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DIFFERENCE DOES NOT MEAN DEFICIENT: THE CULTURAL AND HIGHER
EDUCATION EXPERIENCES OF APPALACHIAN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The link between women in poverty and higher education is important because it reflects inequities in access and resources that exist in the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region. Two main questions guided the research of women in poverty in regard to postsecondary access and attainment. First, what are the experiences of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian-born women as students in postsecondary institutions? Second, how do the experiences of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women help provide a better understanding pertaining to college/university practices that would enable these women to engage in institutions of higher learning and become successful? In order to understand the experiences of economically poor women's higher education opportunities, a qualitative approach was implemented. After performing semi-structured interviews, themes captured the landscape of oppression, human capital levels, and identity formation for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women in order to examine how they were able to be successful with degree attainment. Main themes were found regarding the Appalachian culture for women, identity development of the participants, and elements of access and success during their college experience. Implications that were found as a result of this study included (a) the student culture impact on services at colleges/universities, (b) the importance of colleges to provide an ethic of care, (c) the need for better post-secondary outreach and resources for Appalachian communities and (d) exposure of the oppressive social structures that still exist for this population of women. Recommendations were made regarding higher education practices and future research in the areas of poverty and the generational cycles of women in Appalachia.

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INTRODUCTION

Women in poverty have significant barriers to access, participate in, and complete a degree in postsecondary education (Kates, 1996). There are unique challenges for women on a daily basis, as there are for men, and these unique challenges can be seen in many different regional cultures across the United States (Beach, 2008; Deprez, 2003). Traditional gender roles for women are especially prevalent in the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region of the United States (Reay, 2003). Furthermore, the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region has a history of women in poverty, limited opportunities for women, and low levels of the type of support that women need to thrive socially and educationally. Educational attainment for men and women is well below the U.S. national average throughout central and southern Appalachia (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

The link between women in poverty and higher education is important because it reflects inequities in access and resources that exist in the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region, but more research is necessary to document the existing experiences women still face in the region in regard to the attainment of a college degree.

Research drawn from individual interviews with these women can assist in identifying barriers that they confront and factors that facilitate their success in higher education. This information can be crucial for focusing public policy on the educational problems that women in poverty often experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of impoverished women from the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region who have matriculated at institutions of higher education. Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who enroll in college and desire to obtain a college education often find themselves in and out of welfare and other assistance programs and are typically unsuccessful in attaining a college degree (Kates, 1996). Calling greater attention to this problem may motivate more scholars and university professionals to analyze the conditions of women in poverty in relation to the attainment of college degrees and generate fruitful insights that should eventually yield more effective programs and assistance (Deprez, 2003).

Main Research Questions

Two main questions guided the research of women in poverty in regard to postsecondary access and attainment. What are the experiences of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian-born women as students in postsecondary institutions? This question gave insight into the different experiences of women throughout their college careers. In addition, how do the experiences of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women help provide a better understanding pertaining to college/university practices that would enable these women to engage in institutions of higher learning and become successful?

Significance of the Study

This study was important because the link for women in poverty to higher education explored opportunities and awareness of ways to support training and/or degree attainment for this population (Deprez, 2003). This will allow for better access to resources for health, wellness, and learning for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women and their families. Increasing the number of

scholars analyzing the condition of women in poverty in relation to higher education will provide better insight and eventually better assistance (Deprez, 2003).

A general opinion exists that education creates equality in social and economic arenas (Adair, 2001). Data exist that illustrate women who obtain college degrees often remain out of poverty (Adair, 2001). There are some colleges and universities working with state legislatures and other policy makers to create financial and educational programs for low-income women (Adair, 2001). Women are often excluded from opportunities by patriarchal structures (Beach, 2008). Some of the patriarchal structures create a lower standard of education and lower paying jobs with higher amounts of hours for women (Beach, 2008). For Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women, the patriarchal structure in Appalachia is one of the major obstacles not only in the area of wages but also in socialization and how the threat of education can affect the earning income for the family (Tang & Russ, 2007). Because of the patriarchal family structure, this could be a hindrance for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women to work outside the home or to even decide and have the opportunity to obtain a college degree (Tang & Russ, 2007). Education creates more equality for women and a sense of freedom, which may develop strength and empowerment to challenge current social systems (Beach, 2008).

Another area of significance includes helping constituents to understand the culture that exists for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women. This may lead institutions to provide sufficient resources and practices to support their academic goals.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework of human capital was used to analyze themes and trends from participants' responses as Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women and their experiences in higher education. Human capital was utilized as a theoretical lens through three dimensions. Although

economic capital is most widely used, the theory of capital was expanded by Bourdieu (1986) to include social and cultural capital. Social and cultural were two of the three dimensions used for this research. Because cultural capital is defined as the knowledge, skills, objects, and educational attainment and social capital involves social networking/support found in relationships, these aspects were most useful when identifying common themes from Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital may also include the subset of family capital that was useful because it refers to the “accumulation and cultural capital within the family” (Gofen, 2009, p. 107).

In addition, Barratt (2007) added another dimension of academic capital. He defined academic capital as the knowledge and skills necessary for success in school. Because women from Mid-Atlantic Appalachia may be first-generation students, their social, cultural, and academic capital tend to be less than generational college students (Barratt, 2007). By using these three dimensions of human capital, themes emerged that will assist higher education institutions and programming to better serve women in poverty from the Appalachian region.

Baxter Magolda’s (2007) theory of self-authorship is another theoretical framework that gives an internal perspective regarding Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women and their experiences in college (Baxter Magolda, 2007). While gaining capital in multiple areas, women must also go through an internal process regarding their identity development. Self-authorship is defined as “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” (Baxter Magolda, 2007). According to the self-authorship model, there are four phases that allow women to move from an external definition of self to an internal definition of self (Baxter Magolda, 2007). Following formulas, crossroads, becoming the author of one’s life, and internal foundation are phases that are used in relation to how Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women were able to describe

their experiences with human capital themes. One element with self-authorship that may be especially important to consider is “trusting the internal voice” (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 186). Realizing that external influences could not be controlled, women have to come to the realization that they have choice and/or control over how they think or respond to events, which in turn creates more confidence in their identity (Baxter Magolda, 2007). Eventually, through successful navigation in self-authorship, women will be able to integrate the external world with their internal foundations, which essentially gives an individual a sense of authenticity.

Self-authorship involves an internal process in identity formation and how women interact with external influences, the individual interviews of the women for this study provided the context by which to examine how they were able to achieve success despite their socioeconomic status and lower levels of human capital. The internal perspective of the participants’ journeys may give insight concerning how they were able to achieve reconciliation of their internal identity as traditional women in Appalachia and their newly formed identity as student and eventually a graduate of higher education.

Personal Statement

I am curious to see if women from Mid-Atlantic Appalachia have come across similar challenges and opportunities in higher education. Born and raised in Southern Ohio, I experienced college at a traditional age but faced many nontraditional issues. Along with being a first-generation traditional college student, I found myself caught between wanting to obtain a college degree and still focusing on the traditional values for women in Appalachia.

Socioeconomic status did not cross my mind until I learned that in my region there is no information regarding financial aid and how students can still manage to finance their way through college. This unawareness I had about the extent of my low socioeconomic status

existed partly because everyone in my community was, for the most part, equal on this level. Often members of my Appalachian do not realize where we come from until we start separating ourselves through our choices in career and education. Because of this lack of knowledge about financial aid, I worked three jobs and attended college full time at a regional campus. In addition, the expectation of my Appalachian culture was to get married and start a family after high school. During my undergraduate experience I found myself married, in addition to working three jobs, and then eventually divorcing due to the pressures of obtaining a degree and going against the expected norms of the region.

While navigating unfamiliar territory as a college student, I found that I had to take extra steps required for degree attainment. Besides coping with economic stress, my social networks, family support, identity development, and academic skills were all areas that needed to be restructured or built from scratch. Compared to friends who went off to college or had more money or scholarship opportunities, my experiences as an undergraduate seemed like an uphill battle.

In retrospect, it is interesting to see that the women in poverty on my regional campus often helped support each other, which built a strong network. This served to compensate what more traditional colleges felt like since my friends at the regional campus were also experiencing college as first-generation students and in poverty. We developed a network that became a sub-family. This network even proved strong enough that we still support each other in other areas of our lives even beyond graduation.

In addition to my social and family network, I began to realize that faculty and staff members on the regional campus I attended were a great support. I had been a top student in high school, I naturally loved learning and so establishing relationships with my professors was

one of the areas I did not have to struggle with as much. Without a supportive staff, I would never have been able to learn about the resources (financial aid, library, work study positions) that literally kept me on campus. If I had not established these types of relationships, as a first-generation traditional student, I would have lost hope quickly.

My internal journey with identity development was another area of great growth and great struggle. Without realizing it, the Appalachian identity for women was very traditional. Even though several women I knew growing up tried to go to college, if it became a hindrance to their domestic responsibilities, they would sacrifice their college opportunities and either work or become full-time moms and wives. I found myself caught between the expected norms of being an Appalachian woman and my desire to obtain a college degree. While a sophomore undergraduate, I married at age 19. The marriage was supposed to be good; however, it did not turn out that way. Not only was I caught in an abusive environment, the tension I felt internally was extreme. I felt guilty for a long time when I divorced him during my senior year of college because I felt I had failed at the expectations set by my community and family. Despite my nontraditional struggles, I was still able to obtain my degree within four years. Finding my voice/identity while developing an internal motivation to be successful for my family helped propel me toward my goals. Part of this motivation may have also been to prove to people that I did not have to fit the mold of the Appalachian woman and that it was possible to have choice in the path my life could take.

I have often wondered if the difficulties in my experience still exist among women in Appalachia who are trying to obtain their degrees. Is the Appalachian culture still holding to traditional values? Are public programs increasing their emphasis on education or still relying on job training for jobs that may not exist within the next 10 years? What about women who find

themselves to be single parents? All of these sociocultural factors are interesting to me because I believe that success stories exist about women in Appalachia who overcome poverty through obtaining college degrees. By examining other success stories, there may be some themes that arise that can lead to more research or better public and higher education policies and practices to assist students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of impoverished women from the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region who have matriculated at institutions of higher education. Obtaining a college degree can improve an individual's social status and provide more opportunities for future generations (Ishitani, 2006; Jones, 2004). Though obtaining a college degree is needed, women in poverty seem to struggle with finding the path to ensure their success from the beginning of their college experiences until degree completion.

Topics that relate to the unique situation of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women give an overall view of the different facets of possible experiences. Human capital is one of the foundational theoretical frameworks of this study. Social, cultural, family, spiritual, and academic capital are all connected to the experiences, or lack of experiences, many Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women face (Barratt, 2007; Bourdieu, 1977). It is important to discuss these areas because women in poverty who are successful in obtaining a college degree must find ways to compensate for the lack of capital from their backgrounds and environments.

The next area of literature includes access and success issues for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women and poor women in general. Access includes the financial outlook for women and the amount of exposure to college information. For women in Appalachia, there are some resources available, but the lack of value of this information and the know-how for financial planning often get in the way of higher education (Eitel, 2009; Ishitani, 2006; Johnson, Honnold, & Threlfall, 2011). Success in higher education speaks to the support networks for women who enroll in college or try to balance their home lives with college life. Social support is an important factor in a woman's success in degree attainment (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001).

A unique perspective and additional theoretical framework exposes the internal development for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women. Forming identity is an important aspect that navigates women through their experiences. Baxter Magolda (2007) developed the self-authorship theory, which follows identity formation from a place where authority figures or outside influences affect decision-making until the individual is able to find her own voice and develop her own set of values and priorities that may not align with her cultural upbringing. Understanding the internal development process is especially helpful when analyzing the experiences and how women in poverty deal with the tensions between their past identities and their identities as college students.

The next area that will aid in investigating the experiences of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women is the unique cultural expectations that women from this region face. Not only are traditional roles and roles within the family and community important but these roles are in constant tension when forming their new relationships on campus and with fellow students (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). First-generation student issues are also discussed because many of the women in poverty from Appalachia are the first generation to attend college (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Ramos-Sanchez, & Nichols, 2007).

In the last section, this literature review will provide an overview of the landscape for women in poverty in the United States. Topics such as employment trends, assistance programs, and education/training resources are discussed in relation to women, including single mothers (E.K. Anderson & Hoy, 2006; Kates, 1996; Tiarniyu & Mitchell, 2001).

All of the themes directly relate and form a comprehensive picture of women in poverty. Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women have unique barriers when it comes to seeking and completing their educational goals. Even though the landscape seems somewhat rough, there have been

many success stories of women who have completed their college degrees despite their circumstances. Understanding how these women are able to build capital and form their identities through their experiences may develop programs on campuses and in communities, to assist other women in poverty to achieve their dreams through the implementation of better support systems and programs.

Appalachian Women and Higher Education

The Appalachian region is known for its dire economic state, which includes low incomes, high levels of unemployment, and high levels of poverty (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006; Latimer, 2000). There is the existence of an Appalachian culture of poverty that displays the vicious cycle of unemployment, low educational attainment, and the lack of jobs, which stigmatizes the population within Appalachia (Billings & Blee, 2000; Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006). As indicated by the U.S Census Bureau, the five-year American Community Survey (ACS) reported in 2012 that 15.9% of the U.S. population was living in poverty (Bishaw, 2013). The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) reported a poverty rate of 15.4% for Appalachia, which is higher than the national average (ARC, 2012). In short, poverty is the defining characteristic of Appalachia (Fedukovich, 2009).

In the 1960s especially, the federal government announced that the Appalachian region of the country was the target for the “war on poverty” (Harper, 2000, p. 70). ARC was formed to fight the economic and social struggles in the areas of unemployment, inadequate healthcare, and developing basic education programs for literacy (Harper, 2000). The unparalleled poverty in Appalachia was a result of declining industries that has lasted even throughout the most recent decades and has included the closing of many factories and coal mines (Harper, 2000). The social outcomes that resulted from the declining economy were the reason for the national

attention toward the region. Individuals and communities in Appalachia blamed themselves personally for their failure instead of blaming the industries that were moving out of the region (Harper, 2000). This fatalistic attitude quickly became an easy opportunity for outside entities to blame the victims (the people of Appalachia) instead of fixing the larger economic issues that were affected by these subcultural values and the physical region itself. These issues eventually overrode the call for the war on poverty, making Appalachia a forgotten focus (Harper, 2000, p. 71).

Unfortunately, women are usually the victims of poverty in this region (Latimer, 2000). The current climate of Appalachia seems to stay the same despite the programs emerging from the federal and state levels (Latimer, 2000). This may also be due to the notion of intergenerational poverty that seems to be prevalent among Appalachian families (Billings & Blee, 2000). Even though the theory of a culture of poverty is criticized for stereotyping, the concept does point to issues entrenched in poverty in the Appalachian region (Billings & Blee, 2000). “The intergenerational poverty in the region has been attributed to such individual-level characteristics as a lack of ego strength, insufficient impulse control, an overriding orientation to present-time, a desire for immediate gratification, and fatalism” (Fiene, 1993, p. 18). These characteristics can lead to an unstable family structure that can promote acceptance of deviant behaviors (Fiene, 1993). Thus, a general explanation for the persistent culture of poverty focuses on the perpetuation of an intergenerational cycle of poverty (Fiene, 2000).

Because of this cycle, individuals who live in this family and regional culture seldom take opportunities for higher education seriously or place the opportunities as a high priority (Fiene, 2000). Appalachian high school and college completion rates differ from the national average. In Appalachia, high school completion was close to the U.S. average by having 76.8%

of the population complete high school compared to the nation at 80.2% (ARC, 2012). The biggest difference, however, was the national average of 24.4% of individuals completing a college degree compared to the Appalachian rate of 17.6% (ARC, 2012). These figures help illustrate the culture of education in Appalachia within both the family structure and the school communities.

Crowther, Lykins, and Spohn (1992) discussed how gains in higher levels of educational attainment made by residents can improve the economic status of the region. Educated individuals will be assets to the labor market; however, if individuals are not obtaining the needed education, then the Appalachian economy will continue to weaken and suffer (Crowther et al., 1992). Even if Appalachians are becoming more educated, the other issue is whether the job market will continue to decline in the region. Two-thirds of the Appalachian counties have unemployment rates higher than the national average, and from 2000 to 2008 Appalachia lost 15.0% of the jobs in farming, forestry, and natural resources and 24.6% in manufacturing positions (ARC, 2012). Along with the decreasing employment opportunities, the income of Appalachians was 18.0% lower than the national average in 2009. The lower income percentages may be related to the 20.4% of Appalachians who obtained a college degree compared to the national rate of 27.5%.

