for Equity & Adequacy of School Funding asked the Superior Court for compliance on DeRolph, but the state and Supreme Court prohibited compliance. A more equitable school funding system is an essential part of any plan to address post-secondary educational inequality.

**Perceptions regarding Shawnee State**

Shawnee State is a relatively unique institution, because it is a post-secondary educational institution that provides relatively affordable and accessible education to Appalachian students. Shawnee is an open admissions institution that serves an Appalachian region where many students are low income first-generation college attendees. Shawnee had 80 bachelors and associate degrees, at the lowest tuition rate among Ohio public universities (Shawnee State University, 2008). Enrollment at Ohio's newest four-year university is typically around 3,500 with over 60% of the students coming from Scioto and surrounding counties and over 90% coming from Ohio (Shawnee State University, 2008).

There were some unique insights into the Appalachian student experience that came only from the Shawnee Student data and did not occur in the Ohio University student data. I therefore conclude that social identity and position strongly influence our educational choices. Because, many of Shawnee’s students are low income first-generation college attendees, many of Shawnee student’s choices are influenced by this status. As mentioned previously, the existence of economic constraints means that
Appalachian and other poor students faced choices and sacrifices in order to achieve in post-secondary education and, consequently, low income students are less than half as likely to even pursue higher education (Pelavin & Kane, 1988). Many (56%) of the Shawnee Students felt that Shawnee State University was their only educational choice because of open admissions, location, and cost, but were unsatisfied with the limited degree offerings and reputation of the University. Illustrating this point, a female Shawnee Freshman (participant T) claimed that;

Personally, I didn’t have the opportunity to go to Ohio State and I chose here, because I didn’t feel that they would accept me anywhere else and it’s close to home. This school provides some educational opportunities that otherwise did not exist, but not the full educational options you would see in a traditional campus. Don’t get me wrong, I know that without a good SAT score or grades I wouldn’t be able to get in anywhere else and that’s ok. But, I don’t think that I will get the full educational options that you would get at a bigger, more traditional school. I know it don’t cost very much, but I wish there were more resources. An expansion of the fields of study would be nice and it would be nice if we had masters programs.

Furthermore, another female Shawnee freshman (participant Z) professed;

I chose Shawnee because it’s close to home and cheap. It’s all I can afford. I want to go somewhere where I can study Anthropology, but here all I can do is take a few classes…..No, I think people look at us differently. People who go to a big school look at you differently. People say, “Oh, you go to Shawnee, what
happened”? I think people would think that because I go to Shawnee, I must not be able to go to a regular college.

Another Shawnee specific theme was that some Shawnee State students (31%) felt that some majors were out of their reach because of the amount of time and money it would cost and the inability to pay back student loans. In the words of a female Shawnee junior (participant AD);

Along with loans comes a responsibility to take something where you can make a lot of money quickly. When I originally started, I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I started out in teacher education and it was great. Unfortunately, it wasn’t for me. I wanted to teach, but that’s going to take me four or five years and I need to take something that I can graduate from sooner. Make more money with less debt. Shawnee has a good reputation for the nursing program so, I chose that.

In addition, another Shawnee specific theme was that some Shawnee students (38%) felt that Shawnee degrees were worth less than degrees from other institutions, because Shawnee caters to Appalachian students and is an open admissions institution. A male Shawnee student (participant AF) declared;

I think that you can go further with a degree from a college like the University of Kentucky or OSU than you can with a degree from here. Students from our high school can go here really cheap. They even give free tuition to the valedictorians, but Shawnee is seen as one step up from high school where most colleges are like 5 steps up.
Another Shawnee senior talks about Shawnee’s exceptional Ohio registered nursing exam pass rate and the perception of Shawnee state’s nursing program in public opinion. She explains (participant AB);

If I go to a bigger city they will kind of look at me like, “What’s Shawnee State?” Look at me like a hillbilly or something. I don’t think that the name Shawnee State will open many doors. I feel that it’s no different than anywhere else. A lot of people have the misconception that people aren’t smart here. Of course I don’t agree with that. As far as nursing programs, Shawnee is one of the top programs in Ohio. They had the highest pass rate on the state boards this year. Of course everybody thinks Ohio State and Case Western is the place to be. Again, we’re actually accredited by the Ohio State Board of Nursing and not many schools in Ohio are.

She is right. Shawnee students have done very well. Between 1991 and 2001 the majority (84%) of Shawnee State nursing students, who took the Ohio registered nursing exam passed. This rate has steadily increased and currently Shawnee State boasts one of the highest pass rates of any school in Ohio (Shawnee State University Website, 2008).

As the interview data demonstrates, because of Shawnee’s open admission status, location, and cost, many of the interviewed Shawnee students felt that Shawnee was their only educational choice. While Shawnee State provided a much needed post-secondary option for Appalachian students, the survey data reveals that Shawnee students felt that they weren’t getting the education that they wanted. Shawnee state’s curriculum is
different than Ohio University’s curriculum. A great deal of Shawnee’s degree programs are two-year programs designed to lead directly into a career, such as nursing, electromechanical engineering, and business management. Some felt that some majors, like education, are out of their reach because of the amount of time and money it would cost and the inability to pay back student loans. Nearly 44% of all Shawnee State graduates received associate degrees compared to a little over one percent for all Ohio University graduates in 2006.

Using one of the theoretical frameworks of this study, this is not surprising. Gramsci tells us that schools traditionally prepare students for economic and political positions within the current social order. Gramsci, being a Marxist, linked this hegemonic domination to the current mode of production. Gramsci argues that securing consent for the ruling class requires education to be “supportive of and supported by the prevailing mode of production” (Mayo, 1999, p. 36). This type of education narrowly instructs children for a specific occupation (Mayo, 1999). This appears to be what is happening at Shawnee State. More education means a better job (US Department of Education, 2008). Graduates of Shawnee State University with associates’ degrees will statistically make less money, because the more education you have, the more money you tend to make (Digest of Education Statistics, 2006). While Shawnee State is providing much needed educational opportunities to Appalachian students, it still doesn’t provide Appalachian students with equal educational access.

Gramsci also tells us that traditional education prevents culturally marginalized students from developing different and bias free ideas and an appropriate culture to
challenge the status quo (Mayo, 1999). This directly goes to the social purpose of
education and the purpose of higher education. The curriculum of Shawnee State appears
to be geared toward preparing students to get a job and start making money as quickly as
possible. In an examination of how American higher education reinforces class
hierarchies by unequally distributing “educational capital,” Tsui (2003) identifies a
relationship between institutional selectivity and the development of higher order
thinking skills. Tsui (2003) demonstrates that certain valuable cognitive skills such as
critical thinking are less pursued at nonselective colleges and universities that serve
students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds than at selective institutions.

Critical thinking skills are not only critical to economic success, they are critical for
achieving and maintaining a democratic society. Thomas Jefferson, the author of the
Declaration of Independence, did not separate education from government (Jefferson
Center, 2006). Despite his faith in the ability of man to govern himself, Jefferson realized
the responsibility of self-government could be assumed successfully only by an
enlightened people. He felt that a democracy could only exist with an educated and
informed electorate and that talent and virtue, needed in a free society, should be
educated regardless of wealth, birth or other accidental condition. According to Jefferson,
only popular government can safeguard democracy and every government degenerates
when trusted to the upper class alone.
Research Question Two Findings

Research question two focuses on the factors that promote academic attainment of Appalachian students beyond high school. The findings of the interview data revealed six key factors that help Appalachian students gain access to and achieve postsecondary educational success (see Fig 4.2).

Knowledge of Learning Strategies
College Admission Education
Middle or Upper Class Background
An Educator’s Influence
Intrinsic Motivation
Effective Educational Programs and Policies

What factors promote academic attainment of Appalachian students beyond high school?