In addition to failing welfare systems and a lack of sufficient attention to college recruitment compared to vocational training, there are other factors that uniquely affect women living in the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006). For example, White women in Appalachia who are on financial assistance are often controlled by demeaning images and stereotypes, with derogatory terms such as “hillbilly” and “White trash” that are portrayed through media and cultural expectations (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006). Additional

images seen throughout the history of Appalachian stereotypes “specifically targeted women with comments that labeled and categorized women into traditional roles (e.g., barefoot and pregnant)” (Harper, 2000, p. 69), which clearly makes it more difficult for them to break free from the welfare system or other assistance programs (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006). This difficulty exists because the perceived and entrenched traditional role for women in Appalachia does not include working outside the home, which is in opposition of the welfare or other public assistance programs that require employment or make it the end goal.

The notion of generational poverty that exists in Appalachia occurs when parents and grandparents struggle to survive on government assistance or low-paying employment. This cycle produces lower levels of human capital for their children and is maintained as the next generation develops and strives to get through school but still ends up repeating the cycle of their previous family generations (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006). This often gives the perception that those in poverty are not able to take responsibility for themselves and their families (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006). These stereotypes of Appalachian culture can cause a devaluation of social roles and lead to the development of negative self-imagery that may cause Appalachian women to become defensive when they interact with individuals from higher social classes (Fiene, 1993). This relationship can undermine upward social mobility for women in Appalachia and symbolizes how economic growth can be hindered by scarce resources and lack of opportunities (Fiene, 1993). The struggle in which these low-income women are engaged is complex. It involves overcoming external barriers created by unemployment and failing welfare policies; breaking through the intergenerational poverty structure; and, finally, fighting to maintain their self-worth.

Transitioning from one social class level to the next often brings obstacles that are unexpected and invisible for women in low socioeconomic standing (SES). Enrolling in college suggests that women in poverty are trying to find their way out of an oppressive environment, but their choices and resources are limited and there is a feeling that many aspects of their experiences will be out of their control (Jones, 2004). Jensen (2004) gave a good example of how a low SES, first-generation female student in her psychology course began describing the struggles she was having with her husband at home. By the end of the student's discussion, she began to show how she felt conflicts between roles from her past and those she was experiencing after having completed two years of college (Jensen, 2004). Often, Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women will experience this feeling of alienation not only on the campuses they attend but also from their families and communities of origin (Jensen, 2004).

The "survival guilt" of women who transition from and are successful moving out of poverty and into a middle-class profession or lifestyle is a commonly reported feeling (Jensen, 2004, p. 172). This realization of their identification with the working class creates self-reflection about where they will fit in as they continue to pursue their degrees (Jones, 2004). The feelings these women harbor about why they were able to succeed and pull themselves out of their situations while others were not affects how they communicate with their families and friends. Perhaps they cannot share their experiences because of lingering guilt that results from pursuing a college degree and a profession that moves them away from their generational poverty (Jensen, 2004, p. 173). In essence, low-income women from the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region may find themselves confronting both internal and external conflicts over definitions of success that derive from the working class environments in which they were raised and the campus environment in which they are now placed (Jensen, 2004).

Upward mobility is a source of conflict for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women. Any time an individual moves from one social class to the next, there is a period of adjustment and decision regarding how to reorient one's identity and relationships. According to Waldner (2003), social mobility, although it does exist in the U.S. at greater frequency than in other countries, is usually in the form of only small jumps from one level of social class to the next. These small jumps occur because of generational occupations, such as moving from welfare to a pink-collar job, for example, which is common for women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Waldner, 2003).

SES drives intergenerational career choices, and this can be illustrated in the experiences of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women (Ganzeboom, Treiman, & Ultee, 1991). Ganzeboom et al. (1991) used a 40-year, cross-national research study to analyze socioeconomic advantage and how its transferability occurred over generations. In their research, the last 15 years of data showed inconsistencies when analyzing social mobility as it moved from one generation to another (Ganzeboom et al., 1991). One area that seemed to be the most inconsistent was tracking the social mobility of women across generations. This may be due to the fact the first two generations did not consider women as individuals but rather as "the family," or their place was in the home rather than the workforce (Ganzeboom et al., 1991).

In general, an individual's values are often shaped by the social worlds he or she inhabits and that leads to the intergenerational reproduction of attitudes (Greenbank, 2009). When college students from the working class begin the process of career decision-making, most literature suggests negative qualities of this student population that affects their career outcomes (Greenbank, 2009). Some of the qualities mentioned include working-class students holding a pessimistic attitude on life, not thinking about the future, and having low aspirations (Greenbank,

2009). After 30 in-depth interviews, working-class students did not represent any of the qualities literature suggested (Greenbank, 2009). Because working-class students prefer informal information rather than formal information, their reluctance to use university career centers is the main negative impact on the career decisions (Greenbank, 2009). The implications from this study suggested that universities find a way to deliver information informally on campus in career centers to make it more friendly and accessible to working-class students (Greenbank, 2009).

Intergenerational similarities in educational values and career goals within families and communities may be particularly strong for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women because of their lower levels of social and cultural capital (Ganzeboom et al., 1991). College degree attainment can, therefore, propel women from low socioeconomic backgrounds to move upward through social class standings, but often their initial identity generates conflict along the way (Waldner, 2003). However, it is also evident that women who were raised in poverty can be strongly motivated to attain college degrees if they eventually come to recognize the multiple advantages that a degree offers (e.g., social mobility, higher income, self-improvement, improved opportunities for one's children; S. Katz, 2009). Women who see higher education as an opportunity may be able to break the intergenerational poverty cycle within their culture (S. Katz, 2009).

Fundamentals of Oppression

Poverty and discrimination have become a part of United States history (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson Billings, 2009). Structures of oppression have existed since the colonization of the United States. These structures came in the form of social class disparities and discrimination on many levels, all of which still exist. Appalachia is just one example of how structures of

oppression have affected certain populations. Understanding oppression will therefore give insight into the structures that many Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women have faced while struggling to survive.

Freire (2009), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, explained how oppression works in a fundamental way. It starts with the oppressor, which can be a certain individual or group that exerts power over another individual or group. This leaves the oppressed individuals or groups left to try to work through barriers that oppression brings in order to progress (Freire, 2009). Ironically, the only way the oppressed can make progress is through dialogue with the oppressor.

This concept goes deeper than just dialogue. Both parties, the oppressed and the oppressor, have to be willing to have two-way dialogue in order to equalize power. Freire (2009) suggested that dialogue will not work with words alone but instead must be accompanied by reflection/action. The process of dialogue and action together creates what Freire termed as “praxis” (Freire, 2009, p. 87). Only the oppressed are able to save themselves, and also the oppressor, by creating the environment where both parties are able to come together in harmony. The basis of all of this, according to Freire, is love that commits the oppressed to gain liberation from the oppressor. This sounds like a basic theory, but it is difficult to actually put into practice. Understanding the fundamentals of how oppression works gives deeper insight into how a region such as Mid-Atlantic Appalachia has produced a culture of poverty.

Along with the fundamentals of oppression, many scholars have branched off of this main theme by developing theories to explain the state of discrimination and discrepancies of equality in the United States and in the world (Taylor, 2009). Critical race theory was formed as a “resistance to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines in America” (Taylor, 2009, p. 1). Critical race theorists,

therefore, research and create awareness of these structures of discrimination in order to combat the oppressive nature it has on the United States in the justice system, education, and other areas of society (Taylor, 2009). Critical race theory can be used as a lens when analyzing the lives of other underrepresented groups, including individuals who live in poverty. This is relevant for this study because the participants are women in poverty and may represent diverse races/ethnicities.

Identity Development

The sense of identity or self becomes difficult to manage for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women. Due to the external and internal factors that exist when they begin their college experience, these factors can directly influence their meaning-making process of who they are and how they create a sense of belonging (Ignelzi, 2000). Kegan (1982) explains that meaning making encompasses how individuals shape their reality and this exploration is a process that continues throughout the life span. According to Baxter Magolda (2007), self-authorship in identity formation includes how women transform their views of knowledge, their own identities, and their relationships to others (this can include family and community).

Self-authorship is a foundation for assessing and developing student learning outcomes (Baxter Magolda, 2007). There are many different learning outcomes that are expected for college students that require internal development; however, colleges struggle to put in place opportunities for this internal growth essential for identity and relationship formation (Baxter Magolda, 2007). The theory of self-authorship has advanced linking theory to student learning outcomes, curricular and pedagogical innovations, advances in academic advising, co-curricular development, and innovations in graduate education, professional staff, and faculty development (Baxter Magolda, 2007). The basic premise of self-authorship is to expose the identity

development of students from when they remove themselves from authorities and begin to define their own values, feelings, and purpose (Baxter Magolda, 2007). While Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women try to navigate new territory, they will often experience these external and internal factors that influence their sense of self.

In addition, Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women may still struggle with their identities in moving from autonomy to interdependence. Women in poverty can be successful as long as they are able to recognize their identities and purpose through their relationships with family and peers (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). When women from a low socioeconomic background are able to reconcile their past identities by establishing reciprocal respect and understanding with their parents and friends, then they can become more focused on their educational goals (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This also goes along with findings from Gilligan (1993) that emphasize identity crisis can lead to growth, but this will only be successful for poor women if they are able to build enough capital and social networks to guide them through. There is conflict and dissonance involved with this part of identity development, and the sooner this is able to be reconciled the better chances are that women will establish a sense of belonging and attain their degrees (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Sorting between preconceived understanding of themselves and the world around them and the new culture to which they are exposed in college causes women to look internally. They begin defining what they believe, who they are, and how the new relationships and experiences in college will fit with who they want to become and their academic and career goals (Baxter Magolda, 2007). There are three major influences that help women in Appalachia to determine their broader opportunities that extend beyond the traditional roles found in their communities (Harper, 2000). One influence that comes from teachers, ministers, or other community

members inspires women to have confidence in their skills in the classroom or church activities (Harper, 2000). The second source of influence can derive from family support or expectations regarding the value of education and individual achievements (Harper, 2000). Often a family in poverty may hold education as an important value for their children, so that they can overcome economic hardship and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty (Harper, 2000). The third source is college information provided by local colleges and universities that is now increasingly available to low-income students (Harper, 2000). All of these sources combined can help Appalachian women develop higher self-esteem and greater confidence in their abilities to achieve a college degree.

According to a study by S. Katz (2009), women in poverty who attended college believed that the meaning of education directly tied into their relationships or their desire to develop their self-esteem, confidence, and independence. Students stated that their emotional learning happened after their college experiences as they began to venture on their own, find careers, and hold extra responsibilities (Baxter Magolda, 2007). Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women are often found to have lower levels of capital and lower socioeconomic standing, this emotional learning may occur right along with the other adjustments and stresses commonly found in the college experience (Baxter Magolda, 2007). As a result, they may experience extra pressure.

Family capital plays a role in this identity crisis for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women, because when a group of individuals (or families) go through adversity there is often the expectation that individuals should remain loyal and not join mainstream society or become progressive (Field, 2003). This influence could hold women back from attending college or obtaining degrees because they might not want to be viewed unfavorably (Field, 2003). This experience can be observed through Mead's "looking-glass self concept" (as cited in Rhoads,

2000, p.39) where reflections of what others think came back to the observer (Rhoads, 2000, p. 39). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and who possess lower levels of social and cultural capital, may decide to go to college and as a result form beliefs about education and expectations that are contrary to those that are emphasized in their home culture (Baxter Magolda, 2007). For Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women, their moment of transitioning between their culture and into the culture of higher education is a moment of personal growth that creates conflict between their self-perceptions and what their role is now that they are experiencing a new process of obtaining a college degree. This is especially true for women who learn to be more involved in their present community and their participation in a global community outside their Appalachian culture (S. Katz, 2009).

There is evidence to support that the ability to elevate one's socioeconomic status impacts the level of interaction students have with their campus (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). If there is a lack of financial support from student financial aid or government assistance, Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women are less likely to become integrated into campus life (Pascarella et al., 2004).

A study performed by Diprete and Buchmann (2006) suggested one finding that relates to the importance of social supports designed to increase college attainment by women. Their data suggested that between the years of 1964 and 2002, an increase in educational level correlated with women's marital stability (Diprete & Buchmann, 2006). With this type of social support, women may be more inclined to pursue higher education. This would seem to be especially true for women who are first-generation college students. Because college is often stressful, students must build a social network to be successful (Barry, Hudley, Kelly & Cho, 2009; Lee, Sax, Kim, & Hagedorn, 2004; Tinto, 1987). Even traditionally aged first-generation students disclose their

college experiences differently to parents when compared to generational students (Barry et al., 2009).

Barry et al. (2009) examined the college experience by analyzing stressful events students encounter and the frequency of disclosure in order to cope with the stressful events. A student survey was used at four universities in the United States with 1,539 first-generation students responding (Barry et al., 2009). First-generation college students often lack the social support or network that other college students may have, the chances of being able to disclose about their stressful college events reported at a lower rate (Barry et al., 2009). First-generation students reported to have less disclosure of college-related events with family, friends from home, and friends at school compared to non-first-generation students. Because first-generation students had lower levels of disclosure, this could further complicate their college experience by increasing stress levels and health issues (Barry et al., 2009).

Women in poverty are often single parents, which intensifies the salience of the traditional female role for them while also increasing their concern about finding a better way to provide for their children. Because of their status within a single-parent family, sufficient familial and social support may not always exist for women who want to attend college (Reay, 2003). Without an adequate support network, women find themselves trying to balance domestic activities, working, and college attendance (Reay, 2003). Because this type of situation is a major obstacle faced by poor women, it is often extremely difficult for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women to become involved in extracurricular activities and sustainable interaction with their peers on campus (Pascarella et al., 2004). This may limit their opportunities to build social capital and thus negatively impact their intellectual and personal development (Pascarella et al., 2004). However, once a connection is made on the college campus through peers or activities,

both first-generation and low SES students benefit from this outcome to a greater degree than generational students (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Cultural Expectations

Traditional roles. Even though degree attainment and employment has risen in Appalachia, the region still lags in regard to opportunities for women (Latimer, 2008). Due to the traditional cultural expectations for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women, those who attend college may be plagued by extreme guilt or may desire to continue building their family relationships at the same time they are trying to adapt to the contrasting values and expectations of a college environment (Stieha, 2009). Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, Stieha (2009) examined the voice of a first-generation college student and persistence. The Listening Guide from Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan was used to analyze the narratives given by the student examined (Stieha, 2009). Balance was a main theme throughout the study (Stieha, 2009). This included the student struggling with forging new relationships and maintaining one with her parents/family and balancing work and school but at the same time trying to be a good student (Stieha, 2009).

Traditional roles for women are still prevalent in the typical family structure of Appalachia, which results in poor support for educational opportunities for women, but there is also an increase in female-headed single-parent families (Latimer & Oberhauser, 2005). The role of a single parent lowers the employment activity for women in the region and undermines the economic status of women in Appalachia (Latimer, 2000). Because the mother must often function as the decision-maker, provider, and influential voice for her children, the culture of Appalachia is profoundly matriarchal (Hirsch, 1971). This tendency is attributable to many

economic stressors that affect family structure, including the frequency of unemployed male spouses or a situation of being a single parent (Hirsch, 1971).

In addition, Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women may face greater stress when trying to find social support in college. For any first-generation student, anxiety is high because of possible relocation, creating a greater distance from the person's family, friends, and community (Barry et al., 2009; Tinto, 1987). The strong intergenerational ties within the Appalachian family culture impacts the value placed on the costs and benefits of obtaining a college degree (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

Martin Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) examined the determinants of persistence for first-generation and continuing-generation college students. The Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey was used to examine and compare 1,167 first-generation students and 3,017 continuing-generation students at four-year universities (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). A critical theorist perspective was used to define the research problem, guide questions, and analyze the data (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Findings indicated that first-generation students are disproportionately non-White, low income, and female compared to continuing-generation students (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Even first-generation students who had higher incomes need to persist better than first-generation college students from low incomes, which suggests that not only do first-generation low-income students struggle with parents' lack of experience but they also struggle financially (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Through generations of poverty, patterns of behavior and expectations are passed from generation to generation (DeFreitas & Duffy, 2004). As these characteristics are passed down, the younger generation learns their place in society and often feels the obligation to carry on the generational patterns and attitudes in regard to education and career aspirations (DeFreitas & Duffy, 2004).