Fig 4.2. Findings Regarding Question 2

The first factor is knowledge of learning strategies and how classes that focused on learning strategies help Appalachian students succeed in college. This factor relates directly to how prepared Appalachian students are for college level work. The second
factor is the college admission education and how this type of education helped many of the participants to realize that college was vital to economic well-being and within their reach. This factor helps shed light on how to best help Appalachian students prepare for and get into postsecondary institutions. The third factor is on how some of the participants’ middle or upper class background and history of college achievement in the family helped promote post-secondary educational achievement. This factor helps to gain insight into the role that socioeconomic status plays in post-secondary educational access and success. The fourth factor is an educator’s influence on Appalachian educational success. This section primarily focuses on the critical role educator’s play in encouraging and aiding marginalized students and how Freirian educational theory can make an educator be more effective in promoting learning in marginalized populations. The fifth factor is intrinsic motivation. This factor illustrates how important personal motivation was to obtaining a college education. Finally, the sixth factor is effective educational programs and policies designed to equalize educational opportunities. This section examines the need to expand these programs and additionally provide altered curriculums, more classes on learning strategies, secondary educational equality, and encouragement. These factors, taken in aggregate, provide insight into the factors that promote academic attainment of Appalachian students beyond high school and will be examined in the forthcoming sections.

**Learning Strategies**

One of the factors that promote academic attainment of Appalachian students beyond high school was found to be learning strategies. Many (56% of Shawnee Students
and 22% of Ohio Students) students of both institutions said that they simply did not know how to succeed in college classrooms when they got to college. A male Shawnee freshman (participant AG) explains;

I wish they had a lot more classes that would teach you how to learn. A lot of the teaching is telling you this and you regurgitate it on the test. They’re not teaching you how to do this. A lot of Appalachian students do not do well, because they basically don’t know how to do it. A lot of people don’t know the learning strategies. It’s not that they’re dumb; it’s that this isn’t what they are used to. They have classes like these and they’re helping me get through, but most people don’t know that they exist.

Additionally, a female Ohio University sophomore (participant Q) noted;

I don’t like the way that the professors here teach. All these lectures and multiple choice tests over stuff we will never use. I don’t do well in these kinds of tests, but I do well in essays and fill in the blank. They had a class that taught us how to do multiple choice tests. On my exams, I got confused because two answers look good and don’t know which one to choose. Now, I’m doing better.

Data show that classes on learning strategies are a very important factor for Appalachian educational achievement (Appalachian Regional Commision, 2008). As demonstrated above, many of the Appalachian students interviewed in this study felt ill-prepared for college level work. They noted that they simply did not know how to succeed in the college classroom and described how classes that focused on learning strategies helped them enormously. The strategies described included; test taking
strategies, study tips, writing strategies, and memory strategies. Classes on learning strategies are very important for Appalachian students, because students from low income areas, like Appalachia, typically attend lower quality primary and secondary schools (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). Consequently, Appalachian post-secondary students when they get to college have unique learning needs. Needs that must be addressed at the primary and secondary levels with higher quality education.

**College Admission Education**

In order to be successful in college, students and their families need to be informed on how to best prepare for and get into postsecondary institutions. Yet, only 33% of Ohio University students and 44% of Shawnee students articulated how education on college admissions helped them to realize that college was vital to economic well-being and within their reach. Almost all of these students (100% of the 33% of Ohio University Students and 80% of the 44% of Shawnee State Students) claimed to be from schools primarily serving middle and upper class students. In the words of a male Ohio University sophomore (participant B);

One thing that helped me was the fact that my guidance councilor showed me how to get information on getting into college. He told us how important college is to our future and showed us that there is a lot of financial aid out there to help you out. Basically, he would say that if you want to go to college you can. He pushed us to look at the admissions information online, even when I thought that college was for people who could afford it. Before he helped us find this stuff, I didn’t even know where to start.
A male Shawnee junior (participant X) gave a similar account;

Well, I learned a lot from brochures at my high school. Colleges would send people to talk to us about how much a college degree will help us make a living. They would make a chart on the board about how much you would make without and with a degree. But, what really helped was that they told us about financial aid and that anybody could go.

Once more, the quality of secondary education comes into play. Each year in America, nearly 200,000 low-income students graduate from high school, but they fail to apply to college (Eisenstein, 2006). High school personnel are a very important source of information about higher education for Appalachian students. These personnel must be well versed in the availability and utility of educational opportunities, available financial aid, college costs, and admission requirements and be willing to disperse this knowledge to all students. Unfortunately, the national shortage of quality educational guidance counselors prevents the neediest students from getting important college planning information in high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). In order to ensure that all students, including those not usually seen as college material gain access to higher education, programs are needed that help low income and first-generation students learn the steps to take to go to college, including information on admissions, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the Federal Pell Grant, and student loans.

**Middle or Upper Class Background**

As previously mentioned, most students interviewed noted the lack of sufficient employment in the region as a major obstacle to paying for college and an interesting
addition to this theme is that some (44% of Ohio University and 25% of Shawnee State) students from both schools noted that a middle or upper class background helped them to succeed. A female Shawnee freshman (participant T) explains;

I think with support from my parents, I can make it through college. I was born into a well off family and they pushed me to college. They gave me the money to go so I don’t have to go and get a low wage job or anything. I feel that I have everything I need to get an education here. The only problem is that Portsmouth is boring. There’s nothing to do.

Likewise, a male Ohio University junior (participant H) explained;

I am lucky to have the parents that I do. I think my dad’s income helped out a lot. I think more students than others would say there is a huge difference in our high school between being middle class and being poor, as far as getting to and succeeding in college is concerned. The students with more money, yes, they are going to get into college. They are going to go even if they don’t have the brains behind it. But, the students who are in financial instability, they have to work for what they want.

Moreover, some even noted that a family history of college achievement helped them, as this female Ohio University freshman (participant L) mentioned;

Both my parents have received degrees from Ohio. With help from my parents, who went to college, and my older siblings, I can make it through college. It’s a matter of wanting to do better. Wanting to do better does not only come from your education, it comes from your home. I think parent involvement is very important.
in succeeding in college. You have to apply yourself. Sometimes students in this area don’t apply themselves.

Correspondingly, a male Shawnee sophomore (participant AE) recounted;

I like the situation I’m in financially. My family is middle class and I have a scholarship. Still, the rest of tuition cost a lot and my parents are paying for it. My parents were very well educated and liked to teach a lot while I was at home and I learned a lot from them. More than I did from teachers. They are the reason I want to get a degree and go on to graduate school.

Again, socioeconomic status becomes important in post-secondary educational success. As the quotes above demonstrate, some Appalachian students credited their middle or upper class background with their educational success and some even noted that a family history of college achievement helped them. Studies have shown that high school academic preparation and measures of socioeconomic status such as family income and parent’s education are highly predictive of degree attainment (Rogers, 2006). Parents are the most influential group in a student’s decision to attend college. In fact, a student’s parent’s educational attainment is correlated with the desire to attend college (Stage & Hossler, 1977). First generation college students are more likely to be from low-income backgrounds and are significantly less likely to graduate than peers whose parents have at least a bachelor’s degree (Inside Higher Education, 2006).