Another problem for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women focuses on the conflict between their working-class values (which tend to emphasize common sense) and values central to the college culture (those that emphasize formal learning and the acquisition of knowledge; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). In a study performed by Robertson and Zlotnick (2010), working-class students enrolled in a women's studies course at a private all-women's college reported feelings of being outsiders on campus. Narratives such as this can be directly related to how first-generation Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women in poverty feel when entering college at any age. Another study by Ostrove (2003) found that social class is useful when exploring college women's feelings of alienation and belonging. Women from working-class backgrounds who lived on campus would often describe feelings of alienation experienced during such social activities as lunch when the conversations would center on traveling or art (Ostrove, 2003). This feeling of marginalization occurs frequently for students from the working class as they are put into a middle-class environment (Duffy, 2007). Feeling alienated can also affect the students' perceptions about how academically or socially prepared they are for college (Duffy, 2007).

From a historical perspective, but still relevant, Ostrove (2003) examined data from 193 women who attended Smith College in 1964. The purpose of the study was to illustrate how women perceived their college experiences differently depending on their class backgrounds (Ostrove, 2003). Specifically, seven women expressed a theme of belongingness (Ostrove, 2003). Social segregation and academic preparedness were themes of women from working- and middle-class families. Women from middle-class families recognized who belonged and who did not belong at the college. The perception of social status and sense of belonging was felt also by women from upper-class families (Ostrove, 2003). Awareness that women had a "place" at the college related to which class their families originated from hindered experiences for

women from the working and middle classes. According to Ostrove (2003), women often described their experiences/feelings about financial difficulties, being underprepared for college work, and being socially isolated. These patterns have been reflected in similar studies since. This suggests that the identity development of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women should be investigated more carefully because social class is not a concrete characteristic but rather a part of identity that can change daily depending on campus social interactions and those that occur in the family (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001).

Social groups can provide a part of one's identity, just as emotional attachment can be incorporated into one's self-concept (Aries & Seider, 2007). Therefore, class can aid in the development and expression of different identity concepts such as knowledge, beliefs, values, and motives (Aries & Seider, 2007). In addition, class is deeply connected to the identities that Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women form, but this part of their identities is difficult to understand or confront because there are both external and internal components (Robertson & Zlotnick, 2010). Identity formation involves inevitable crisis, women from poverty have an increasingly difficult time dealing with how their personalities and identities fit into the world around them (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The one area that is especially difficult for these women is their interpersonal and family commitments. The conflicts that arise in this area can produce feelings of anxiety, shame, and guilt for those moving away from their working-class status and family values by attending college (Aronson, 2008; Duffy, 2007). Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women must continually search for and work to create a lifestyle balance between degree attainment and the health of their family life (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

First-generation student issues. First-generation students are those who are the first from their families to attend college (Gofen, 2009). First-generation students from Appalachia struggle with the need to maintain their Appalachian culture but at the same time are motivated to leave their communities of residence for educational and occupational pursuits (Bryan & Simmons, 2009).

Bryan and Simmons (2009) used an ecological theory and qualitative research to examine what impacts college success for first-generation Appalachian college students. After examining the results of 10 first-generation Appalachian Kentucky university students, there were seven main themes that emerged that contributed to the college experience (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). The importance of close-knit families and communities was a common theme among first-generation Appalachian students, which could contribute to social networks but hinder the separation needed to form one's own identity in college. Some students expressed having two separate identities because of the vast differences between their family and life cultures and the college culture (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). Other important themes for the first-generation students are the lack of knowledge about college procedures and the pressure to succeed as the first in their families to attend college. Three other themes involved the topic of returning home, the pervasiveness of poverty, and the importance for campuses to have early intervention programming (Bryan & Simmons, 2009).

The gap between first-generation students is the highest percentage within socioeconomic class, with low socioeconomic students graduating at much lower rates as first-generation students compared to first-generation students from other socioeconomic levels (Stieha, 2009). This gap is wider than in comparison to race/ethnicity and rates of degree completion (Stieha, 2009). Compared to second-generation students, first-generation students have less economic,

social, cultural, and academic capital to begin with when entering higher education (Barratt, 2007).

Various studies have identified five distinct areas that contribute to the success or failure of first-generation students: background, precollege academic preparedness, reasons for choosing a college (social and financial), the secondary institution the first-generation student attended, and variables associated with a student's social, financial, and academic experiences (Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Bui, 2002). Not only is the background different than non-first-generation students, but also their reasons for pursuing a college degree and their experiences (Bui, 2002).

Sixty-four first-generation college students were used for the study from the Program Leading to Undergraduate Success at UCLA (Bui, 2002). The students were divided into two sections, with one being students whose parents had college degrees and the other those students whose parents did not have college degrees. The students received a questionnaire with three basic components: background information, reasons for attending college, and their first-year experiences (Bui, 2002). Results from the questionnaire point out differences in the first-generation student population. Some of those differences included most students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds and their main reason for attending college as wanting to assist their families financially upon completion of their degree. Other factors for first-generation students included more worry about financial aid, a fear of failing in college, and the feeling that they have to exert more effort in studying (Bui, 2002).

First-generation students are also more likely to have low retention and completion rates (Ishitani, 2006; Martin Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Tinto, 1987) due to their lower levels of capital upon entering college. In a study by Ishitani (2006), first-generation students were examined

using a longitudinal study through the National Education Longitudinal Study: 1998-2000 that was supported by the National Center for Education Statistics. The purpose of the study was to illustrate success of first-generation students in higher education and add to the already existing knowledge of this particular student population (Ishitani, 2006). Students were examined by using certain time events, such a dropping out and graduation, and the probabilities of these two events happening based on student attributes (Ishitani, 2006). As a result, issues such as having to work while attending college and having to honor family responsibilities, as part of the Appalachian culture, can create a difficult experience for this student population (Barry et al., 2009).

Cultural and social capital is also important for first-generation students. Cultural and social capital, in the context of first-generation students, is the amount of knowledge about the college campus (including values), access to human and financial resources, and a general understanding of campus terminology and function (Ishitani, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003). The source of these two types of capital should come from parents; however, parents of first-generation students did not attend college, this lack of involvement could create a sense of culture shock when their children attend college for the first time (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Ramos et al., 2007).

Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols (2007) used the College Self-Efficacy Instrument to examine 192 entering freshman at a private liberal arts college on the west coast. Results from this study concluded that self-efficacy was reported at higher rates for first-generation college students than non-first-generation college students (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). Even first-generation students who reported higher levels of self-efficacy still underperformed academically compared to their non-first-generation peers. One of the most important findings

was that the level of a student's self-efficacy at the beginning of an academic year predicted later levels of college adjustment (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007).

Likewise, many important academic qualities that are developed during high school are found to originate and be influenced by parents (Ishitani, 2006). Mediocre preparation in high school may partially account for this decline in enrollment among first-generation students and for their high rate of attrition (Barry et al., 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Often first-generation students score lower on standardized tests and have lower GPAs earned in a less-rigorous high school curriculum (Barry et al., 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Studies have shown that first-generation status does have a negative impact on college completion, which may be largely attributable to this lack of preparation (Barry et al., 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Tinto, 1987). In addition, first-generation students are more likely to report several patterns that are negatively correlated with academic success, such as exposure to fewer humanities courses, studying fewer hours, working more hours, and lower rates of participation in honors programs (Pascarella et al., 2003; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007).

The culture shock experienced by first-generation students often involves the conflict between their family and cultural background and the institution's values (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). There has been a demonstrated link between parents' level of education and the educational level of their children (Gofen, 2009). For first-generation students several problems represent barriers that must be overcome for them to attain college degrees, including low socioeconomic background, low expectations for achievement, a lack of knowledge about the college culture, limited family support, and insufficient academic preparation (Gofen, 2009).

The lack of family support is an especially important factor for women in Mid-Atlantic Appalachia to consider because of the traditional values that are emphasized within the family

culture. Because of this lack of support, students often have to reject their family culture in order to pursue an education (Gofen, 2009). This is a difficult task for Appalachian women and may affect identity development throughout their college experience. Even earlier studies related to student persistence hinted that there are differences in degree attainment for women who are married or are coming from a more traditional family role (Astin, 1975). There is some hope for resilient low-income families that can overcome adverse circumstances, however, suggesting that they are able to develop confidence and can create progress toward increasing their share of economic capital (Gofen, 2009). This indicates that children from such a family are in a better position to accomplish academic and social achievements despite their poverty (Gofen, 2009).

Part of the dilemma for first-generation students may result from the isolation and shame they feel because they are having a difficult time in college (Barry et al., 2009). Even before they enter college, there is a fear of failure, worries about money, and a feeling of being behind in their academic preparedness; all of which may be multiplied for Mid-Atlantic Appalachia women who are in poverty (Bui, 2002). It is critical for these students from this population to find a way to build social capital so that they have opportunities to disclose the difficulties they are facing to supportive professionals or peers (Barry et al., 2009). Disclosure can lead to improved academic performance and higher rates of campus involvement (Barry et al., 2009).

Another problem confronting some first-generation students is their overreliance on high school friends to help them form campus social networks that extend their social contacts and can build capital (Barratt, 2007). Because first-generation students are already starting with low amounts of capital, not being socially well connected may create another barrier to campus resources vital for their success (Barratt, 2007). This lack of knowledge and broader, diverse networks eventually leads to a lack of campus support, which may be a reason why first-

generation students graduate at lower rates than students who have more economic, cultural, social, and academic capital (Barratt, 2007; Tinto, 1987).

Research regarding the status of first-generation students in higher education finds that their numbers are declining (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). The decline is most evident in the highly selective colleges and universities, which results in first-generation students being more concentrated in the least-selective colleges and universities (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). This socioeconomic stratification is increasing despite existing countermeasures and leads to a lower level of access and opportunities for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Ishitani, 2006).

Pascarella et al. (2003) examined the experiences and outcomes of first-generation students who attended community colleges. The study consisted of five community colleges located in five different states and came from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Students in the sample consisted of 144 randomly selected participants from the five institutions who all participated in the first three data collections, in fall 1992, spring 1993, and spring, 1994 (Pascarella et al., 2003). There were 21 individual measures of students' academic and nonacademic experiences during their first two years of college. The study found that first-generation college students had vastly different experiences than non-first-generation students who had both parents with completed bachelor's degrees (Pascarella et al., 2003). The study speculated that first-generation students who persisted at the community college experienced the same general benefits as other students. This may be due to the community college exhibiting a less threatening and/or more accommodating environment than the traditional four-year campus (Pascarella et al., 2003).

For first-generation students, there is less opportunity for them to have high levels of capital in all categories because they tend to originate from households that have a low capability of generating such capital (Barratt, 2007). Among first-generation students, the results of such low capital are often reflected in lower grade point averages and standardized test scores, which almost automatically result in non-admission to higher-ranked institutions (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). In her case study of a low SES student's college experiences, Bergerson (2007) suggested that such students may be motivated to compensate for their social class standing by attending college and taking advantage of their intelligence.

Corts and Stoner (2011) reported that two of the main reasons why women attend college are based on their intellectual and financial pursuits. Corts and Stoner examined motives of college students as to why they decided to enter college. The College Motivation Scale was used in two different studies. The first study measured five factors that influenced a person to go to college. Those categories were career/financial, social opportunities, intellectual growth, self-discovery, and going to college was the norm/obligation (Corts & Stoner, 2011, p. 775). The second study illustrated that career and social motives related to grades, whereas the motive for intellectual or self-discovery related to a student's learning orientation. Women, specifically, were found to seek higher education to better their futures in the areas of intelligence/learning and to better their financial status (Corts & Stoner, 2011). This is why it is imperative that women seek resources and networks to assist with career goals. Without goals for their careers or intellectual motivation, women are at a higher risk of dropping out of college (Corts & Stoner, 2011).

Human Capital for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian Women

Another important aspect to consider is the notion of capital, which was extended by Bourdieu (1986) beyond its original frame of reference within economics. He emphasized other forms of capital that relate to the necessary skills humans must possess to progress in society. These other forms of capital are often referred to as economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, and academic capital (Barratt, 2007). Bourdieu believed that education represents a mechanism that controls the social and economic hierarchy between social classes (Swartz, 1997). Social class is a social construct based on the perceptions and beliefs held by a large segment of a population, a collective norm is developed (Bourdieu, 1977). Shared values and common views are often the bonding force between the relationships that build social capital (Field, 2003). However, some individuals may be excluded from building social capital because they do not share common pursuits with people who might be able to assist them (Field, 2003). Hence, high and low prestige is categorized (Barratt, 2005). While social class is deemed as dynamic, then college can be viewed as a transformative middle-class experience by which students build cultural capital, social capital, and eventually, with the attainment of a degree, economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977).

Social capital. Although this concept may provide a hopeful perspective on the chances that individuals who come from lower socioeconomic levels might be able to reach a higher status eventually, social capital could also serve to reinforce the inequality found in economic and educational realms, as well as lifestyle (Field, 2003). This negative spin on social capital points to a possible anti-social behavior or isolation, which may in turn cause individuals and groups in society to stagnate in their social development (Field, 2003). Such stagnation may

cause less access or no access at all to resources that could help these groups build social capital (Field, 2003).

High levels of social capital are often associated with higher levels of financial and cultural capital (Field, 2003). Some college students find it difficult to take advantage of the opportunities needed to increase their social capital and promote ultimate success. This is true especially because relationships are often thought of as a part of identity, which leads individuals to connect with people who are similar to them (Field, 2003). If first-generation students attempt to build capital, often they will find themselves feeling marginalized, as if they do not belong in the college environment (Field, 2003).

Students who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and are the first in their families to attend college have major difficulties with social and academic transitions, far beyond those normal transitions that most first-year students confront (Pascarella, et al., 2004). Many students from the Appalachian region may be first-generation, this example can help describe their obstacles in higher education. First-generation students have been the focus of many research studies, but few have covered the cognitive and psychosocial development this population of students undertakes while in college (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Another limitation of first-generation studies involves the span of time in which students were analyzed. Most studies focused only on first-generation students in their first year of study (Pascarella et al., 2004). There are three areas in a comprehensive study by Pascarella et al. (2004): the estimation of net differences of first-generation students compared to other colleges students within their academic and nonacademic experiences; net differences of first-generation students compared to other students in their cognitive, psychosocial, and status attainment; and to determine if certain experiences (academic and nonacademic) influenced differing cognitive

and psychosocial outcomes of first-generation students (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 251). Data were collected in a longitudinal study from 18 four-year colleges. Results indicated marked differences between first-generation college students and other college students concerning the influence of both academic and nonacademic college experiences (Pascarella et al., 2004). One of the highlights from this research was the emphasis that students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds struggle because of their lack social capital, which leads to lower abilities to build social capital to help propel them.

Social capital, in particular, specifically targets the strength and extent of an individual's social network and it takes both skill and time to develop such networks effectively (Bourdieu, 1977; Lee et al., 2004). Lee et al. (2004) examined the implications that a parent's level of education has on social mobility and the effect on college students. The study included a sample of 5,000 students across the campuses of the Los Angeles Community College District. Information concerning student backgrounds, activities, goals, and views came from the Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students project in 2001 (Lee et al., 2004, p. 5). The main interest of this study examined what level of formal education the students' parents completed (Lee et al., 2004). The study illustrated that there are significant differences in a student's views and experiences depending on the varying levels of parental education (Lee et al., 2004). This illustrates another example of the effects of intergenerational patterns in Appalachia. When a college student has parents who have not obtained any college experience or degrees, their social capital is considerably lower than colleges students who parents have obtained some or completed college degrees.

Cultural capital. Along with social capital, cultural capital includes factors such as knowledge, skills, objects, and educational attainment (Barratt, 2007). It is clear from just these

two forms of capital that women from low socioeconomic backgrounds may not have the knowledge or resources available to teach themselves how to build capital that will contribute to their success. For Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women, in particular, the acquisition of social capital is hindered in part by the spotlight of national attention that was directed toward the region and its culture by President Kennedy and other governmental agencies, beginning in the 1950s and early 1960s. During the 1960s and into the early 1970s, the antipoverty movement targeted many of its efforts toward Appalachia and the effort was carried through into the 1980s under the Reagan administration (M. Katz, 1989). Despite attempts to combat poverty, policies were failing and, in fact, poverty increased during Reagan's presidency (M. Katz, 1989).

Much of the dialogue surrounding Appalachia at that time did not focus on the causes of regional poverty but rather on debates surrounding policy implementation (M. Katz, 1989). Studies emphasized "poor whiteness, [a culture] fraught with racism and sexism, and slowed by anti-progressive ideals" as integral parts of the identity of the Appalachian population (Fedukovich, 2009, p. 145). Included in this blanket characterization, Appalachian women were stereotyped as existing largely as support to their husbands, children, and communities (Fedukovich, 2009). Thus, as a result of these stereotypes, it came to be perceived that Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women struggled to build social capital because of the identity they were pressured to accept. Similar stereotypes and ideas about the identity of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women can also be found in the educational system (Sullivan, 2003). Because of the formation of these stereotypes, poor women are often silenced by feelings of shame and displacement from the desired middle-class norms (Sullivan, 2003).

Family capital. When studying Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women, it is also especially important to consider the concept of family capital, given the strength of traditional values and

generational ties within the region. Family-based social capital includes the “social links between family members, the social relationships of a family, or the accumulation of human and cultural capital within the family” (Gofen, 2009, p. 107). This form of capital is known also as a bonding social capital, because it relates to identity development and purpose (Gofen, 2009). If bonding social capital occurs in isolation, it could have negative effects because it would be social capital used to maintain or reinforce one’s current status instead of promoting progression to a higher status (Gofen, 2009). The main purpose of using family capital to understand the ultimate educational success of women in poverty is to examine the ways family affects the progress and future goals of children (Gofen, 2009).

If a woman from Mid-Atlantic Appalachia comes from a resilient low-income family and has not been exposed to bonding social capital in isolation, her chances for attaining greater educational success may be better than the chances of her counterparts who are in the opposite situation. Johnson et al. (2011) indicated the importance of bonding mechanisms, describing how social connections provide support for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women on a daily basis. Because these women often find themselves at a disadvantage when compared to students with higher levels of family capital (Furstenberg, 2008), it can be crucial to have friends or relatives who can babysit, provide rides to and from work and school, or even just be there to talk when the need arises (Johnson et al., 2011).

Students whose parents obtained college degrees have access to an understanding of the culture of college and how obtaining a degree can be used for personal development and the achievement of socioeconomic status; therefore, first-generation students from low socioeconomic backgrounds will not have exposure to that type of cultural capital through their families (Furstenberg, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004). This suggests that first-generation college

students may need to utilize alternative social mechanisms, such as forming relationships outside their own families, in order to acquire more information that will help them build capital.

Coleman (1990) discussed how ties and relationships with teachers, ministers, etc., allow for social capital to exist for students in low socioeconomic situations and especially for first-generation college students. These relationships are a resource that can aid women through college and in shaping their career aspirations. The more social capital is accumulated, the more it will assist women in breaking through barriers that keep them in poverty (Johnson et al., 2011).

In their interviews with rural Appalachians, Greenlee and Lantz (1993) found a strong sense of interdependence and reciprocity within the community even for basic needs. Greenlee and Lantz examined the stress of poverty on families. Their study included participants from Appalachia in Southeast Ohio. A naturalistic approach was used to gain themes from the voices and opinions of the working poor in this region. Focusing on how stress from poverty affects family life and family coping behaviors, Greenlee and Lantz interviewed 32 families using an in-depth, semi-structured model. Some themes included depression found among the working poor, guilt for not having time with their children due to work, realizing that their poverty teaches their children the value of money, and how spirituality and religion helped them cope emotionally through tough times (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993). An example taken from their study included the description of community reliance as a way to cope with poverty. One neighbor may cut wood not only for his own stove but for others, and in return a neighbor could can vegetables and offer this to the neighbor who had cut the wood (Greenlee & Lantz 1993).

Because of the lack of resources and the poverty rate within Appalachia, the reliance of people working together to survive represents a strong cultural tie for women in the region

(Harper, 2000). While trying to survive, educational attainment is not accorded a high priority when compared to making money to put food on the table, which creates a never-ending cycle within close-knit communities that rely heavily on each individual to do his or her share for the survival of the whole (Harper, 2000). This balance of interdependency between community members could be greatly affected if an individual decides to go to college or leave the community (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993). For Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women this presents a dilemma, because the pursuit of higher education could affect not only their immediate family but the survival of other community members and organizations (e.g., their churches), as well as the larger community (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993).

Another problem for women within the Appalachian family culture relates to how their work is perceived in a predominantly male-driven labor market (Harper, 2000). Within Appalachia a man's work and labor divisions are more highly valued and are perceived to contribute more to the family and community economy (Harper, 2000). Thus, jobs in service industries (pink collar jobs) are reserved principally for the women in the community and viewed as less important when compared to their traditional role of being a wife and mother (Harper, 2000). Such a perspective, of course, can severely limit Appalachian women's views about their opportunities for higher education and professional careers (Harper, 2000).

For the Appalachian region, faith and spirituality also become a part of an individual's identity (Feldman & Moseley, 2003). Religious affiliation within the region is composed of mostly Christian denominations, with the majority of individuals being affiliated with Protestant or Catholic congregations (Feldman & Moseley, 2003).

Because the Appalachian region is known for a strong Christian tradition, Feldman and Moseley (2003) studied how this faith is intricately connected to the Appalachian community

environment and how it forms a type of family subculture. While focusing on elements of faith within Appalachia, Feldman and Moseley (2003) also connected this faith to environmental reform efforts. These efforts that are being used in Appalachia focus on the internal change (or personal transformation), and are used to advance an environment of an ethic of care in the region (Feldman & Moseley, 2003; Noddings, 2012). Methods used within this study included: 1) a literature review of a larger project that examined faith-based environmental reform efforts within Appalachia and internationally which provided context; 2) extensive research using media, a database, and Internet searches and the used the snowball technique to identify leaders who led faith-based initiatives in Appalachia; and 3) an open-ended interview on more details regarding initiatives and the progress toward reform goals used faith (Feldman & Moseley, 2003). The information provided concerning the faith context in Appalachia is important to consider since this value is used in most aspects of individuals' lives who resides in the Appalachian region (Feldman & Moseley, 2003).

Because many residents of Appalachian communities take moral values seriously in their daily lives, relationships between community members can be characterized as reflecting a strong undercurrent of moral obligations much like a family subculture (Wortham & Wortham, 2007). Sociology has focused on research associated with the norms, values, and social structures within society (Wortham & Wortham, 2007). Because of the push to focus on moral sociology in recent studies, Wortham and Wortham (2007) wanted to expand the study of social capital and social networks to include the dimensions of spiritual capital. The main influences for this study include the morals and social lift focus of W.E.B. Du Bois, the perception of social behavior from Greeley, and the spiritual well-being perspective from Brewer and Koenig (Wortham & Wortham, 2007). One of the studies used in their examination of spiritual capital

included data from the UCLA study “Spirituality in Higher Education,” which analyzed perceived qualities of the “good life” from a list of characteristics (Wortham & Wortham, 2007, p. 444). Among the findings, spirituality was significantly correlated with exhibiting many of the characteristics that describe the good life, which included increased optimism, greater civic responsibility, more tolerance of racial and ethnic groups, and longer academic performance (Wortham & Wortham, 2007, p. 444).

Thus, it should come as no surprise that the church is second only to family in discussions about the provision of social support for individuals in rural Appalachia (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993). Support from the local church congregation often helps families get through financial difficulties and is heavily relied upon, given the distrust that exists in Appalachian culture toward of any type of government assistance program (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993). This can bring stability to the community; however, it could also create stagnation in the development of those who want to break away from the traditional elements of their regional culture.

Spiritual capital. Spiritual capital is often thought of as a combination of other forms of capital such as human, social, and cultural (Wortham & Wortham, 2007). Due to this combination, a person’s beliefs, behaviors, religious instruction, religious participation, and volunteer activities are all part of the individual’s identity and understanding of the world. In essence, spiritual capital involves not only external dimensions of self but also internal dimensions, which could drive other motivations (Wortham & Wortham, 2007).

Because Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women may hold a high level of spiritual capital, this could positively affect their success in college by fostering characteristics such as “optimism, greater civic responsibility, being more empathetic, exhibiting more tolerance of racial and ethnic groups, and stronger academic performance” (Wortham & Wortham, 2007, p. 444).

While women from lower socio-economic backgrounds represent another marginalized group, their spiritual capital may allow them to relate to and support other marginalized groups successfully. This may be especially true for women who wish to go against their traditional cultural roles in Appalachia and look toward a college degree as a way to develop intellectually and provide more opportunities in their lives. Depending on their spiritual dimensions or level of involvement in religion, this could lead to a greater chance that they may develop a higher level of social capital (Wortham & Wortham, 2007).

Spiritual capital could pose a problem for identity development and family relations among Appalachian women who attend college. As suggested earlier, cultural tensions created by women who choose to take the path toward higher education may work against the strong ties that they have formed on a spiritual level with their families and communities (Wortham & Wortham, 2007). Another tension among the spiritual beliefs within the Appalachian culture involves support for a “helping tradition” that combats forms of oppression deriving from politics and economics. Ironically, however, this may turn these women away from obtaining “worldly” knowledge because a spiritual approach to combating oppression does not necessarily support the educational perspective that is part of the very economic and political platforms most Appalachians fight against (Feldman & Moseley, 2003).

As an example, interviews with families in rural Appalachia exposed themes of reliance on spiritual capital and faith to help them overcome obstacles (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993). One way that was used to cope emotionally with financial struggles was stated in a response by an interviewee who said how she was not sure where money would come from for food one day, but that “the Lord came through” (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993, p. 127). Statements throughout this study repeated this reliance on spirituality as a way that women in rural Appalachia cope with

circumstances when their lives seem unbearable (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993). Again, this may work against their progression in college because of the external and internal tensions that could arise.

Academic capital. Academic capital reveals how certain factors can contribute to higher or lower levels of skills that are needed to be successful in an education setting. This form of capital reflects the idea that social reproduction culminates in the cultural reproduction that educational systems generate (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1990). According to findings by Barratt (2007), the reproduction of social hierarchies in the United States correlates with consistency of college admission and the family income of students who apply to college. Aronson (2008) asserted that social classes filter the college choices available to students based on how comfortably they will fit into the campus environment, especially in relation to the students' own culture, background, and school experiences. Therefore, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may not have sufficient academic preparedness compared to students from higher social classes, which puts them at a disadvantage because of the lower levels of academic capital they possess (Aronson, 2008).

Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study 1998-2000, McCarron and Inkelas (2006) examined a sample of 1,879 first-generation students from four- and two- year colleges and their experiences of the gap between education aspirations and attainment, and the role of parental involvement for these students. To balance the study, 1,879 students who indicated that at least one parent obtained a bachelor's degree were included as non-first-generation students in order to compare the gap of education aspirations and attainment, along with parental involvement influences (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). One of the main differences between the two student populations involved the predictor of education aspirations. Parental

involvement was the best indicator of educational aspirations for non-first-generation students with the importance of good grades as the best predictor for first-generation students (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). A surprising result of this study is the gap between educational aspirations and educational attainment. First-generation students exhibited a 62.1% gap, from 1990 to 2000, that did not reach their educational aspirations and 66.0% of non-first-generation students did not reach their educational aspirations (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). The conclusion was that even though non-first-generation students may have a higher social and cultural capital level, this does not mean that they will succeed in their aspirations at a faster or more effortless rate (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

In particular, this pattern is reflected in the disproportionate number of students from middle-class and higher social-class backgrounds who are able to enroll in high schools that offer college preparatory coursework (Aronson, 2008). Aronson (2008) sought to discuss the objective and subjective class differences that impact the experiences of college students. Because first-generation and low-income students are “filtered” out at different stages in the college process, the disproportionate numbers point out that outcome reproduces the existing social inequalities; however, there is the chance that transformation can exist. Throughout the examination, Aronson illustrated inequalities through childhood to adulthood and also included institutional stratifications and effects of class differences in many areas such as college admission, attendance, experiences in college life, work, and degree attainment.

The inverse effect is revealed in studies that show how children and young adults whose background prevents them from acquiring adequate cultural capital cannot adapt as easily to the school culture and will therefore opt out of the opportunity for higher education (Field, 2003; Van de Werfhorst, 2010). The parent and community perceptions of school are illustrated

through a case study of two families from West Virginia, which discussed their perceptions and their expectations of school for their children (Howley, 2006). The responses from the families in Appalachia supported other studies that show a pragmatic perspective on education that would ultimately (hopefully) prepare their children for the unstable and depressed economic climate in their region (Howley, 2006). Another interesting perspective on rural education from this study is the tendency for parents to explain that socialization in the school setting allowed their children to possibly unlearn rural ways, which would help them communicate more effectively once they leave school and enter the workforce (Howley, 2006). Not one response strongly suggested that school would propel their children into college, which may influence their children to remain loyal and uphold the heritage in Appalachia rather than attend higher education and relocate (Howley, 2006). In addition, friction between social classes was evident in this study and mirrors the stigmas rural and poor Appalachians face within the school setting (Howley, 2006).

Some scholars, however, have asserted that cultural capital is more fluid and that people can achieve higher levels of cultural capital, although it is more difficult if this form of capital is not provided originally by parents or family (Van De Werfhorst, 2010). In contrast to Bourdieu's studies on cultural capital, Werfhorst (2010) focused on two weaknesses with these studies, which include the integration of a "multidimensional nature" (p. 157) of sociality in social mobility, difference in lifestyles, and political orientation. While Bourdieu focused on the one-dimensional effects of levels of work compared to educational level, Werfhorst (2010) believes this should be analyzed using a more multi-dimensional approach using school-level outcomes. The second area of weakness that Werfhorst (2010) criticized concerning Bourdieu's research indicated that even though Bourdieu saw that lifestyle preference often correlated with

political orientation, not only is cultural capital an influence but also “communicative resources” (Werfhorst, 2010, p. 165) which is different from social skills because the focus is to gain skills that enable an individual to see something from more than one vantage point. Even though there are two criticisms of Bourdieu’s work, overall, Werfhorst (2010) supported the use of Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory especially when analyzing cultural behavior. The connection this study posed highlights that the school setting plays an integral part for building cultural and academic capital for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds including Appalachia.

Because cultural capital involves how much knowledge an individual possesses concerning elite culture and the ability to access the rewards it offers (Aries & Seider, 2007), it is apparent that one’s social class background also has an indirect effect on how such capital is used. Aries and Seider (2007) sought to explore the experiences and social class formation as it related to identity development in college students. The study involved interviews of 15 lower-income students from a state college and 15 affluent students who attended a selective liberal arts college (Aries & Seider, 2007). The interviews were structured using Marcia’s Identity Status Interview, which categorized students based on the responses into one of four categories: achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion (Aries & Seider, 2007, p. 143). Students from affluent backgrounds stated that social class standing was a highly important aspect of the identity, and this characteristic was significantly higher than lower-income student participants. In addition, affluent students could identify social structures in place to aid in their success and had higher occupational goals (Aries & Seider, 2007). Lower income students established higher levels of social class exploration and developed an ideology to explain their social class standing. Overall, social class was found to be a significant independent variable for student identity formation and identity exploration (Aries & Seider, 2007).

Thus, in regard to educational decisions, the value placed on achieving a college degree may be a learned disposition, which can be difficult to change because of the narrowed or isolated scope of cultural capital that is available in Appalachia (Swartz, 1997). This causes a struggle for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, in particular, when they try to establish a sense of continuity in their life course between where they were, who they are now becoming, and what they are likely to achieve (Aries & Seider, 2007; Field, 2003).

One example of this may be found in the case of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who have to work while attending school. Because working students recognize that they must continue working to make funds that will pay their college expenses, they may often find that this causes their attention to academic priorities to wane (Tokarczyk, 2004). Instead of realizing that their academic problems may be due to being overloaded with responsibilities, students often tend to believe that they are just not smart enough to attain a college education (Tokarczyk, 2004). The incongruities that Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women confront in being held to traditional role expectations, while simultaneously working outside the home and attending college, forces many to adopt a “superwoman” (Harper, 2000, p. 75) persona that may increase their chances of encountering further social and economic hardships. Because most low-income women fall within the first-generation college category, it is simply one more barrier they must overcome to be successful in higher education, given their low levels of academic capital as it relates to other inadequate levels of social and cultural capital that exist in Appalachia.

Access to Higher Education

Higher education has a reputation for being inaccessible to the low socioeconomic populations of the United States. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are seen as having better outcomes in the higher education system (London, 2006). Factors that may

account for that pattern include tendencies for students from high socioeconomic backgrounds to have more well-educated parents and for these students to attend schools that are better equipped to prepare them for college (London, 2006). Enrollment patterns of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are frequently delayed because these students often begin college later due to such events as immediate entry into the workforce after high school, marriage, early parenthood, and welfare dependency (Aronson, 2008). There is also the likelihood that social support processes and the transfer of social capital vary by social class (Johnson et al., 2011).