Economic inequality is not simply resource inequality, because studies suggest that financial aid alone is not sufficient to compensate for the educational disadvantages (Stinebeckner & Stinebeckner, 2003). A recent study of Berea College students, a college
whose student population are mostly Appalachian residents, found that even with full
tuition scholarships students from low-income families were at considerably greater risk
of dropping out than students from more middle-class families (Stinebrickner &
Stinebrickner, 2003). Additionally, at the primary and secondary levels, research has
shown that children from working class backgrounds do not, on average, do as well in
school as those from upper classes backgrounds (Stinebrickner & Stinbrickner, 2003).
Inspiration appears to be a key factor. In fact, many of the interviewees noted that,
despite wanting to get a degree, Appalachian students feel that college is beyond their
reach and have less drive to achieve academically. This quote from a female Ohio
University freshman (participant C) is an example;

> Sometimes, it’s like, why try. If we don’t have what we need to get in or do well,
then why put myself through this? That’s what it’s like in High School. Several
times in High School, I thought Maybe, I should start working and forget about
college. Anyways, it’s difficult to concentrate on or get exited about the courses
you need for college if you know you can’t pay for it.

The question becomes, “What can we do to help influence and inspire lower class
Appalachian students to pursue post-secondary education?” The following section on
influential people addresses this question.

**Educator’s Influence**

Many studies demonstrate that influential people are a primary factor in
promoting educational achievement. Carrasco (1988) suggested that teachers are an
important influence in a student’s decisions to pursue post-secondary education. High
school teachers are especially influential, due to their extensive contact with students nearing college age. High school teachers, who almost certainly college educated, can give pertinent advice on college success and provide emotional support for decisions to go to college. This is especially important to Appalachian college students, whose parents may not have a college education or be aware of the utility of college in today’s world. As discussed earlier, parents are the most influential group in a student’s decision to attend college. Appalachian students, whose parents can’t or won’t promote educational access, are especially dependent on actors outside the family for post-secondary educational encouragement and support. According to the interview results, some (25% of Shawnee students and 33% of Ohio University students) noted exceptional teachers as a primary motivating factor. For example, an female Ohio University freshman (participant P) noted;

I wanted to do better in life. Better than what you could get with a high school degree. But, it was my photography teacher who inspired me. He pushed me to be a better photographer. He helped me with my photography education. He retired my senior year. They are going to phase out traditional photography. I kind of wish they couldn’t. It would allow other people the chance to learn about it.

Some (19% of Shawnee Students and 28% of Ohio University) students noted how the encouragement of friends helped them, as exemplified by a female Shawnee freshman (participant T);

What has helped me? People I’m friends with who think I can make it through college. They are my greatest asset, but I wish I had more moral support because I
don’t know that I’m going to make it emphatically. I know I’m going to get there one way or another financially through loans. I know I’m going to get there that way. It’s just a matter of people reminding me of that. Family friends, people I’m close to.

Further illustrating this, a female Ohio University freshman (participant L) explains;

I think succeeding in college has a lot to do with the friend you got. In this area there are a lot of drugs, alcohol, a lot of dropouts, and a lot of girls getting pregnant. If people had any sense around here they wouldn’t be doing this kind of thing. If I ever did that, my friends would be like, “what’s wrong with you girlfriend?”

To inspire learning in a student an educator cannot simply tell a student about a new idea; an educator must engage in a “process of communication in which the learner was interacting with others in purposeful activities or investigations of common interest” (Phillips & Soltis, 2004, p. 56). In other words, the educator must engage the subject material in a manner that demonstrates to the learner its utility and relevance. This is particularly important to marginalized students, such as Appalachians. Students from different backgrounds have different ways of understanding the world.

Knowledge is formed through the ideology and politics, of a particular society in a particular historical period. Different perspectives develop because of different socializing experiences. These conceptual frameworks are used to order reality and conceptualize new knowledge. Consequently, students from different backgrounds may have multiple ways of conceptualizing information. This makes it vitally important that
educators understand the “culturally-shaped assumptions, practices, and values” of their students and themselves (Phillips & Soltis, 2004, p. 64). This, “will enable a teacher to be more effective in promoting learning…. and make the teacher more sensitive to his or her own deep-seated cultural assumptions and how these might be shaping the attitude that is being adopted toward students who seem to be “different”” (Phillips & Soltis, 2004, p. 64).

Applying one of the main theoretical frameworks of this research (Freire’s educational pedagogy) helps to illustrate what educators must do to inspire learning in marginalized students and improve retention. Freire (1970) notes that, in the current setup, the teacher sets up a specific fixed and compartmentalized narrative on reality that is often alien to the lived experiences of the students. This is the result of an authoritative relationship between a “narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)” (p. 52). This narration leads to mechanical memorization and what Freire (1970) terms the “banking” concept of education (p. 53).

As opposed to the “banking concept” of education, Freire’s (1970) “problem-posing education” is designed to motivate students to learn by helping the oppressed perceive the reality of oppression and conceptualize ways to “struggle to free themselves” (P. 31). For example, in a Brazilian literacy program, Freire taught peasants to read by basing reading materials on issues important to his students lives. This process was guided by the teacher, who increasingly poses problems relating to the students and their world. This process, according to Freire (1970) incites inquiry, creativity and critical thinking, because reflecting on themselves and the world increases the scope of an
individual’s perception and allows him or her to “direct observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena” (p. 63).

Feire’s pedagogy is based upon a democratic relationship between teacher and student that is a partnership in which both are simultaneously teacher and student. This requires a “humanist, revolutionary educator” that engages students in critical thinking and a “quest for humanization” (Freire, 1970, p. 56). In other words, the student is seen to possess the cognitive capacity to teach while being taught (Freire, 1970). Thus, reality is jointly constructed through dialogue, as opposed to being constructed based on the teacher’s narrative on reality.

A problem-based educational pedagogy and curriculum approach is an effective way to retain and graduate more students (South Carolina Advanced Technological Education Center of Excellence, 2000). Research has shown that a problem-based educational pedagogy “improves student learning and retention, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and the ability to skillfully apply knowledge to new situations” (Audet, et al., 2007, p. 1). Improving student retention rates is an essential art of improving Appalachian post-secondary education rates, because in Appalachia a very high percentage of the children from low income families who graduate from high school do not graduate from college (Kane, 1994; Heckman, Locher, & Taber, 1998).

**Intrinsic Motivation**

All of the interviewees exhibited intrinsic motivation to enter and excel in post-secondary education. Many noted how important personal motivation was to obtaining a college education. An female Ohio University senior (participant J) noted;
Right now there is always room for improvement, but now feel I have what I need to further my education. I’ve always been intrinsically motivated to do well. I always worked hard in school and got good grades. I had good enough grades to get me into school. I funded it by loans. I’ve always believed in the importance of education.

A female Shawnee sophomore (participant V) reported;

 Basically, it was my dream to go beyond high school. I don’t know what I would have done without going to school. It has been hard financially, but I’m not going to quit. I do work study, but that only pays minimum wage. They won’t even allow me to work over 20 hours. Anyways, I’m going to finish school no mater what.

This is not surprising. Previous studies suggest that over seventy percent of rural Ohio high school seniors intended to pursue post-secondary education (McCracken & Barcinas, 1989). As previously mentioned, the data for this study demonstrates overwhelmingly that the interviewed students valued and wanted to succeed in college if given the opportunity. These facts stand in stark contrast with the discouraging educational statistics about Appalachian Ohio that show postsecondary educational rates significantly below the state and national averages. Once again, we ask the question, “If Appalachian students are really motivated to get an education, why is it not happening”? Based on what has already been analyzed, it appears that the solution to this question is complex and multi-dimensional incorporating economic, social, educational, and structural components.
**Effective Educational Programs and Policies**

Many (78% of all students, 88% of Shawnee Students, and 67% of Ohio University Students) of the participants credited current programs and policies with helping them to achieve academic attainment beyond high school. As previously mentioned, some indicated that Shawnee’s open admission policy and low cost gave them opportunities otherwise unavailable. A female Shawnee sophomore (participant V) explains;

> As far as education goes, we are very lucky to have the college experience that we have here. I would not have been able to go to college if not for Shawnee. I think a lot of people and students have a lot of misconceptions about Shawnee students. I feel that the teachers are very well educated and I feel that I have been very well educated here.