One form of social capital, found mostly among students from high socioeconomic backgrounds, provides leverage and access to upward mobility (Johnson et al., 2011). The other form of social support that usually operates within lower social class environments tends to focus on helping an individual to just “get by” (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 11). This contributes to the epidemic of low college attainment for women in poverty. Students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be first-generation, and women from this population (more so than men) emphasize their socioeconomic status as a dominant reason why they wish to go to college (London, 2006). This could be an especially salient motivation for the percentage of low SES students who rely on the current welfare system for support (London, 2006).

Finances. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 was the overarching law that gave welfare recipients two programs: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Aid to Families with Dependent Children, (Pandey, Zhan, Neely-Barnes & Menon, 2000). There have been expressed concerns that the 1996 Welfare Reform Law generated even greater restrictions on women who are poor (Deprez, 2006). According to Tiarniyu and Mitchell (2001), current welfare reform ignores education as a solution and,

instead, focuses too much on getting people off welfare and into the workforce. The lower the educational level of women, the more likely they will be in poverty (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). If welfare reform and other federal programs continue to focus on the cycles of women in poverty and not education and training, these programs will not provide women the chance to have better opportunities to provide for themselves and their families (Kates, 1996). In addition, first-generation students often come from lower SES backgrounds, which also relates to the cultural and social capital needed by first-generation students to achieve success (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

As indicated earlier in this paper, women from low socioeconomic backgrounds often find themselves having to work instead of pursuing college degrees because of the necessity to provide for their livelihood or contribute to a family income (Adair, 2001). Within the Appalachian culture, younger adults are often expected to provide another stream of income for the whole family. Regardless of whether they enter college at traditional or nontraditional ages, Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women are often working when they become college students (Aronson, 2008; DeFreitas & Duffy, 2004). This pattern is especially characteristic of single mothers in poverty (Adair, 2001).

According to some studies, there seems to be an indication that women obtain college degrees to help ensure that they overcome or avoid poverty and not simply to increase their earnings per se (Diprete & Buchmann, 2006). Even though the focus may not be solely on increased earnings, the attainment of a college degree is important for poor women so that they may be able eventually to have a reasonable income (Kates, 1996). But this is also important for women in general since their earnings are below the average income for men (Kates, 1996). Because of failing government assistance for women in poverty, Mid-Atlantic Appalachian

women are part of a population of students who need to work during their college years, which is yet another obstacle that could cause them to delay their degree attainment or drop out.

As federal and state funding continues to decrease, funding for poor students continues to be a major issue (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). The effort to create equity in higher education has existed across several decades (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). With the big push for equity occurring after WWII and Higher Education Act efforts, a re-examination of the status of equity in higher education and specifically analyzing equity for students from low socioeconomic standing was the focus for Astin and Oseguera (2004). The method utilized for their study drew on data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Entering Freshman Survey. This survey has been conducted over the past 38 years and each year 400,000 freshmen (approximately) from more than 700 institutions respond (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). The most recent conclusion of this study showed increasingly socioeconomic inequity of entering college freshman students who gain admission to the most selective colleges and universities. Despite efforts for remediation, American higher education has become more socioeconomically stratified than any decade before (Aston & Oseguera, 2004).

Studies have shown that financial aid influences degree completion and, depending on the type of aid and levels of consistency, students who rely on financial aid are at risk (Eitel, 2009; Ishitani, 2006). The risk also relates to how college tuition has increased exponentially within the past few decades, well beyond the normal range of inflation (DeFreitas & Duffy, 2004). Because of these rising costs and increasing reliance on student loans or grants, women with low or non-existent incomes will find themselves first struggling to make it through and, even if they complete their degree, having to repay a substantial amount of debt once they graduate (DeFreitas & Duffy, 2004). As an example, even when economically disadvantaged

women have received merit scholarships, the grant amount from the institution was reduced, which left only loans available to the students (Dahlberg, 2003). This turns the perception that there is financial aid available into an empty promise because grant money is typically the first thing reduced instead of a loan after a scholarship has been awarded (Dahlberg, 2003). This creates more unmet financial needs for women in poverty (Arsonson, 2008).

According to Dahlberg (2003), financial aid has become the new equivalent to welfare in higher education. But many students from the working class are averse to accumulating debt (Bergerson, 2007; Furstenberg, 2008), and this aversion often affects whether a student stays in college or drops out because of their reluctance to take out sufficient student loans (Bergerson, 2007; Furstenberg, 2008).

A study of first-generation women students who had to work while attending college noted that these women were not able to be highly involved in college life because of economic concerns and the financial pressures that they experience (Hand & Payne, 2008). This lack of involvement in campus life may lead to diminishing support in the social arena, which could be detrimental to their degree attainment (Eitel, 2009; Hand & Payne, 2008; Walpole, 2003). Walpole (2003) studied the effects of capital as it relates to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Studies have often focused on the mainstream college population; however, by investigating student activities such as contact with faculty, time spent studying, co-curricular activities, and working, and then analyzing how these activities contributed to building capital would help “increase the economic capital of low-income students sheds light on the different patterns for this population” (Walpole, 2003, p. 51). Four-year colleges were used in this study (Walpole, 2003). Data were collected using the longitudinal data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program sponsored by the Higher Education Research Institute (Walpole,

2003). The main surveys used were the 1985 Student Information Form, the 1989 Four-Year Follow-Up Survey, and the 1994 Nine-Year Follow-Up Survey (Walpole, 2003). The sample included approximately 12,376 students from 209 four-year colleges in the United States (Walpole, 2003).

In addition, social class is also perceived as an important element for student retention. The gap between one's perceived social standing and the modal SES level reflected on campus can ultimately represent a challenge that may undermine the connection between student and campus (Barratt, 2005; Lee et al., 2004). Some research supports the notion that access to social and cultural capital occurs through participation in extra-curricular activities (Stuber, 2009). The type and frequency of involvement may be considerably lower for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Stuber, 2009). Using theories of social and cultural reproduction, Stuber (2009) examined the rate of participation and the effects of extra-curricular activities on working-class students compared to middle- to upper-class students. Stuber (2009) facilitated 61 in-depth interviews of college students. The findings added the social and cultural reproduction theories by exposing how students with social and cultural resources from the middle and upper class are better equipped to increase these resources in contrast to students from the working class who struggle to build these resources throughout their college experience (Stuber, 2009).

This correlates with low graduation rates of women from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Not only is graduation from college not the norm for such women, but also only 16% graduate while still on welfare and 20% graduate at some point after leaving the welfare program (London, 2006).

Exposure to college information. The main challenges for Appalachian women include not only economic barriers but also parental barriers and the lack of awareness of higher

educational opportunities (Crowther et al., 1992; Lee et al., 2004). Family influences on students, along with individual attributes and institutional roles, all contribute to their existing low level of enrollment in higher education (Crowther et al., 1992). Students who attend college often go through the struggle between independence and loyalty to their home and family (Hand & Payne, 2008). In addition, students whose parents do not have a college degree are often affected by parental doubts about whether the student can succeed in college (Lee et al., 2004). For Appalachian students, this struggle is experienced even more intensely because of their loyalty to family and the region (Hand & Payne, 2008).

Bergerson (2007) analyzed a case story about Anna to illustrate the impact of social class on the college experience. Primarily the focus was on how social class influences student participation in campus life and academic coursework (Bergerson, 2007). In addition, to the perspective from Anna, Bourdieu's social class reproduction theory was also used to view how social class is used in college student decision-making and experiences (Bergerson, 2007). Data for this project stemmed from a larger research study on a regional semi-selective private liberal arts college (Bergerson, 2007). Anna was selected from a group of 16 students who had responded to a survey for incoming new students. Because of her low socioeconomic standing and being a Hispanic female, Anna participated in journaling and agreed for Bergerson to observe her in daily college activities for one year. This observation of her life on campus was used to compare and support or disconfirm the descriptions she gave when explaining her experiences in interviews and journaling (Bergerson, 2007). As a result of the case study, Bergerson called for institutions to examine how social and power structures may be reproduced on campuses and programming. In addition, Bergerson highlighted the changing student population where a "one-size-fits-all" approach will not be successful for the increasingly

diverse student population (Bergerson, 2007). One aspect of this research supported the social class reproduction that may occur for first-generation students from low socioeconomic backgrounds because of the struggle between loyalty to family and loyalty to themselves and their college experience.

For Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who are first-generation students, exposure to basic knowledge about higher education is limited by their family and community origins, putting them at risk for not completing a college degree (Bergerson, 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004). Along with a lack of information regarding the different elements of the college experience (e.g., a limited awareness about the application process or the cost of a degree), first-generation students, especially those from the Appalachia region, are also often unaware of how the effects of possible family responsibilities, working, and living off campus will affect academic success (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Success in Higher Education

Appalachia has a reputation for low educational attainment. Projects such as the federally funded Trio program and the Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) have been implemented to combat the educational endemic in the region (Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education, 2008). The EOC educates low-income residents over the age of 19 who qualify as first-generation students (OACHE, 2008). In addition, Appalachian Ohio high school students ranked financial concerns and the lack of education about college programs as some of their biggest obstacles to attaining a college degree (OACHE, 2008). Even though these programs exist in Appalachia, however, it has been a struggle to gain participation from the labor force because most of the population relies on employment in blue-collar industries rather than in the service sector (Seufert & Carrozza, 2005).

Some of the struggles involve difficulties in a number of areas that would lead to successful degree attainment. The indicators for success as defined by Astin (1975)—ability, high school performance, socioeconomic status, employment, campus involvement, and educational aspirations—have remained the same over the past few decades. Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women must continue to combat their lower levels of capital while trying to reach levels that are deemed successful based on these indicators.

Support systems. Colleges and universities often do not provide the support needed for women in poverty. For example, social programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, which assists single mothers in obtaining a college degree, expose the increased need for accommodations for women and children on the college campus (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). Campuses across the nation now provide low-cost housing and even in-house daycare to single mothers on campus (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). But even though such programs exist in some states, they often vary in type and by the restrictions they place on women, which can again be traced back to the inconsistencies associated with the welfare reform act of 1996 (Pandey et al., 2000).

In addition, there was a study that investigated classes of students that would apply to institutions before 1992 (Reay, 2003). After analyzing the results, there was a pattern involving women from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Due to the experiences of women from this qualitative study, those that applied for pre-1992 institutions felt that they would not “fit in” to the campus culture and there was no support for women from lower socioeconomic classes (Reay, 2003). This highlighted a distinction between socioeconomic classes and gave attention to especially address how to support a more diverse population including women who are poor, which is still applicable today (Reay, 2003).

Alienation was another term used in several studies to illustrate how low SES women felt during their first year on a college campus (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). This alienation obviously affects the identity development these women undergo in sorting out the conflicts between their Appalachian culture and higher education experiences (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). The issues with alienation and identity development lead to a larger and deeper internal issue for Appalachian women and their success in higher education.

Women in Poverty

In general, higher education is valued in the United States, and the results of obtaining a degree are observed through upward mobility in socioeconomic standing and social status (Ishitani, 2006; Jones, 2004). For example, Jones (2004) sought to examine the meaning of education held by working class women. Since the general opinion of education is a way out of poverty and into higher ranked professions, 10 women professors from the working class were interviewed to illustrate the perception of higher education. Among some of the results from Jones's study, the majority of women interviewed described higher education as a way out from where they once were and somewhere where they felt belonging. The sense of belonging and drive to fight through oppressive situations were examined by pinpointing critical moments of awareness (Jones, 2004). This and other studies support the notion that achieving higher education will aid in social mobility.

Although the value of higher education is evident, there are low socioeconomic populations that may never benefit from this opportunity. The phrase *feminization of poverty* stems from the notion that historically the U.S. sub-population living in poverty is largely represented by women (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). Many factors contribute to the increasing number of women in poverty. In the 1970s, a movement formed to study the causes of why

women are consistently overrepresented among the poor (M. Katz, 1989). Throughout U.S. history, women played a traditional role in family life, which made their husbands the sole breadwinners of the family. If something happened to their husbands, women were left as widows with no assistance—a pattern that was most pronounced in the U.S. during wartime (M. Katz, 1989). Further down the timeline, programs were beginning to develop for low-income women, which brought about legislation to guarantee their civil rights in employment. Even with improved efforts, however, women still represent the largest segment of the American population living in poverty (M. Katz, 1989). There seemed to be two primary reasons for why this pattern continued: (a) the increase in single-parent homes run by women; and (b) the types of jobs in which women were employed (M. Katz, 1989).

In examining the increase in single-parent families, researchers found that women are usually the head of single-parent homes and often work in poor-paying pink collar jobs that do not provide enough earnings to cover basic household needs (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). The pink collar job market for women also reflects the fact that wages earned by women are roughly equivalent to 47% of the wages earned by men (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). Kates (1996) also suggested that policies designed to aid individuals in poverty tend to place attention on immediate job attainment and steer away from education and training. This is not a positive effect since many single-parent families, in most cases led by women, are often reliant on welfare or go back and forth between welfare and employment (Nelson, 2006). This supports the research findings that women are more vulnerable to poverty than men because of the failing policy structures and lack of job opportunities with equitable income (Latimer, 2000).

A large segment of single mothers are not only finding themselves in pink-collar jobs but also struggle to find the support systems needed in order to gain access to resources that would

propel them into education opportunities which could lead them out of poverty (Anderson & Hoy, 2006). The majority of women on welfare agree that education is the key to better employment opportunities (Anderson & Hoy, 2006). Even with programs such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, women are finding that they are not being adequately prepared for jobs and if they live in rural areas, resources and employment opportunities are scarce (Anderson & Hoy, 2006).

In rural settings, the return on the investment with the programs or resources that aid women in building human capital are often not met due to the climate in which they live (Anderson & Hoy, 2006). For single mothers, even the programs in place have drawbacks when it comes to providing for their families (Anderson & Hoy, 2006). Long waiting periods for benefits to occur, ineffective caseworkers, education and skill-building workshops, and childcare are all issues single mothers have to endure (Anderson & Hoy, 2006). Rural single mothers are also combatting a lack of public transportation, rural programs may have fewer resources, and job prospects are limited (Anderson & Hoy, 2006).

Single mothers in poverty are faced with a dilemma when opportunities do arise or when they are continually trying to survive. Social support is extremely important for single mothers and the most common networks, which also mirror support systems in rural communities, are through friends and family members (Gladow & Ray, 2001). The nature of the give-and-take relationship is often built with other single mothers because they provide a network that understands the trials of being a single mother in poverty (Gladow & Ray, 2001). In a study by Nelson (2006), rural families were used to compare the differences between married couples in poverty and single-parent homes in poverty. Self-provisioning, in the form of growing food, changing oil in a car, cutting firewood, etc., was at a much lower rate in single-parent families;

however, for single mothers, establishing a network of social support was at a much higher rate and often these networks consisted of other women who were also single parents (Nelson, 2006). Because single mothers are faced with providing childcare at a high cost while trying to survive on low-wage jobs, the social network is extremely vital to create a balance between family needs and working (DeBord, Canu, & Kerpelman, 2000). Along with childcare is the lack of benefits and healthcare that goes along with low-wage employment (DeBord et al., 2000). Even if single mothers enroll in programs to assist with child healthcare, transportation for rural single mothers is often an issue and they are not able to receive healthcare on a regular basis (DeBord et al., 2000).

Another analysis by Kates (1996) reinforces the importance for women of obtaining postsecondary training and education. Not only will education allow women to step away from the cycle of welfare, it will allow women to gain opportunities for a better life overall (Kates, 1996). It is also clear that investment in postsecondary education will yield a more cost-effective solution for women who are poor than further expenditures on welfare or other federally funded programs (Kates, 1996). In fact, the 1996 welfare reform law has actually been detrimental to women who try to obtain higher education because of its focus on short-term employment options and vocational training that takes less than one year to complete (Adair, 2003; London, 2006).

To further highlight the detrimental nature of welfare reform for women in poverty, London (2006) analyzed the effectiveness of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWOA). As part of the 1996 PRWOA, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program has strongly discouraged postsecondary education as a way out of poverty (London, 2006). The biases are apparent in this program to steer away this population from

obtaining a college degree. To combat the inherent discouragement of welfare recipients to attend college, London (2006) addressed the improved outcomes of those recipients who do attend college while receiving welfare or other government assistance. To gather data, London (2006) used statistics from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) that followed a representative sample of 13,000 young men and women from 1979 to 1998. The parameters for this specific study included time on welfare and time in college by analyzing continuous periods of time that a NLYS respondent received cash assistance or enrolled in college (London, 2006). The specific population within the NLYS sample was narrowed down to women only because this is the majority population that receives welfare assistance (London, 2006). This study among others highlights the specific effect and outcomes welfare reform programs have on women specifically.