Additionally, many students noted that Upward Bound programs helped them, but noted the limited availability of these programs. A quote by a male Shawnee Junior (participant X) exhibits this;

> Upward Bound is a program to help Appalachian students and I think there should be a lot more. They may not feel that they can succeed in school. Let them know they can succeed. They help Appalachian students by asking what they would like to do. This is what you can do. This is where we are and where we need to be. The instructors tell them they can achieve no matter how they feel about themselves or how others feel about them. No, I’m Appalachian I’m stupid or I can’t do that. No matter what your IQ level is, if you put your mind to something you can do it. Their peer tutoring helps too.
These programs were also mentioned by Ohio University students as a help to them, including this freshman (participant O):

Upward Bound is a great program. I’m a former student. I’m not just saying that because I’m a former student. You’ll find a few who went through it and decided that college just wasn’t for them, but Upper Bound will push you to go get a secondary education. Pre-college is great too. Really gets you a step ahead of a lot of students in high school because you get a college experiences and a taste of what you can achieve.

Upward Bound is a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education that provides support to participants in order to increase the rate at which they complete secondary and postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Upward Bound serves: high school students from low-income families, high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree, and low-income, first-generation military veterans who are preparing to enter postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Programs mentioned include; instruction in reading, writing, study skills, and other subjects, academic, financial, or personal counseling, tutorial services, mentoring programs, information on postsecondary education opportunities, and information on financial aid.

Support structures are needed to motivate, inspire, and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As we have seen, not all children are given the same chances to succeed. Many low income students are potentially successful but inadequately trained, with skills and motivation necessary to succeed in education beyond high school.
(U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Since the passage of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, federal policy makers have provided low-income students with programs designed to equalize educational opportunities (Jager-Hyman, 2004). Unfortunately, historic patterns of inequality still exist today. As we have seen, financial aid is not enough to truly equalize opportunities for educational advancement. We also need to provide altered curriculums, tutoring, secondary educational equality, and encouragement.

**Research Question Three Findings**

Ever since the WWII more young women have graduated from college than young men. Yet, there are more men than women ages 18-24 in the general population of the United States, with 15 million women compared to 14.2 million men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The male/female ratio on campus today is 43/57 respectively, a turnaround from the late 1960s (Marklein, 2005). This is the importance of research question three, which sought to find out what differences were in educational experiences and perceptions about post-secondary education among male and female Appalachian students. The goal of this research question is to gain insight into the nature of this post-secondary gender gap, so that we can find ways to give equal educational opportunities to all students.

For a third time, several findings (see Fig. 4.3) emerged from the analysis of the interview data that shed light on this question.
Fig 4.3. Findings Regarding Question 3

The first finding is that some men in Appalachia feel pressured and motivated to make money right out of high school. This finding draws from both economic and social aspects of the lives of Appalachian students to explain the gender discrepancy. The second finding relates to family traditions that primarily impact males. This finding is that some families have a family history of military service and many Appalachian young men feel it is their duty to serve before entering or instead of entering post-secondary education. The third finding is that poor high school boys are encouraged to go into vocational programs, because college is seen as out of reach and men are seen as breadwinners. These factors, taken in aggregate, provide insight into the differences in
educational experiences and perceptions about post-secondary education among male and female Appalachian students and will be examined in the following sections.

**Men in Appalachia Motivated to Make Money after High School**

The findings of this research suggest that one possible reason for this discrepancy is that men in Appalachia are pressured and motivated to make money out of high school. As a whole, Appalachia is a persistently poor area and, as demonstrated earlier, socioeconomic status and availability of resources greatly impact the decision-making processes of students (Freeman, 1999; Spohn et al., 1992). According to students from both institutions, socioeconomic status was a key factor in many male Appalachian students’ decisions to go to college. Illustrating this trend, an male Ohio University junior (participant E) declared;

> Getting a job is very important to a lot of guys, who have to take care of their family. In a poor area like this, we have to help out with our younger brothers and sisters, because our parents can’t do it alone. My older brother didn’t go to school because he had to help mom and dad with us. He got a job in Jackson. I know a lot of guys like that. I’m lucky I’m the youngest.

Similarly, a male Shawnee freshman (participant S) divulged;

> My mom wants us to go to college. But I know that she needs me at home. I don’t feel that mom should take care of dad and work. My sister is the one that needs to go, she needs to go so that she can get a good job……I don’t think I will be able to finish if things don’t change.
Gender identities in Appalachia still appear to place men in the traditional role of breadwinner. As illustrated in the quotes above, these gender ideologies come through in the interviews. The manifestation of this is that men still assume primary responsibility for the family’s economic health even at the detriment of their own education. This is especially important if student’s parents are ill or unable to provide, as some of the interviewees parents were. Poor students are particularly vulnerable because socioeconomic status is a prime indicator of health (McCracken & Barcinas, 1989).

Another reason for males being motivated to go directly into the workforce after high school could be that college is not as essential for boys as girls, who still make an average of 80 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts (General Accounting Office, 2008). Research indicates that a college education, while becoming more and more essential for economic well-being, is currently less vital for men than women (Perna, 2008). College increases women's earnings far more than men's (Perna, 2008). Men generally earn more than women with identical qualifications, but this pay gap narrows as women become more qualified (Kleinfeld, 2008). Consequently, there appears to be a specific financial incentive for the postsecondary educational achievement of women that doesn’t affect men to as great an extent. Kleinfeld (2008) argues that this earning gap is de-motivating boys, because in the early years, young men don't see the wage benefit. For men, undergraduate post-secondary education does not have a large impact on earnings, at least in the short interim after graduation (Kleinfeld 2008). They are torn between wanting quick money and seeking the long-term rewards of education (Kleinfeld, 2008).
Family History of Military Service

From ones early socialization experiences, one receives a heritage of attitudes, sentiments, and ideals which may be termed a family tradition, or the family culture (Burgess, 1937). These traditions can greatly impact our life choices, including our postsecondary educational decisions. A relevant finding to research question three is that some families have a family history of military service and many Appalachian young men feel it is their duty. This occurred twice in the interviews, both respondents from Shawnee State. For example, when asked to elaborate on why his male friends are not in college, a Shawnee Sophomore (participant AE) responded;

Quite a few have their parents and other family members in the military and they feel that it’s part of their responsibility to carry on their family ways. I don’t think it’s to them a career in itself. It’s more of what is expected of them.

It is not surprising that a strong military tradition exist in rural America. This country has a long history of rural military service. In the early years of the republic, the United States military consisted of civilian frontiersmen, armed for hunting and basic survival in the wilderness and organized into local militias for small military operations (Murray, 2005). Because of a customary distrust of standing armies the development of a professional military didn’t occur until well after the war for independence in American history. The development of large standing armies didn’t occur until the Civil War, with the construction of the Union and the Confederate armies, in which many of the combatants were rural and poor (Murray, 2001). Additionally, WWI, WWII and Vietnam saw the service and deaths of many Appalachian soldiers (Murray, 2005).
A family military tradition is not the only reason Appalachian males join the military, some Appalachian male youths see the military as their only way out of poverty. In fact, over 44% of contemporary military recruits come from rural areas, many of them from lower-middle class and poor backgrounds (Tyson, 2005). Nearly two-thirds of Army recruits in 2004 came from counties in which the median household income is below the U.S. median. The military provides a good income and eventual educational opportunities not otherwise available, but at a cost of delayed educational attainment and the traditional hazards that come from military service, such as injury and death.

**Poor High School Boys Pushed into Vocational Programs**

At the high school level, poor and minority male students are disproportionately tracked into vocational programs that do not prepare students for advancement to college (Oakes, 1985). “Tracking is the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes” (Oakes, 1985, p. 3). This is seen in the interview data. Some (25% of Shawnee Students and 39% of Ohio University) students from both institutions claimed that poor high school boys are encouraged to go into vocational programs, because college is seen as out of reach and men are seen as breadwinners. A Shawnee freshman (participant S) explains;

I think there is more help in high school to get you into vocational programs than colleges, if you’re a guy. Poor guys from our high school are encouraged to go into a vocational program…I think they figure that since they probably won’t go to college, at least they can get free trade training and start making money.
Oakes (1985) examined tracking and “how it both causes and supports differences in the lives of secondary students. Oakes sees the educational inequality that exists in American educational systems as being the result of a function of our unequal educational system and ways of thinking about the disadvantaged. Oakes (1985) points out that “most considerations of barriers to educational equality have focused on characteristics of students themselves as the source of the problem” (p. 4). She argues that these stereotypes and cultural misconceptions about the poor directly influence educational inequality, because they are cognitive structures that directly influence the way an individual is perceived in society and often produce a self-fulfilling prophecy. Oaks (1985) notes:

Seen as products of disorganized and deteriorated homes and family structures, poor and minority children have been thought of as unmotivated, noncompetitive, and culturally disadvantaged. But there is another view. It turns out that those children who seem to have the least of everything in the rest of their lives most often get less at school as well. (p. 4)

Oakes (1985) highlights the importance of understanding the social construction of difference that is at work in our educational system. There are many stereotypes and cultural misconceptions that exist about culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students and education. The ways in which public discourse and educational policy labels these students is an often unexamined part of the discourse on educational gaps in the United States. Oakes (1985) notes that, historically, marginalized students in the United States have been labeled into oppressive categories because it was
believed to be in the best interest of the students. These oppressive categories become a hidden transcript that is used by educational institutions and educators to make judgments on students’ ability and potential, sort students, and provide different types of education depending on these oppressive categorizations. These practices stem from traditions in the school’s culture that are based on “deep-seated beliefs and long-held assumptions about the appropriateness of what to do in schools” (Oakes, 1985, p. 5). These beliefs are ingrained into their consciousness and are treated as natural and unalterable by members of society at large. “We rarely question the view of the world on which practices are based—what humans are like, what society is like, or even what schools are for” (p. 5). This, according to Oakes, “permits us to act in ways contrary to our intentions” (p. 5). Like in Garamsci’s theory of hegemony and Freire’s educational pedagogy, Oakes sees a group-based ruling system of ideas being the means that one group in society uses to control all others and perpetuate existing social hierarchies.

Oakes (1985) examines the social-historical contexts that lead to the development of these traditions and notes that these traditions emerged as a solution to a specific set of educational and social problems at a particular time in history. Oakes notes that prior to 1890 school attendance was infrequent and homogeneous, but at the turn of the century a population explosion fueled by a steady flow of immigrants changed the dynamics. This combined with a plurality of different post-secondary institutions with diverse curricula lead to a crisis in secondary schooling in the United States. Prior to this crisis, schooling was considered a way to “develop an intelligent mass citizenry”, but economic and social forces changed this goal into “preparation for the world of work and for differences in the
future lives of students” (Oakes, 1985, p. 16). Consequently, the solution to this educational crisis that emerged was a comprehensive high school that fostered differential education for different students.

This new high school was developed using the concepts and ideas embodied in social Darwinism. This “provided a scientific basis for seeing some groups of people as being of lesser social and moral development than others” (Oakes, 1985, p. 16). Social Darwinism is based on the belief that social organization is subservient to the laws of nature. Consequently, social stratification is seen as the result of some individuals and groups having the requisite skills or attributes to compete and others lacking these traits. In other words, the rich deserve to be rich and the poor to be poor. This implied that biology was responsible for social poverty, social deviance, and crime and that schooling was unlikely to alter the situation of the poor. This led to the belief that children of various social classes were qualitatively different than each other. Children of the poor were stereotyped as “laggards, ne’er-do wells, hand minded, and socially inefficient, ignorant, prejudiced, and highly excitable” (Oakes, 1985, p. 35). Unfortunately, these labels are treated as real by members of the larger society and that imparts expectations for education and upward social mobility.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided insights into the perceptions of Appalachian students from two different universities, Ohio University and Shawnee State. A number of important findings emerged from the analysis of the research data with regards to the research
questions being addressed in this study. These findings demonstrate that economic inequality is not just resource inequality. The educational disadvantages go much deeper, because variables correlated with economic inequality, such as substandard secondary educational backgrounds, lack of family histories of college achievement, or the lack of educational role models, are themselves significant factors in postsecondary educational access and success. Consequently, the research data suggests that the educational inequality experienced by Appalachian students have not only economic components, but also social, educational, and structural components that have to be addressed simultaneously.

Previous research supports the assertion that economic Appalachian educational inequalities have not only economic components, but also educational, social, and structural components (Gamoran, 2001; Kleinfeld, 2008; Perna, 2008). Gamoran (2001) examines educational inequality and links it to not only socioeconomic status but corresponding cultural, social, and pedagogical inequalities that combine to preserve privilege across generations as well. The findings of this research reveal that the low social-economic status of many Appalachian students, the history and economic structure of the Appalachian region, the differences in type and quality of education given to poor and more wealthy students, generational gaps in perceptions of the utility of postsecondary education, the shortage of high school guidance counselors for poor districts, gender wage gaps, the lack of supportive teacher role models, de-motivational educational pedagogy, increasingly high tuition rates, and limited educational choices for
Appalachian students all disadvantage Appalachian students in postsecondary educational access and success. All of which will be examined in detail in chapter five.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND SUGGESTIONS

Summary

This research was an exploratory study that sought to examine the perceptions of male and female 18 to 25 year old Appalachian students from two different Ohio universities, Ohio University and Shawnee State about postsecondary education. The purpose of this research was to contribute to the knowledge base on Appalachian students and be useful to a variety of institutions and individuals helping historically underachieving students, including state and federal policymakers, federal and state agencies, educational institutions within Appalachia and other impoverished regions, and to academics and instructors. The data was analyzed to answer the following research questions:

(1) What are the perceptions of Appalachian students in OU and Shawnee State about post-secondary education?

(2) What factors promote academic attainment of Appalachian students beyond high school?

(3) What are the differences in educational experiences and perceptions about post-secondary education among male and female Appalachian students?

This study employed an exploratory, qualitative, face to face interview approach. This approach was deemed most appropriate by the researcher, because much of the social world cannot be expressed with the objective numbers of a quantitative analysis and a qualitative face to face research methodology will more likely enable this research
to examine the perceptions of Appalachian students about postsecondary education holistically in their social context than in a quantitative approach. This qualitative approach also allowed an inductive route in conceptualizing the data that yielded an in-depth understanding of the issue of Appalachian educational inequality. Appalachian educational inequality is a complex social phenomenon and this process lets the data speak for itself. The instrument used was a semi-structured interview schedule developed by the researcher and face validated. The adaptability of the semi-structured instrument allowed me to be open to the unexpected and present an in-depth analysis of the perspectives of Appalachian students about post-secondary education. The next section of the chapter will briefly summarize the findings drawn from the research data.

**Major Findings**

The analysis of the interview data generated 11 key findings related to research question 1, 9 for research question 2, and 3 for research question 3. The major findings under research question 1 are:

- Most Appalachian college students feel that a college degree is necessary to obtain a good job.
- Many felt that obtaining a college education as extremely difficult due to the cost/time and resources available to them/some felt that they had to choose between starting their adult life and going to college.
- Many of the interviewees noted that their parents still have the view hat a decent job can be obtained without a college degree, which resulted in lack of parental support.
• Many of the interviewees noted that their parents do not/did not realize how much a college degree costs. (a generation ago college degree less vital)

• Many of the interviewees noted that Appalachian students feel that college is beyond their reach and have less motivation to achieve academically.