Just because welfare reform has helped decrease the number of families using welfare, does not mean that the policy has been successful in assisting people to rise out of poverty (Adair, 2003). In response to the welfare legislation, which discourages higher education as a way to combat poverty, Adair (2001) sought to expose the importance of a college education especially for single mothers on welfare. Data from her interviews illustrate how single mothers in her study describe the importance of pursuing higher education and the obstacles that many face which hinder their experience or completion (Adair, 2001). As a result of her study, Adair (2001) found that the support and opportunities for single mothers on welfare are extremely limited and that society must make changes toward equity in higher education opportunities and in society. This has been viewed as an ongoing issue for quite some time, with welfare simply allowing women to take one step out of the system and into another level of poverty instead of providing opportunities to further their education (M. Katz, 1989).

Support systems are vital for women in poverty. Constituents such as higher education institutions, state and federal governments need to work together to provide better support structures for all women who are poor including welfare recipients, non-welfare recipients, and those in single-parent homes (Pandey, et al., 2000). New policies must be in place in order to shift the focus onto education as one of the fundamental ways to combat poverty (Pandey et al., 2000). In addition, education often leads to a higher standard of living and there is proof that people with higher levels of education live longer, have better health, and are more productive than people who do not (Mortenson, 2000).

Employment and Earnings Trends

Low-income women who try to attend college often find themselves in a quandary. For example, if a single mother finally receives a job placement to come off welfare, her time has to be dedicated to work, not school, especially if there is lack of support and information from local institutions and other support systems (Reay, 2003). This is a stressful situation, because a college degree does contribute substantially to financial stability (Eitel & Martin, 2009). In an effort to improve the persistence and graduation of first-generation female college students, Eitel and Martin (2009) studied the financial literacy needs of women in college and how this related to degree attainment. A quantitative analysis using the JumpStart Survey was used to gather data from 204 female participants from one university. Some of the general findings included participants who were not financially literate and despite the need to become more financially literate, this need did not propel the participants to perform information-seeking behavior (Eitel & Martin, 2009). The implications of this study called for immediate action in regard to financial literacy components offered as a part of the higher education experience (Eitel & Martin, 2009). Studies such as this prove the need for local institutions and support systems to

create better ways to communicate and educate women in poverty about their opportunities and to improve their financial literacy.

Not only are services and support systems not readily available, the infrastructure of earnings in the United States also present an obstacle for women. Salary data show that men with a high school degree earn around \$26,000 per year compared to their female counterparts, who earn approximately \$15,000 annually (Pandey et al., 2000). However, once a woman obtains a college degree she is then likely to earn approximately \$26,000 per year, which represents a large increase compared to women with high school degrees, but the amount is still disproportionately low when compared to the earnings of college-educated men (Pandey et al., 2000).

Because of the inequity in yearly earnings between women and men, the importance of a college degree is magnified for women, especially as it relates to their chances of upward mobility in society. Current policies and practices are not creating an equal playing field for low-income women or those on welfare assistance and have been proven to create a cycle of poverty that may only be broken by obtaining higher education.

Education and Training

In addition to the societal pressures that women in poverty confront, the covert and overt negative stereotypes ascribed to the poor often lead poor women to adopt a feeling of defeat while they are attending colleges or universities (Adair, 2001). In a study by Bullock and Limbert (2003), 69 low-income women in an education/training program were asked about how they perceived their status regarding social class and upward mobility (Bullock & Limbert, 2003). Even though the overall perception shared by most of the women was that higher education or a college degree would assist them in achieving middle-class status, they also

perceived that there is a struggle associated with gaining access to higher education. In particular, the cultural values to which women living in poverty are exposed differ greatly from the values that typify college culture and this can pose a challenge and/or threat to the women's success (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001).

In relation to the cultural differences poor women face when attending college, social class is an area that has been underexplored in relation to college student retention (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). Four case studies examined by Wentworth and Peterson (2001) investigated the identity development and issues of adult women from working-class backgrounds and their experiences in college as first-generation students. The Seidman model for the interview sessions was used and participants were randomly selected. Ages of the participants ranged from 31-53. The two main themes from the interviews illustrated that campuses need to be responsive to feelings of alienation that working-class students often experience, and that first-generation students often need permission to take liberal arts courses because they come from a practical culture in work and school (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001).

This condition also relates to the lack of an educational focus in welfare and public assistance programs that emphasize mainly job-training skills (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006). As Johnson et al. (2011) pointed out, the goal of decreasing caseloads is one thing, but to actually bring women out of poverty and into financial independence is another. Johnson et al. (2011) studied the importance of social capital as a way to increase the success of single women in poverty. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 called for women to achieve one of two goals, which included work or marriage. Believing that social capital needs to be a focus for single women on assistance, Johnson, et al. (2011) used longitudinal data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Survey (FFCWS) to illustrate that single women need

social support for upward mobility instead of simply “getting off welfare” (p. 9). In addition to the data from the FFCWS, Wellman and Wortley’s framework was used to define social capital. One of the major findings in this study concluded that in order to achieve the two goals set by the PRWOA, women had to rely on levels of social capital that was not a readily available resource to them as poor women (Johnson et al., 2011).

It can be argued, in fact, that the 1996 welfare reform measures have overshadowed the importance of obtaining a college education by emphasizing job placement (S. Katz, 2009). Although job placement can be important, it represents only a temporary fix for low-income women because many times the initial jobs they obtain pay wages that fail to lift the women out of poverty (S. Katz, 2009). In response to the “work first, education last” message from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, S. Katz (2009) analyzed, through interviews of women on welfare, how their rationale for using higher education is the same as the current cultural explanations associated with the American Dream. S. Katz (2009) used qualitative research in the form of interviews and focus groups of 64 women from the San Francisco Bay area from November 2005 through June 2007 who were receiving cash assistance from CalWORKS. Many of the interviewees responded with an understanding that a college degree would increase their opportunities for social mobility, increase the chances of their children going to college, and enable them to become leaders within their communities (S. Katz, 2009).

Degree attainment conflicts especially with the blue-collar focus on employment that exists in the Appalachian region (Seufert & Carrozza, 2005). In addition, low-income women have a more difficult time finding work compared to men, who are three times more likely to participate in blue-collar and production work than women (Seufert & Carrozza, 2005). As the research examined in this section suggests, women in the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region face

a unique set of challenges and obstacles that impede their eventual attainment of a college degree.

Summary

Degree completion for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women is more important than ever before because there are consistent findings that emphasize education and the attainment of a college degree as an effective way out of poverty (Duncan, 1999). While trying to attend college and attempting to finish a degree, Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women undergo a unique and complex struggle. Despite a long history of programs designed to assist them, many women have not yet escaped the cycle of poverty. Instead, such programs have tended to emphasize pink-collar jobs for women instead of focusing on educational attainment to move them out of poverty.

For Appalachian women this is especially difficult because of the existence of an entrenched culture of poverty and intergenerational transmission processes that continue to pass this culture down through families and communities (Duncan, 1999). Behavioral patterns found in the culture of poverty are often perceived to be counter-productive (Fiene, 1993). The daily living expectations of just getting by and the pattern of absenteeism from jobs are typical reflections of this intergenerational poverty (Fiene, 1993). This culture of poverty not only hinders the social mobility of Appalachian women, but it also creates problems in their identity development (Fiene, 1993).

The profound effects of confronting failing welfare systems, dealing with the internal turmoil of finding their voice among conflicting values, and transitioning from one social class to another can produce either negative or positive results. Women from Mid-Atlantic Appalachia typically possess lower levels of capital throughout their lives, which may undermine attempts to

build social networks that would increase their chances of graduation and ultimate educational success. This may be an uphill battle, because many studies confirm that an individual must develop a substantial amount of social capital to overcome significant poverty (Johnson et al., 2011).

One noteworthy characteristic among women from Mid-Atlantic Appalachia is the strong ties that exist between mothers and daughters and the influences that relationship has on identity development and higher educational attainment (Harper, 2000). If women hold strong and loyal relationships to their mothers, internalized family values are more likely to be salient and to create a greater sense of understanding about role expectations (Harper, 2000). If education and individual achievement are highly praised by mothers and fathers, daughters will be more inclined to develop personal ambition and a strong achievement orientation (Harper, 2000). From an early age, these relationships are important so that women are able to listen more to their inner voices, know clearly what they want and how to achieve their potential beyond the traditional constraining roles available in the Appalachian culture, and eventually obtain a college degree (Harper, 2000).

One aspect that is rarely covered in respect to women in poverty and their success in higher education is the internal motivation that students must have to escape the oppressive nature of their environments (Jones, 2004). The driving motivation among Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who achieve their academic goals despite many external and internal obstacles may be their intellect and a passion for learning, suggesting that intellect is a way they develop a sense of self (Jones, 2004). As one of the students in a study conducted by Gilligan (1993) stated, "Crisis reveals character." In this spirit, Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who successfully graduate and break out of the cycle of poverty have shown that their character and

experiences may hold the key to understanding how communities and policies can better serve women in similar circumstances.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of impoverished women from the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region who have matriculated at institutions of higher education. Obtaining a college degree can improve an individual's social status and provide more opportunities for future generations (Ishitani, 2006; Jones, 2004). Even though obtaining a college degree is needed, women in poverty seem to struggle with finding the path to ensure their success from the beginning of their college experience until degree completion. This study may highlight the needs of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women so that institutions of higher education can provide more sufficient resources and support practices.

This chapter will discuss the methodological approach for examining Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women from poverty and their experiences while obtaining their degrees. The first section will include the overall goal for this research. Exposing inequities that these participants may have felt or faced may shed light on new ways to provide services and resources for this population. The second section is the research design, which includes data collection, participant selection, and data analysis. Relating the design to the research problem is the beginning of any research process (Creswell, 2009).

Participant selection and confidentiality is a critical part of this research. Recruitment of participants, the characteristics of the participants, and how their confidentiality and anonymity is secured are detailed within the section of research design. Because I am an Appalachian woman who obtained higher education, I was able to bracket my own experiences to ensure the voices and experiences of the participants are more clearly heard.

Methodology

To capture the multidimensional nature of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women and their potential experiences in relation to human capital and internal identity formation, a qualitative research design was required. A qualitative approach was effective for social sciences and education because it assists with interpreting people and/or events (Creswell, 2009). In order to understand women in poverty from Mid-Atlantic Appalachia and the how their experiences affected success in college, a qualitative design is appropriate. A quantitative approach would not be as useful when trying to learn about specific participant experiences and the characteristics associated with their stories/narratives. Using the qualitative research design enabled a process where themes emerged through inductive practices that could lead to the improvement of experiences for future women in Appalachia who attend institutions of higher education (Creswell, 2009).

There are many characteristics of qualitative research that were useful for this study. The first characteristic to highlight is that the researcher is the key instrument. I was the main information gatherer because I interviewed and observed each participant (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). From the perspective as the key instrument, I used an inductive data analysis focusing on the participants' meaning of their experiences. Using a qualitative design allowed me to use interviews, observations, and documents to find emergent themes, which allowed flexibility throughout the process to modify how the data could best be collected (Creswell, 2009). Also, because Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women were observed and interviewed, it was important to use qualitative methods as the research was conducted in each participant's setting of choice. One of the more important features of using a qualitative research approach was gaining a holistic account of the participants experiences as Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women

who were able to achieve, or will soon achieve, degree completion in higher education (Creswell, 2009).

One of the approaches within qualitative research is phenomenology. A phenomenological perspective is used for studies with the intent of investigating shared experiences and exploring the essence or essences from that shared experience (Merriam, 2009). Women in poverty from Mid-Atlantic Appalachia are from a distinguishable culture, so their experiences of attending and succeeding in college may have similar patterns in their lives that propelled them toward a positive outcome (Merriam, 2009). This aligns with the basic goal of phenomenological research, which is to study participants' "conscious experience of their life-world", (Merriam, 2009, p. 25).

I chose this type of qualitative approach because I believed this would be the best way to capture the deeper or more complex structures of the phenomenon. This would only be effective as long as I intentionally bracket my own bias or beliefs about the phenomenon I am studying (Merriam, 2009). This is a key element of successful phenomenological research (Merriam, 2009). One way of bracketing used in this research was by my revisiting my own experiences as a Mid-Atlantic Appalachian woman who successfully obtained a college degree and writing a personal statement (Merriam, 2009). Other aspects I had to keep in mind for the phenomenological study was to make sure that a good rapport was built between the participant and me and to display empathy and/or sincerity through active listening when interviewing the individual participants about their experiences (Lester, 1999).

Part of the phenomenological approach is embedded in how to analyze the data collected. Horizontalization was used as part of the process since all data was viewed as having equal weight and was then clustered into themes (Merriam, 2009). All responses, even those that were

non-repetitive, were linked thematically to create a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Once this part of the phenomenological process was complete, then the essence, or comprehensive picture, of the phenomenon was the end result (Lester, 1999; Merriam, 2009). This qualitative process was an effective way to capture the best snapshot of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women and their experiences of successful degree attainment. According to Lester (1999), phenomenological studies that have an interpretive lens are able to inform, which closely aligns with the purpose of this study and may provide insight concerning the climate of societal structures and/or policy reforms.

Research Design

In order to understand the experiences of economically poor women's higher education opportunities, a qualitative approach proved to be beneficial (Merriam, 2009). From personal narratives and semi-structured interviews, themes were sought to capture the landscape of oppression, human capital levels, and identity formation for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women in order to examine how they were able to be successful with degree attainment. An expedited Institutional Review Board approval was necessary for this research (see Appendix A).

Participant Selection

Recruitment for participants occurred through network sampling (Merriam, 2009). Referrals started with contacts from flyers posted on the local regional campus. Once referrals occurred, participants who were interviewed then referred other participants. Because research has shown that women in poverty often find support from other women who are experiencing similar situations, this was a successful way to gain participants for the study.

Participants who met the selection criteria for this study were women who: (a) were born, raised, and attended college (or were currently attending) in the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region and (b) identified themselves as first-generation college students living in poverty.

Through the proposed referral process, eight women who attended or were currently attending the local regional campus of a public state university within Appalachia were able to participate. All of the women matched the selection requirements. Even though their levels of poverty varied, all of the women reported that they had experienced financial hardship in their current situation or while attending college. Being first generation was also another important aspect of this study because of the perceived lower levels of human capital that most first-generation students possess. There was also age and racial/ethnic diversity among the participants. The ages of the women ranged from 29-58. Out of eight Appalachian women, three identified as African American and the other five identified themselves as White. This diversity of participants provided a richer and more nuanced picture of the experiences of Appalachian women concerning successful degree completion.

For purposes of the research, eight participants had the opportunity to participate in semi-structured interviews. This left the conversation open enough to capture the main themes of the participants' experiences while making sure some main questions were answered to provide a consistent foundation for the interview sessions. Maximum variation sampling was used (Merriam, 2009). Maximum variation sampling uses a strategy to identify participants who will represent the widest possible range of characteristics that are useful to the study (Merriam, 2009). Participants were required to be Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who are self-identified as first-generation and in poverty that are completing their college degree (or had recently completed it). The participants included women who were born, raised, and attended

college in Appalachia. By coupling maximum variation sampling with network sampling, participants were able to represent a wide range of characteristics since their age, race, sexuality, and other factors were varied.

It is important to recognize that women from poverty and the Appalachian region have overlapping facets of their identities. These participants were women from low socioeconomic backgrounds who lived within the culture of Appalachia. Because each aspect of these women may at different times (or much of the time) have affected their experiences, it was important for maximum variation sampling to be coupled with network sampling. The notion of how the different areas of identity can affect an individual's experience, especially in regard to oppression, comes from the concept of intersectionality (M.C. Anderson & Hill Collins, 2013). Intersectionality is an important concept to consider because it explains how the inner dynamics of each piece of an individual's identity interacts with inequalities in society (M.C. Anderson & Hill Collins, 2013).

Data Collection

Cultural traditions in Appalachia are often passed down from generation to generation through storytelling (Baghban, 1982). Interviewing women from this region not only was a comprehensive way to expose their experiences but it proved to be a way in which the participants felt the most comfortable.

By network sampling through community organizations, participants were each interviewed in a semi-structured format (see Appendix B) and then asked to volunteer if they would like to expand on their experiences after their interviews by completing a personal narrative/reflection writing prompt (see Appendix C); (Merriam, 2009). The personal narrative/reflection writing prompt was given to participants after their interview session but no

participants returned this form to expand on their experiences from this study. This approach provided the opportunity for me to introduce the concept behind the research focus and allow participants to share their experiences, which laid the framework for interpretation.