• Most Appalachian students felt unprepared for college and SATs by their high schools/ felt that this would cost them thousands in developmental courses in college/many felt that teachers/councilors favored students they felt would go to college/many noted lack of resources in high school/ many felt that many high school teachers focused on slow learners to the detriment of the class to maintain funding and satisfy NCLB requirements

• Many noted how having to take remedial courses in college discouraged them and others/feed into the stereotype of Appalachians.

• Many of those interviewed had to work multiple jobs due to the lack of good paying jobs in the area.

• Some Shawnee students felt that Shawnee degrees were worth less than degrees from other institutions because Shawnee caters to Appalachian students and is an open admissions institution.

• Most of the Shawnee Students feel that Shawnee was their only educational choice because of open admissions, location, and cost, but were unsatisfied with the limited degree offerings.
• Many Shawnee students felt some majors, like education, out of their reach because of the amount of time/money it would cost and the inability to pay back student loans.

The major findings under research question 2 are:

• Many students noted that they simply did not know how to succeed in the college classroom when they got to college and noted how classes that focused on learning strategies helped them enormously.
• Many noted how education on college admissions helped them to realize that college was vital to economic well-being and within their reach
• Some noted that middle or upper class background helped them to succeed/ some noted how lack of future employment was de-motivating.
• Some noted that a family history of college achievement helped them/ some noted a lack of recognition of college achievement from older family members who never went to college and didn’t think it was important as de-motivating.
• Some noted exceptional teachers as a primary motivating factor
• Some noted how the encouragement of friends and family helped them
• Some noted that Shawnee’s open admissions and low cost gave them opportunities otherwise unavailable to them.
• Many students noted that a peer tutoring/pre-college/Upward bound programs helped them, but noted the limited availability of these programs.
• Many noted how important personal motivation was to obtaining a college education (finding scholarships on own/having to sacrifice/delaying marriage family etc.)

The findings under research question research question 3 are;

• Men in Appalachia pressured/motivated to make money out of high school.
• Many families have a family history of military service and many Appalachian young men feel it is their duty.
• Poor high school boys pushed into vocational programs because college seen as out of reach and men are seen as breadwinners.

**Conclusions**

The data shows that issues related to the postsecondary educational achievement of Appalachian students require a holistic view incorporating economic, social, educational, and structural components. This exploratory study of the perspectives of 34 Appalachian students about postsecondary education that contrast with prevailing stereotypes about how Appalachian students view the value of post-secondary education.

The students interviewed highly valued education and were motivated to succeed in postsecondary education. Yet, surprisingly, the results revealed a generational gap in the perceptions on the utility of education and academic expectations from parents, teachers, and others.

The findings of this research suggest that parents view higher education as less important than their children and have lower educational expectations of them, as a
result. The research suggests that this gap stems from the changing socio-economic conditions in Appalachia. This is disadvantageous to Appalachian students, because parents are key providers of resources and emotional support for college students. According to Carrasco (1988), parents are the most influential group in promoting educational achievement. Consequently, Appalachian students are dependant on actors outside the family for post-secondary educational encouragement and support. Thus, their dependence on other outside actors, such as teachers is critical. Therefore, when teachers fail them by reinforcing stereotypes that discourage their pursuit of higher education then these students have no one else to turn to.

Correspondingly, studies also (Carrasco, 1988) suggest teachers are important influence in a student’s decisions to pursue post-secondary education. Providing Appalachian students with strong, involved, and inspirational teacher role models can go a long way toward helping Appalachian students overcome socio-cultural disadvantages. Inspiring students to learn is a difficult process and research suggest that inspiring a student requires an educator to engage the subject material in a manner that demonstrates to the learner its utility and relevance. This is where the application of one of the theories adopted for this research was beneficial. Using Freire’s (1970) problem posing education was a valuable tool in this regard. This educational pedagogy is designed to motive students to learn by basing instructional materials on issues important to his student’s lives. Freire’s educational pedagogy can help motivate student to learn, regardless of socioeconomic status.
In addition to socio-cultural disadvantages the cost of tuition creates a significant barrier to educational access. Most of the students interviewed perceived obtaining a college education as difficult, not due to the difficulty in course work, but due to the cost, time, or lack of resources. Students interviewed reported that Appalachian students have to work two jobs, sacrifice sleep, and work long hours, and even delay marriage and family. Accordingly, an increase in Appalachian student financial aid seems to be needed. This increase should come in the form of grants and scholarships and not loans. Loan aid, because of the additional debt, can still limit the educational options of Appalachian students. Some of the students interviewed felt that some majors, like education, are out of their reach because of the amount of time and money it would cost and the inability to pay back student loans.

In this study, a good number of the interviewees linked educational success and local economic development. This is supported by previous studies (Blackburn, Bloom, & Freeman, 1989; Davis & Johns, 1982, Carter, 1999) that link the overall health and composition of a regional economy to educational access. These studies find that areas with persistently low socioeconomic development tend to have persistently low post-secondary educational rates. Stafford, Lundstedt, and Lynn (1984) point out that this creates a cycle that is self reinforcing due to an insufficiently educated labor force. Consequently, the lower than average per capita incomes in persistently poor areas, like Appalachia, seem to have a reciprocal relationship with lower than average post-secondary educational rates and both have to be addressed simultaneously.
The findings of this research suggest that one possible reason for the gender gap in post-secondary education is that men in Appalachia are pressured and motivated to make money when they leave high school. Gender identities in Appalachia still appear to place men in the traditional role of breadwinner. The manifestation of this is that men still assume primary responsibility for the family’s economic health even at the detriment of their own education. Additionally, the current job market may be de-motivating boys, because in the early years, young men don't see the wage benefit of an undergraduate degree. For men, post-secondary education does not have a large impact on earnings, at least in the short interim after graduation (Jones, 2003). Moreover, at the high school level, poor and minority male students are disproportionately tracked into vocational programs that do not prepare students for advancement to college. Creating higher paying student employment on campus could make college more attractive to young male students and help all students with the cost of college, regardless of gender. Also, eliminating the oppressive tracking practices at work in the American educational system that produces differential education for different students would go a long way toward creating gender equality at the postsecondary educational level.

Many of the interviewees reported feeling that they received inadequate high school educational instruction and this has created a significant obstacle to postsecondary educational success. Unfortunately, students from many rural Appalachian school systems do not get exposed to the same information and study methods that are provided in other regions of the country (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008). Because an adequate High school education is a major factor in post-secondary educational success,
it is essential to improve the high school education for all Appalachian districts regardless of property taxes. This requires implementing a more equitable school funding system. Equality in higher education is a closely connected to equality in k-12 education, because equal higher educational opportunity requires all incoming students be given the tools necessary to succeed in college. Quality of high school education remains a major factor in college-level access and success. School funding issues are a root cause of k-12 educational inequality (Spelling Report, 2005).

Unfortunately, in the current social/political environment, education, except for an “adequate” minimalist core, is seen as a privilege. In Supreme Court cases since the 1960’s, most notably, San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, Education was determined to be not among the rights afforded explicit protection under our Federal Constitution. The justification for this is Section 1 of Article 13 of the U.S. Constitution, which explicitly delegates authority to the states to ‘establish and maintain a system of free public schools wherein all the children of the state may be educated.’

Unfortunately, the states do not have to provide equal educational opportunities, because the Rodriguez case also ruled that since absolute equality cannot be obtained the states are only required to provide an "adequate” education to each student. This ruling ended a short lived trend that developed in the 1960’s that may have re-conceptualized education as a right in American society. The social/political basis for this ruling can only be understood by understanding the historical social construction of education in the United States. Education has historically been seen as a necessity in our democratic society, but equal educational opportunity has not. In fact, the author of our Constitution
Thomas Jefferson, while citing a direct correlation between education and successful self-governance, did feel that different social classes required different educational instruction. School funding has been a very contentious problem for Ohio. Wealth-based disparities permeate the current educational system and are a major obstacle to providing a quality education to children from poorer districts.

In Ohio, educational equality is not a right and the Ohio State Constitution requires only "a thorough and efficient" educational system. Consequently, there is no legal basis for giving less fortunate children any more than an education that meets contestable minimum standards. Even when only required to meet minimum standards, the state of Ohio has failed in its obligation to all its children. As mentioned previously, the state Supreme Court has declared the state's education finance system unconstitutional in 1997 (DeRolph I), in 2000 (DeRolph II) and in 2003 (DeRolph III). Education is an important tool to combat poverty and create social equality in society, but state and federal governments are failing in their commitment to provide educational opportunities to all citizens. If we are to truly achieve educational equality the political will to completely remove all economic and social barriers to education must be cultivated.

Because of Shawnee’s open admission status, location, and cost, many of the interviewed Shawnee students felt that Shawnee was their only educational choice. A few Shawnee students revealed that they could not go to more traditional institution due to the cost, location, or admission standards. While Shawnee provided a much needed post-secondary option for Appalachian students, the survey data reveals that Shawnee students
felt that they weren’t getting the education that they wanted. A number of the students interviewed felt unsatisfied with the limited degree offerings and reputation of the university. Building new open admission universities could simply replicate these problems. Thus, opening preexisting high quality institutions to the poor appears to be the only way to insure similar educational opportunity to all. One way to compensate for the disproportionate educational backgrounds and that exist in the nation and truly open up similar higher education to all the poor and disadvantaged.

Data show that classes on learning strategies are a very important factor for Appalachian educational achievement (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2007). Many of the Appalachian students interviewed in this study felt-ill prepared for college level work. They noted that they simply did not know how to succeed in the college classroom and described how classes that focused on learning strategies helped them enormously. Many students noted that Upward bound programs helped them, but noted the limited availability of these programs. These programs could be expanded to serve all Appalachian students.

Thus, in diagrammatic representation the conclusions of the study could be presented as shown in Figure 5.1. For Appalachians to achieve educational realization all these five components namely, structural, economic, educational, social, and intrinsic motivation should be present.
Suggestions

As previously stated, the issues related to the postsecondary educational achievement of Appalachian students require a holistic view incorporating economic, social, educational, and structural components. These suggestions in aggregate create a multidimensional plan for Appalachian educational realization. This research contributes
to the knowledge base on Appalachian students and could be useful to a variety of institutions and individuals. This data could be useful to state and federal policymakers in their effort to improve educational efficacy and equality, to federal and state agencies searching for the best way to implement educational policy, to educational institutions within Appalachia and other impoverished regions seeking ways to better serve the surrounding community, and to academics and instructors developing pedagogical methods that can better assist Appalachians in achieving their academic goals.

**Policymakers:**
As the findings suggest, most of the students interviewed perceived obtaining a college education as difficult due to the cost, time, or the lack of resources available to them. Students interviewed reported that Appalachian students have to work two jobs, sacrifice sleep, and work long hours, and even delay marriage and family. This suggests that Appalachian financial aid is not sufficient to ensure equal access by Appalachian students. Accordingly, my suggestion is for policymakers to increase Appalachian student financial aid, in the form of grants and scholarships and not loans. Loan aid, because of the additional debt, can still limit the educational options of Appalachian students. Tuition caps would be another way to lower the educational cost for Appalachian students, but the risk lowering the quality of educational institutions if not accompanied with increased funding for educational institutions, due to institutional budget shrinkages.

Perhaps, the only ways to compensate for the disproportionate educational backgrounds that exist in the nation is to truly open up higher education to the poor and
disadvantaged. Consequently, my suggestion is to alter the admissions practices of many of the best institutions of higher learning in the nation to give students from underprivileged backgrounds a better chance of gaining acceptance. Perhaps by giving low income students preferences like those granted to minorities. Since underprivileged students often lack a quality secondary educational background, these students also must be given low to no cost developmental courses to enable them to succeed.

The findings of this study tell us that because of Shawnee’s open admission status, location, and cost, many of the interviewed Shawnee students felt that Shawnee was their only educational choice. A few Shawnee students even revealed that they could not go to more traditional institution due to the cost, location, or admission standards. While Shawnee State provided a much needed post-secondary option for Appalachian students, the survey data reveals that Shawnee students felt that they weren’t getting the education that they wanted. A number of the students interviewed felt unsatisfied with the limited degree offerings and reputation of the university. Building new open admission universities could simply replicate these problems. Thus, opening preexisting high quality institutions to the poor appears to be the only way to insure a similar higher educational opportunity to all.

In this study, a good number of the interviewees linked educational success and local economic development. Family income has proven to be a reliable indicator of whether an individual will attend college (Spohn, Crowther, & Lykins, 1992). Lower than average per capita income in persistently poor areas, like Appalachia, has a reciprocal relationship with lower than average post-secondary educational rates and both have to be
addressed at the same time. Rural and inner city regional development would be a good way to increase the amount of adequate paying jobs available to Appalachian residents. Additionally, a raise in the minimum wage would help all poor people and would be a particularly effective way to help the economy of persistently poor areas like Appalachia. So, my suggestion is economic development for persistently poor Appalachian areas as a means of improving educational access and success.

Because an adequate High school education is a major factor in post-secondary educational success, my fourth suggestion is to improve the high school education for all Appalachian districts regardless of property taxes. This requires implementing a more equitable school funding system. A good way to do this is for policymakers to pass The Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy’s proposed constitutional amendment. The proposed amendment guarantees every school pupil a fundamental right to the opportunity to gain a high quality public education, regardless of school district property values, income level, or demographic and geographic factors and outlines a new school funding system, based on a statewide school trust fund that distributes funds based on what is necessary to ensure the opportunity for a high quality education for each pupil (Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy, 2007).

**Educational Institutions within Appalachia**

A suggestion for educational institutions within Appalachia is to create more classes for Appalachian students that teach college survival skills and basic learning strategies, such as test taking strategies, study tips, writing strategies, and memory strategies. Data shows that classes on learning strategies are a very important factor for
Appalachian educational achievement (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008).

Furthermore, the findings of this research reveal that many of the Appalachian students interviewed in this study felt ill-prepared for college level work. They noted that they simply did not know how to succeed in the college classroom and described how classes that focused on learning strategies helped them enormously.

Many students noted that Upward bound programs helped them, but noted the limited availability of these programs. Upward Bound is a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education that provide support and information services to high school students from low-income families, high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree, and low-income, first-generation military veterans who are preparing to enter postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). These programs should be expanded to serve all Appalachian students.

Providing higher paying work study programs to all college students as a way to address the gender gap that exist in post-secondary education is another suggestion. The findings of this research suggest that one possible reason for the gender gap in post-secondary education is that men in Appalachia are pressured and motivated to make money out of high school. Gender identities in Appalachia still appear to place men in the traditional role of breadwinner. The manifestation of this is that men still assume primary responsibility for the family’s economic health even at the detriment of their own education. Creating higher paying student employment on campus could make college more attractive to young male students and help all students with the cost of college, regardless of gender.
This is very disadvantageous to Appalachian students, because parents are key providers of resources and emotional support for college students. Parents are the most influential group in promoting educational achievement (Carrasco 1988). Consequently, Appalachian students are very dependant on actors outside the family for post-secondary educational encouragement and support. My suggestion is to create programs that provide mentors and role models for Appalachian students. Such programs could be part of a community project or implemented in a primary, secondary, or even postsecondary school.