The interview sessions were digitally audio-recorded. By using a digital recorder, the interview session yielded participant voices in order to add to the depth of their narratives. Due to the personal nature of the interview topics, developing a rapport with the participants was critical while also maintaining a stance of neutrality to maintain openness to participants' responses (Merriam, 2009). To continue developing rapport, a short conversation before recording occurred for introductions and to make the individual participant comfortable. In addition, the initial conversation was used to collect demographic data such as age, marital status, family background, and so forth.

The interviews were a semi-structured model because some participants had more focus in one area than others (Creswell, 2009). The interview tool consisted of questions that involve the themes that appear in the purpose of this study and the literature review (see Appendix B). Questions in the tool included areas such as background and demographics, family, perceptions of their role in Appalachia as a woman, spirituality, effects of poverty, experiences in K-12 education, involvement with any community or government assistance programs, any noticeable differences of their experiences being a first-generation student, and a question pertaining to their internal journey with coping and succeeding in their college experience. The interview followed the participant's train of thought, and if an area was not exposed during their narration, then I used the structured interview questions to ask about a specific area that was not discussed naturally by the participant.

Interview sessions were audio digitally recorded and after transcription, all interviews will be secured for three years as required by the Institutional Review Board. Transcribed interview documents and analysis are kept in a password-protected file on my personal computer, which is also password-protected (Creswell, 2009). Names of the participants were changed to ensure confidentiality in the data analysis and findings (Creswell, 2009).

After each interview, I filled out a form for field notes (see Appendix D) for immediate observations and to check off areas that were prevalent in the interview with a space for notes. This captured a true perception of the interview that assisted when analyzing the transcriptions of the sessions at a later date (Merriam, 2009). Field notes contained only the anonymous name of the participant as an identifier along with the information recorded immediately after each interview session.

The design of data collection using semi-structured interviews to guide them through the topics of this study provided not only a comprehensive but also a personal account of the experiences of women in Mid-Atlantic Appalachia and how they were able to break through obstacles toward their degree attainment. Because storytelling is a cultural tradition in Appalachia the tradition of storytelling was reflected in the interviews, as all of the women opened up and told personal accounts regarding their relationships, school experiences, identity development, and their upbringing (Baghban, 1982).

A semi-structured interview was utilized and each participant chose a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. All interviews took place at the local regional campus during the week of March 25th, 2013. I expected some rapport to develop and I was pleased that a significant level of trust with each participant was extremely high and contributed to the depth of our interviews.

In order to validate findings or themes found by the personal statements and interviews, participants were sent a copy of the final descriptions of the themes to ensure member checking are completed (Merriam, 2009). Participants then had a chance to provide feedback about how accurate the themes were with their narratives and experiences (Creswell, 2009). One participant responded to the themes by just clarifying her life timeline. No other participants added or deleted any of their comments or quotes used in the themes of this study.

Triangulation is another important aspect of qualitative study (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). In order to increase the credibility of the data provided, triangulation was used because it allows for two or three methods to show convergence of consistency or non-consistency of emerging themes. Using three different approaches (interviews, documentation, and field notes) to collect data allowed for triangulation to occur and increased the validity of the interpretations and analysis of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used with the interview data, which resembled the basic nature of inductive and comparative analysis for qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). This procedure was the most effective way to capture any emergent themes from the participants. Using an inductive data analysis approach, the transcribed interviews were analyzed and for each different theme mentioned, a highlighted color was used to identify the different categories. This allowed for the direct quotes of the participants in the study to show prevalent themes throughout the research. By approaching the data analysis in this manner, a comprehensive list of themes emerged including repetitive and non-repetitive responses/experiences (Creswell, 2009).

During the analysis of data or after this process, a follow-up question would have been asked of the participants. This only occurred if I had found a theme that was not part of the

original study and if I needed more clarification about certain topics. Another follow-up that may have occurred is what resources or skills would have made their journey through college more accessible or easier to navigate. This follow-up depended on the themes and whether or not this was not already discussed in the interview sessions (Merriam, 2009). No follow-up was needed in addition to having participants look over their themes and quotes.

Part of the phenomenological approach to qualitative studies was to make sure I took necessary steps to alleviate as much bias as possible. During the data collection and analysis, I made a conscious effort to bracket my own beliefs and interpretations of the research topic (Merriam, 2009). My personal statement assisted me with recognizing my biases so that I effectively used the bracketing technique (Merriam, 2009).

In addition, two individuals were selected as peer-debriefers. The peer-debriefers read and questioned the study in order to fill in gaps of understanding. This technique assisted with the validity of the study so that there was more than one interpretation used in the analysis (Creswell, 2009).

Summary

A qualitative approach for studying the experiences of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women and their success in college was useful in capturing their accounts holistically (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The phenomenological methods for the study made it possible to analyze the essence of success for these women and their struggles in their communities and society as a whole in order to obtain their college degrees. Not only has participant confidentiality been secured, but as the researcher, I was able to use different methods such a bracketing, member-checking, using peer-debriefers, and utilizing methods of triangulation to increase the validity and credibility of this study (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The goal for this research was to

be able to inform constituents about the status of social structures and identity development issues and create awareness or reform to assist women in poverty and their degree attainment (Merriam, 2009).

FINDINGS: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of impoverished women from the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region who have matriculated at institutions of higher education. The likelihood of women in poverty obtaining a college degree is limited, but creating awareness of the success stories of women who were able to beat the odds is needed to generate new strategies that can lead to even more success in the future (Deprez, 2003; Kates, 1996).

One main question guides the research on women in poverty in regard to post-secondary access and attainment. What are the experiences of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian-born women as students in post-secondary institutions? This question was the overarching focus of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants of this study. This chapter will focus on each woman's journey. By describing the overall journey of participants, it should become clearer how their experiences intersect and merge to form major themes regarding the success of Appalachian women as first-generation students who have or will soon obtain their college degree.

Participant Profiles

The participant diversity allowed for rich descriptions and comparative analysis of their experiences as Appalachian women who were or will soon be successful in obtaining their college degrees. All women who participated shared that they were experiencing poverty. Even though the levels of poverty were slightly diverse, all participants were using or have used public assistance in varying forms.

Regarding family structure, at the time of the interviews, only three of the eight were married. Two of the married women had their first children as teenagers in high school and before their current marriages, and the other married woman had no children of her own but has two stepchildren from her marriage. Four women were single mothers, with three of the four being African American. There was only one participant who was still single and had no children.

For this particular chapter, the focus will be on providing an overall profile of each participant. Their stories, although different, share many of the same characteristics. The next chapter will present findings based on their direct quotes and the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interview process.

Sara

Sara is a 50-year-old White woman who grew up and currently resides in Appalachia. She lived in the Appalachian portion of Pennsylvania for part of her upbringing. During her childhood, her parents divorced, leaving her mom to raise three daughters with Sara being the youngest child.

Family background. Around five-six years old, shortly after her mother's divorce, Sara stayed with her maternal grandmother (who also raised her four children alone, having lost her husband on her first birthday to a car accident, returning home after a drinking binge). Sara's mother, being the oldest, helped raise her two brothers and sister while Sara's grandmother worked wherever she could to provide. Sara believes her mom remarried in hopes that the "gas station owner" would take her away and make it all right, but the cycle of drinking and adultery continued.

Her mother only passed the seventh grade and, while her biological father did graduate high school, he was not around the family. Education did not seem important or stressed by her family when she was growing up, because most of her family worked in factories or minimum-wage jobs. Her biological father had worked in a steel mill for most of his life to provide for his family. She did not say she was in destitute poverty, but she did say that she had everything she needed concerning the basics (shelter, food, etc.) despite growing up in a low socioeconomic level.

One of the positive influences growing up came from her stepfather. He was a marine who taught her a lot about the things in life that you normally would not know unless you grew up in Appalachia. Farming, canning, being involved with 4H, and other activities all came from her stepfather. She commented, “He has probably more influence on me than I really realized at the time.” He had passed away before she graduated high school.

Education experiences. Another highlight of Sara’s background is her experience in K-12 education. She never really remembered being smart in school, but reflecting back she said she must have been because the teachers often asked her to help other classmates with their work. Not until later in life when she ran into a past substitute history teacher did she realize that she had more academic capital than she realized. The history teacher commented how he remembered her for her insightfulness and the great questions she used to ask in the classroom. This was one of the first instances when Sara was introduced to the notion that she had a lot going for her.

Traditional role expectations. There were a lot of examples given by Sara that related to the traditional expectations that many women face in Appalachia. Growing up, she witnessed her mother tending to her father and stepfather and often stressing the importance of cleaning the

house rather than homework. Because of this influence, Sara found herself married and dealing with a pattern her mother dealt with most of her life.

Sara began to realize that by working outside the home and securing a position at the local branch college campus, she wanted to be more than a mom and wife. As she began to work with faculty and experienced a trip to India, she began to feel tension between who she thought she should be and who she actually wanted to be. The more she surrounded herself with education, the more she continued to drift apart from her husband. In one of her statements, she alluded to the fact that after her daughter and she returned from their trip to India, her daughter pointed out that she (Sara) was a different person and respected among friends and co-workers. This (among other factors) led to her divorce.

In the meantime she was taking classes part-time because the position on the campus called for a bachelor's degree. Now divorced, Sara faced the socioeconomic strain as a single mother living in Appalachia. Sara asserted that without the support of the campus, faculty, and staff members, she would have not been able to finish her degree. She stated, "You know, I graduated with my bachelor's degree 30 years after I graduated high school."

Motivation and resources in college. During our interview, Sara was asked about motivation and the resources she used while obtaining her degree. The motivation was high for her based on wanting to provide a better life economically for her daughters, to become a positive role model, and breaking generational cycles that her family experienced in Appalachia. Without the assistance from her faculty members who would watch her daughters, let her borrow books, etc., she may not have made it. On the day she graduated, it hit her that she overcame poverty (not only financial but emotional as well), being a single parent, and all of the characteristics of a first-generation student.

Spirituality. One of the interesting components of Sara's story was her view on spirituality. Sara did acknowledge that she believed in God and that things happen for a reason, and she also believes that all religions are tied together in a way that gives people a purpose, "a reason to wake up in the morning." Sara was not so adamant about the ritual of religion but the sense of "God winks" that occur in life and that make you who you are and create the opportunities for you to become a positive influence in the world. Sara was the only participant who traveled overseas and worked in India, which "may have opened her spiritual experiences to encompass more beyond the Appalachian region in the United States."

Lenn

Lenn is a 58-year-old African American woman who was born and raised in Appalachia. She was raised in a traditional family. Her father was the minister of music in the church and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. Lenn was a middle child of four immediate-family children and half-brothers and half-sisters from her father's previous marriage. She often found herself the peacemaker in family dynamics.

Spirituality. Lenn has overcome a tremendous amount of obstacles in her life. Most people from the outside perspective would describe her experiences as obstacles, but Lenn would be quick to say they were opportunities. Lenn grew up in the church and everything in her life truly revolves around God. Her existence, perseverance, and purpose in all situations connect to her undying commitment to Jesus Christ. She stated, "No man will ever (nor has one) ever come between me and my relationship with God." Her testimony was evident throughout the interview and in the very way she described how she strives for excellence every day of her life.

Lenn experienced two disabilities in her childhood. The first obstacle involved braces for her legs because she was born with her feet turned in where the bottom of her feet would touch

each other. The braces were worn through most of her K-12 experience. In addition, she was born with a speech impediment of stuttering. She described the severity of her stuttering by comparing herself with Mel Tillis, “who sounded like a machine gun when speaking.” She conquered stuttering with the help and insight from her father, who would make her sing to him when she wanted to talk. She would not stutter one word while singing. Through prayer and coaching, Lenn overcame her stuttering and is now an accomplished singer and speaker in her community.

Culture of Appalachia. Growing up in Appalachia also proved to be a harsh economic experience. Lenn remembered having to put cardboard in the bottom of her shoes because they could not afford a new pair. Despite the financial difficulties, she described growing up in the Appalachian and the African American communities as being a part of a close-knit family. She stated, “You never had to worry about food, because everyone would share and take care of each other.”

In school, Lenn did not have too many comments about her experience but remembered in elementary school that her teacher refused to let her use her left hand to write. The teacher was bound and determined to make Lenn write with her right hand because she was already facing (as Lenn described) three other disabilities being in braces, stuttering, and being African American. Lenn did remember receiving a standing ovation at their high school graduation, which was a unique response. She was a friend to many and was known for not judging others no matter their race, socioeconomic status, what they looked like, or where they lived.

Traditional role expectations. After high school, Lenn went to beauty school and received her certificate. She followed in the footsteps of most her family, who were cosmetologists. She also found herself married and having two sons. Even though her husband

expected her to be the traditional Appalachian housewife and mother, Lenn said she would cut hair at her home and then clean up before her ex-husband came home. The money she made supplemented the family income. The marriage was not healthy and (to the joy of Lenn) her husband left her. She commented that if he did not leave she would have stayed with him because of her religious beliefs.

After the divorce she found herself a single parent trying to make ends meet. She received public assistance but she only received \$10 worth of food stamps and made \$7 too much for a medical card. In addition, her ex-husband only paid \$100 a month to support her sons and that was only if he felt like paying her.

College experience. Lenn experienced extreme medical complications. She found herself in the intensive care unit in 1999 with acute pancreatitis. She said that she “did everything but die.” It was due to her medical situation that she had to quit being a hair stylist and found herself completing her first bachelor’s degree. She then continued in college for her second bachelor’s degree and with the help of faculty and staff, she secured a job on campus and graduated in 2000. When she completed her first master’s degree, she started her second master’s degree that same summer. Her perseverance through college included struggling financially but also relying on her faith that God has a purpose and plan for her life. Not only was she able to break numerous generational cycles in her family, she has become a major community influence. She commented that her goal is to continue to mentor women in Appalachia (African American and White) so that they can continue to break the “generational leadership cycle” that was often passed from one man to another in the community. She is currently a professor at the regional campus where she obtained her bachelor’s degree and is the president of a community board.

Tiffany

Family background. Tiffany is a 29-year-old African American woman who is a single mother to one daughter. She had just returned to college a couple of semesters before the interview after stopping out for a while. Her parents exemplify the traditional marriage in Appalachia. Her father worked at the local steel mill for 37 years until he was injured. He completed high school and received a basketball scholarship to a private college but found out her mother was pregnant while they were in high school and joined the U.S. Army. Tiffany's mother did not finish high school due to her pregnancy, but just completed her GED in the last six or seven years. She currently operates a home daycare.

Spirituality. Regarding her spirituality, Tiffany described herself as being raised in the church but currently does not attend all of the weekly services. She commented that she would not describe herself as "churchy," although she fully believes God provides all of the opportunities in her life and she remains steadfast in her faith. She talked about how she was grateful for the upbringing her parents provided and is now taking her daughter to church and Sunday school.

Socioeconomic status. Tiffany shared the financial hardships her family has had to face in the past and currently. Her parents were on public assistance in the form of food stamps when she was young but managed to work their way out. Tiffany remembers her father buying half cows and pigs from local farmers to fill the freezer and maintained two large vegetable gardens. Now that Tiffany is a single parent, she uses food stamps, Section 8 housing, and Ohio Works First, which is the financial support under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, for her income. She commented that she wants this to be temporary, which is why she decided to go back to school to obtain her degree.

Although finances were a concern, Tiffany's high school academic achievement allowed her to earn a full scholarship to attend the regional campus at which she is now enrolled. After earning 18 hours in the nursing program, Tiffany quit college to concentrate on a job in retail. Tiffany excelled in her retail job and received a manager position at \$12 an hour, which is above minimum wage. She decided to stick with this position for a number of years. In 2004, she went to the local community college and received her associate's degree in medical assisting for billing. At the time, she was only finding starting positions at \$8 an hour and decided to stay in retail. After a while, Tiffany was encouraged by her mother to go back to school and finish the bachelor's degree.

Motivation to attend college. When asked why she made the decision to re-enroll in college, she said that she thought about what her mom went through with her daycare business and decided that she was not willing to settle for that. Tiffany explained that even though her mother is not able to help financially or academically, she helps take care of her three-year-old daughter and other errands. Tiffany said her mom told her one day, "I can't help you write your paper but I can help you with the other stuff."

Tiffany stated that the main motivation to finish her degree is to break the generational cycle for women in her family and to provide a better life for her daughter. This type of motivation outweighs the hardships that Tiffany has faced financially. With her high level of academic and spiritual capital, Tiffany has been able to overcome the obstacles that so many of her classmates have failed to conquer. Her academic capital was shown through her confidence that she knew she was smart even compared to her friends while in high school and maintained a high GPA as well. She truly feels blessed to have the opportunity receive her degree this coming

fall semester, especially since her brother or sister were not pursuing college as an option. This will make her the first in her family to obtain a college degree.