Additionally, studies also (Carrasco, 1988) suggest teachers are important influence in a student’s decisions to pursue post-secondary education. Providing Appalachian students with strong, involved, and inspirational teacher role models can go a long way toward helping Appalachian students overcome socio-cultural disadvantages. A way educational institutions could foster this is to provide training in educational leadership and college opportunities in Appalachia. All teachers and high school personnel must be educational leaders well versed in the availability and utility of educational opportunities, available financial aid, college costs, and admission requirements and be willing to disperse this knowledge to all students.

*Academics and Instructors*

My eighth suggestion is for educators and instructors to incorporate Freire’s (1970) problem-posing education into the classrooms of poor Appalachian students. Studies show that even with full tuition scholarships students from low-income families were at considerably greater risk of dropping out than students from more middle-class
families (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). Freire’s problem posing education is designed to motive students to learn by basing instructional materials on issues important to his student’s lives. This process is guided by the teacher, who increasingly poses problems relating to the students and their world. This process, according to Freire (1970) incites inquiry, creativity and critical thinking because reflecting on themselves and the world increases the scope of an individual’s perception and allows him or her to “direct observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena” (p. 63).

Freire’s educational pedagogy can help motivate student to learn, regardless of socioeconomic status. According to Freire (1970), the current “banking education” system is a process warps reality, stifles dialog, inhibits creativity, and is an instrument of oppression that is used in conjunction with a “paternalistic social action apparatus” (Freire, 1970, p. 55). This system is based on oppression and stereotypes and sees the oppressed as dysfunctional and in need of change. Freire (1970) notes, “the oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these “incompetent and lazy” folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality (p. 55). Freire develops an alternative educational pedagogy that does not dehumanize oppressed or oppressor, but seeks the humanization and liberation of both. Freire’s (1970) provides a valuable tool, in the form of his problem posing education pedagogy, for achieving a critical consciousness in oppressed populations and motivating these students to learn.

**Federal and State Agencies**

Appalachia is a large geographic area that stretches from Mississippi into Pennsylvania with regional differences in the demographic, social, and economic
conditions of its population. The Appalachian regional commission delineates three key sub-regions (Northern, Central, and Southern), which themselves are diverse with rural, urban, and metro counties. Consequently, federal and state agencies must take in account the diversity of Appalachia as a whole when searching for the best way to implement educational policy. Uniform region-wide approaches cannot ignore the diversity in the needs, lives, and struggles faced by students in the region. Consequently, my final suggestion is that regional differences be incorporated into any implementation strategy by federal and state agencies.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This was an exploratory study designed to gain an initial understanding of the perceptions of Appalachian students about postsecondary education from two different institutions of higher education. Due to the small sample size and limited sample area compared to the whole of Appalachia, the findings of this research do not represent a complete picture of the lived experience of all Appalachian students since only two different Ohio universities, Ohio University and Shawnee State, were represented in the sample. Consequently, there is a continuing need for research on Appalachian students and the obstacles they face. It is, therefore, my suggestion that continued research needs to be done in order to gain as much of a complete picture of the lives of Appalachian students as possible.

This includes examining lives of the different demographic populations that exist in Appalachia. Appalachia is a heterogeneous place with great diversity. It is not sensible
to make overarching generalizations about the entire culture and needs of Appalachian students throughout the region based on this study since the study focused on the predominantly White student populations of Southern and Southeastern Ohio. Yet, Appalachia has large populations of African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans and others. Additionally, this study focused on poor Appalachians that primary live in rural areas. However, many Appalachians are not poor and many live in urban areas. If we are to get a complete picture of the issues facing Appalachian students we must examine this population and all its heterogeneous parts.
REFERENCES


ACT. (2004). *Crisis at the Core: Preparing All Students for College and Work*. Iowa City, IA.


Mann, H. (1848). Twelfth Annual Report of Horace Mann as Secretary of Massachusetts State Board of Education.


http://www.ohiocoalition.org/.

http://www.ohio.edu/outlook/facts.cfm.


APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INSTRUMENT QUESTIONS/ SHORT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Short Demographic Survey
(8) What is your age
(9) Where did you grow up?
(10) Where do you live now? What county?
(11) Are you enrolled in a college or University? Which one?
(12) How many hours are you currently enrolled for?
(13) What are you studying?
(14) What is your gender?

1) Please, tell me about yourself. Your educational experience, so far.
2) Why did you choose to attend this college?
3) What’s it like to be a college student in Appalachian Ohio? Why do you feel that way?
4) In a poor area like Appalachian Ohio, are there unique problems that college age individuals face in obtaining an education?
5) Are their differences in the educational experiences of Appalachian college students based on gender?
6) What do you perceive to be the main problems that potential college students face in this area face?
7) How did you overcome these problems? What enabled you to succeed?
8) Do you think that students in this region have the things they need to obtain an adequate education? What else might they need to be successful?
9) Describe any disadvantages students in the area face in getting into and succeeding in college? Describe any advantages that they may have?
10) Do you think that some students in Appalachian Ohio have a harder time than other students in the area? Why?
11) What are the main problems that you face/faced as a student? How do you deal with these problems? Explain.
12) Do you have what you need to successfully achieve your educational goals?
13) Describe how you manage/managed to get the education that you did. What enabled you to go beyond high school when others may not have?
14) Describe any disadvantages you have faced in getting into college, because you were from this area? How did you deal with them? Are there any benefits for you in being a student/potential student from this area?
15) As a current or past Appalachian student, do/did you ever need help to achieve academically? What kind of help do/did you get? What kinds of help do/did you wish you would get?
16) What is the best part of being an Appalachian student? What is the worst part?
17) What is the best way to help students in Southern/Southeastern Ohio?
18) Are there any current programs that you think are helpful in assisting Appalachian students? What other kinds of program(s) do you think would be helpful?

Is there anything that you wish to add that would help me understand the Appalachian college experience?
APPENDIX B: OHIO UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM

Title of Research: Perceptions of Appalachian Students about Post-Secondary Education

Principal Investigator: Scott Powell

Co-Investigator: _____________________________

Department: Educational Studies

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 perceptions about post-secondary education of college students from two different Ohio universities, Ohio and Shawnee State, in order to gain insights into the lived experience of Appalachian students in these two regions. There is a one time anonymous survey. This is the only time you will be given this survey; after the survey, you will not be contacted again.

The questions in the interview will be about your experiences as a college aged Appalachian. Thus, some of the questions may be about your educational experiences. If you feel uncomfortable, you may stop the survey at any time.

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

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 Francis Godwyll at godwyll@ohio.edu or 593-4484.
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 C: (1) NEWSPAPER AD/FLYER

College/College Aged research volunteers needed:

My name is Scott Powell. I am a Doctorial Graduate Student at Ohio University. I am doing a study of college aged Appalachians as my Dissertation. This research seeks to understand the perceptions of Appalachian students in Ohio University and Shawnee State about post-secondary education. In addressing the postsecondary educational gap between Appalachia and the rest of the nation, it would be helpful to understand the attitudes, expectations, obstacles, hardships, and behavior of these students. Increased knowledge about this population can foster ways to improve educational achievement in this impoverished region and achievement gaps. Volunteers will be asked to participate in an interview, which should take about 1/2 hour.
Certificate of Completion

Ohio University certifies that SCOTT POWELL completed the computer-based training course on the Protection of Human Research Subjects.

Serial: 714505
Date: 8/30/2004