Lisa

Lisa is a 34-year-old, first-generation, White college student. She grew up in Appalachia with her parents and an older brother. The dynamic of Lisa's community and family illustrate the close-knit relationships often found throughout much of Appalachia. Her father lost his job in construction and had to move away to work in Indiana during her senior year of high school. She and her mother remained in the region and then moved in with her brother, for whom she helped take care of his two kids during her senior year of high school.

Family/community values. One of the values instilled in Lisa reflected a good work ethic. She has carried through with this intrinsic value because she mentioned that right after high school she needed to move out and secure a job. She described her motivation to work by stating, "Jobs were something I had to have for survival." When she started to think about attending college, her father wondered why she would want to do this because she had a stable job with a restaurant chain as a waitress and a trainer.

The value of a good work ethic may have been instilled in Lisa because of the community she was part of when she was growing up. She did not realize she was part of an Appalachian culture and was not aware how close to poverty they were because "everyone was in the same boat" financially. She remembers never having to struggle with food, but if she wanted a certain pair of basketball shoes, her parents would have to save money and she would get them later. Being part of the close-knit community also helped Lisa's family survive despite financial hardships because there was a sense of "family" within her neighborhood.

Motivation to attend college. With the encouragement of her female friends, Lisa enrolled in the local regional campus right after high school. However, her desire to hold a stable job outweighed her motivation to attend college and she dropped out. Five years later, Lisa was finally encouraged again by one of her co-workers to go back. Despite the questions of why she would want to attend, Lisa explained that she had great support from her family and a sense of pride because she will be the first to receive a college degree. Lisa explained that it has been difficult for her financially and admitted to skipping class in order to work, because paying the bills seemed more important. Now that she is closer to graduating, she is seeing the value in finishing no matter the circumstances. Even though she does not currently attend church, she relies on prayer every day to continue toward earning her degree and thanks God for helping her get through.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a 34-year-old, White, Appalachian woman. Her journey through school and living in Appalachia illustrates a very challenging path but at the same time demonstrates a very strong internal motivation to make things better for her and her family.

Background. As the only girl out of four children, Jennifer mentioned that school and good grades were highly stressed to her. Because of extreme poverty, Jennifer's family could not afford for her to attend college. Nevertheless, throughout her K-12 experience she was encouraged to get high grades in order to receive scholarships. As a girl living in Appalachia, Jennifer always felt that obtaining a college degree was her only choice. Her brothers, on the other hand, seemed to have so many more occupational options available without having to further their education.

While in high school, Jennifer became pregnant and had her first son at the age of 17. Her experience in high school was good overall due to a very supportive high school guidance counselor. There were some other motivating factors for Jennifer especially from negative comments concerning the stereotypes of pregnant teenagers and how they would be consigned to living on public assistance and “not amount to anything.” Her mother (who is a huge supporter of Jennifer’s pursuit of a college degree) told Jennifer to prove this teacher wrong.

Socioeconomic status. Poverty has always been at the forefront of Jennifer’s life. In high school, she worked 20 hours a week at a local fast food chain and received assistance for food and medical care. Even after she married, she continued to receive public assistance through food stamps. She commented that even after her first bachelor’s degree, she only worked part-time jobs in politics, and the campaigns she worked with did not end up winning their elections. According to Jennifer, she has returned to college to pursue her second bachelor’s degree as an elementary education major so that she will have the ability to provide a better life and situation for her family.

College experience. Jennifer’s family has been a very strong support throughout her college experience. Not only does her husband understand and is a stay-at-home dad who helps take care of her three sons, Jennifer’s mother has continued to offer strong encouragement. Other support systems for Jennifer have shown up through the faculty and staff at the regional campus where she attends. She commented that the faculty “get it” concerning the fact that she has a family and works outside of school. Their ongoing support and flexibility have allowed her to achieve her degrees.

Spirituality. The spiritual aspect of Jennifer’s life is definitely what sustains her and gets her through. She admitted that growing up she went to church but did not fully embrace it.

In her adult life, however, she is a devout Nazarene. Even though she did not say that all of her achievement is due to God, she stressed that He has provided her the opportunities in her life and has decided to follow His path regarding her purpose for her family and community. She hopes not only that her sons will have the opportunity to obtain a college degree but also that she will be a positive influence many of the children she will teach in her community.

Anne

Anne is a 34-year-old White Appalachian woman. Her experiences not only are related to the culture in which she grew up but also are connected to some personal trauma that may have propelled her into college.

Family background. Her early childhood experience was within a traditional family. She quickly found that she was intelligent and enjoyed school. She even completed some of her older brother's high school papers while she was in junior high. Her family was very close-knit and they ended up moving in with her grandfather to assist him with his farm. She commented on how manners were very important in the family and that it was a responsibility to help family in times of need. The emphasis of care giving was instilled in her by her mother and is evident in Anne's relationship with her current husband and her two stepchildren.

According to Anne, there was a time in her life when she rebelled against her parents. She hung out with her cousins and found herself sneaking out of the house and beginning not to care about school as much. She remembered having negative reinforcement in school through comments from teachers about how she and her cousins would all end up pregnant and on welfare. This actually did happen to a couple of her friends, but it made Anne angry to the point of not caring about her future even more.

Anne shared that her family has not had the best health. She commented that her mom lost two children in a house fire and that her father, mother, and brother had all flat-lined due to different situations, but they also all survived. Anne went through her own experience during her rebellious stage. One particular day, she left home without permission while her mom was working. She got in the car with her cousin. While riding, the cousin, who was the driver, wrecked their car due to speeding and Lisa went through the front windshield. As a result of the accident, Anne was thrown from the vehicle and was seriously injured. Lisa had severe head trauma and could not walk at first. She had to go through rehabilitation for one year in high school to learn how to walk, brush her hair, and other basic daily living skills. It was through this experience that Anne met her first social worker; and she became inspired to finally settle down and attend college as a first-generation student.

Socioeconomic status. Anne and her husband are currently living with her parents and talked about how she felt that working was essential in order to provide for her whole family (not just her husband and two stepchildren). Anne's socioeconomic status is one of poverty. She is still using some forms of assistance through food stamps. She discussed her experiences working 40 or more hours a week for several years at a fast food chain. When she became ill, she still worked just enough in order to have health benefits. She emphasized that it was a very good job because they had good benefits, but she eventually realized that she needed to do something more in order to do better for her family.

College experience. She expressed that her family supports her pursuit of a college degree and Anne exhibited great goal-setting and reflection skills. Even though she did not seem confident at times about her journey for her degree, she constantly sets small goals to reach the larger goals and reflected on how far she has come from the time of her accident until now. With

support from the campus faculty and staff, Anne feels that she was able to become an even better student and that she will be overwhelmed at the time of her graduation. There is a slight fear for Anne about what life will be like without school given that the local economy is still struggling, but at the same time she is excited to break the generational cycles of her family.

Marie

Marie is a 35-year-old, White, Appalachian woman. Her journey in life that led up to and through her college experience illustrates great struggle that also brought about great successes for her.

Background. She grew up and has remained in the Appalachian region her entire life. Coming from a family in which her parents were divorced, Marie often found herself home alone growing up because her mother was trying to provide for her children as a single parent. Even though Marie was home alone, she learned from her mother that working for the family was just a way of life. Because a lot of her family members, including her mother, worked in manufacturing, Marie was resigned to the fact that after high school she would just start working.

Even though Marie found herself alone while growing up, this gave her the opportunity to spend time with schoolwork. Looking back, she could see that she enjoyed learning throughout her school years. In high school, Marie started to rebel internally against her situation with her parents and especially her father, who was not around when she was growing up. After becoming pregnant in high school, her father stepped back into Marie's life and she subsequently moved in with him. Her parents were both supportive of her with her pregnancy and Marie ended up receiving her GED before her friends graduated high school.

Marie did end up working in manufacturing but then got married. She found herself in the traditional Appalachian role for women as a stay-at-home mom. It was evident that her kids

and husband are a priority in her life. When she decided to pursue her college degree, she encountered a great deal of tension between staying in the traditional role and trying to find time to achieve her own professional goals.

Spirituality. During the interview, the question was asked about whom or what inspired her to receive her college degree. Marie answered that it was not until she started attending church that she realized she even had that option. Growing up, Marie did not have a strong tie to church or religious beliefs. One of her friends invited her to attend church and now Marie and her family are active members. At the church, she was approached to teach preschool Sunday school. This was quite a stretch for Marie. But when she went to a training/workshop in the community, she was introduced to a woman who also taught at the local regional college campus. This was Marie's first inspiration to attend college. Marie is now doing more administrative duties for the church, and she still gives credit to her network at the church and faculty and staff who have supported her during her college experience.

Even though Marie is connected to God and her church, she felt that because God provides opportunities, it was up to her to take the step through opened doors. She was finally able (toward the end of the interview) to give herself credit and express the pride she has in herself to be able to "make it" and reach her own personal goals. Her identity development was evident when she started to speak about her future goals.

Motivation. Marie is extremely motivated to help other teenage girls in the community and about explaining their options to them. Becoming a resource or inspiration to other women and girls is one of Marie's goals. There were times during the interview when Marie expressed almost a disbelief that she was going to graduate or even have an impact on her community. Since she was just part of a recent movement to save their community pool, she has now realized

the potential she has to become a great influence on not only her family but also the rest of her community.

LaRay

LaRay is an African American, Appalachian woman in her mid-fifties. She is in her mid-fifties and was born and raised in the Appalachian region. She is the youngest of five siblings and grew up in a single-parent family once her father left them when she was young. The strength and determination that LaRay has carried through her life experiences and journey to her college degree is evident through her relationship with her mother.

Family background. The interview began very emotionally when LaRay was speaking about her upbringing. Even though her mother had passed more than 22 years ago, LaRay cried, saying she still misses her mother every day. This bond greatly influenced how LaRay has lived her life. LaRay mentioned how her mother moved through poverty and raised her family with grace and dignity. Because her family was poor, and with her strong religious background, LaRay learned that family is the most important thing in life. Even though she did not have the material trappings in life, she stated her best memories were of the times spent with simple family outings to the neighborhood park with a bucket of chicken. This instilled a set of values that placed God first, family second, and then community, because her mother made it a point that time together and with God was all that was needed to live and not the material things such as family vacations and a big home. LaRay has been able to instill those same values of togetherness, community, and God in her children.

Education experiences. LaRay's K-12 experience was discussed at length. She reflected on her level of poverty while in school, describing how she would alternate the same two pairs of pants every day of the week while attending elementary school. Some of the

children would make fun of her, but LaRay was able to keep close to her circle of friends and her family. Because she had an older sister, she often found herself in activities that her sister encouraged. She was quite active in high school and belonged to the baton squad. LaRay did not mention any negative experiences with teachers and that she did well in class. Because LaRay knew that obtaining employment after high school was important, she decided to attend the local vocational school to learn business/office skills.

LaRay remembered starting college right out of high school in a city outside of the Appalachian region. Because of the different dynamics of a larger city, sharing a house with eight other students, and being away from her family, LaRay quickly moved back home. After moving back, LaRay found herself at a local regional campus. She decided to start majoring in accounting but then found herself not doing so well, and she ended up working for the gas company. At the same time, her brother introduced her to her future husband. Before they were married, they both worked different shifts, so LaRay found herself in the caregiver role that her mother portrayed by taking care of his daughter while he was at work and “playing house.” After a year she married her husband. In addition to the stepdaughter, whom she is very close to, LaRay gave birth to two children of her own. At one point, the husband became abusive to LaRay, and she found the courage within to divorce him. During her marriage she was working for the gas company, but soon after her divorce the position was eliminated.

Motivation to attend college. After the divorce, LaRay was struggling to make ends meet and used food stamps for a while. When she started to apply for professional positions, she noticed that she was not getting anywhere because many places were starting to require a college degree. She mostly worked cleaning jobs and finally—thanks to support from her church family—she was encouraged to return to college and earn her bachelor’s degree. During her

time in college she was able to use government assistance and financial aid to support her children. She expressed that her church family was the biggest support for her and continued to be. She was able to rent a house from someone in her church and also purchase a car. Between her church and faculty and staff from her campus, LaRay was able to complete the associate's degree from the local community college and eventually her bachelor's degree.

Current status. LaRay's life goal is to exemplify the qualities her mother carried with her and to be a positive influence on her community. She currently works in the mental health field and can see the discrimination through the treatment her clients receive and also how she is treated as an African American woman. Her hope is to continue to receive the licensures she needs in order to work in the role that God has for her in the community. She strives for excellence every day just as she was taught throughout her life.

Summary

In the next chapter, findings drawn from the interview sessions are analyzed and grouped into thematic categories that reflect the reported experiences of the women who were interviewed. The findings identify patterns of experience that many of the women in this study have in common. In addition, the findings also expose problems or limitations within local communities and the U. S. higher education system that must be addressed to provide better support to help poor, first-generation college women achieve their degrees.

FINDINGS: CULTURE AND IDENTITY

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of impoverished women from the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region who have matriculated at institutions of higher education. Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who enroll in college and desire to obtain a college education often find themselves in dire financial situations and are typically unsuccessful in attaining a college degree due to varying factors, creating more awareness and analysis may shed light on how women can obtain college degrees against the odds (Deprez, 2003; Kates, 1996). The last chapter discussed each participant's personal profile to gain an overall perspective of her journey toward degree completion. This chapter will provide more in-depth themes derived from the data collected during the interviews. One main question guided this particular research on women in poverty in relation to postsecondary educational access and attainment: What are the experiences of low socioeconomic status, Mid-Atlantic Appalachian-born women who strive toward or achieve a college degree? This question led to the development of semi-structured interviews with eight women who were born, raised, and attended college in Appalachia as first-generation students. Participants had to disclose living in poverty or experiencing poverty at some level and they had to be close to or finished with their bachelor's degree programs. The use of the semi-structured interview was productive and emergent themes exist from the collected data.

This chapter is the first part of the thematic results from the data collected. Themes that relate specifically to the Appalachian culture of these participants are found within this chapter. Overall elements of the Appalachian culture are discussed and then organized into sub-themes related to family structure, traditional role expectations, educational experiences, and

socioeconomic impact of the Appalachian environment. Following the Appalachian elements, themes related to the participants' identity development are included. Each participant is presented individually concerning the moments of crisis or identity development that she exposed during interview sessions. Spirituality and the intersectionality within their identities are also discussed. To support the themes, participants' perspectives, comments, and direct quotes will give further insight into the journey of each of these women.

Overall Elements of Appalachian Culture

Data collected for this study of Appalachian women who are first-generation college students or have graduated revealed strong influences of the Appalachian culture that affected their upbringing and their present-day identities. Even though each participant had her own unique journey, there were some major commonalities that reflected their experiences in Appalachia. To begin with, participants were able to illustrate the overall landscape of the Appalachian culture in regard to the feeling of community, the economic culture, and the options presented to them as Appalachian women.

The Appalachian culture was described by a few of the participants as a close-knit community. Lisa, who is finishing her degree this year, stated, "The community was very close-knit community, especially in the neighborhoods I lived in were pretty close." Lenn echoed this feeling of community. Being from the African-American community within Appalachia, Lenn also mentioned that someone from outside the community "can immediately become part of the family as long as you remained trustworthy." This theme was common throughout the interviews of the participants.

In addition to the community that most participants belonged to, there was a sense from a few of the participants that they did not realize they were even part of a culture until they

attended college. Both Marie and LaRay expressed this feeling. LaRay (an African American Appalachian) mentioned how she learned that she was from Appalachia and commented that her response to that feeling by saying, “Oh, I am part of that region? Oh, I am part of that culture.” This change in perspective allowed LaRay to develop the desire to do better than the stereotype of Appalachians “not amounting to anything.” Marie, a 34-year-old White woman, explained how she felt about being part of the Appalachian culture in general terms. She said the following to explain her perspective:

To break that whole stigma of being from Appalachia. But I don’t want...I am not ashamed of where I came from, I don’t think people should be ashamed of where they came from or how they were brought up. And anybody that is Appalachian that feels “I am not going to get out of here,” well, [they] should do something about it then.

Marie and LaRay were very forthright in their interviews with the surprise that they were part of the Appalachian culture but at the same time embraced their culture as a part of who they are.

In addition to the perspective about being part of the Appalachian culture, Jennifer commented on the options given to women in the Appalachian region. Jennifer received her first bachelor’s degree in 2001 but reflected back on her choice to attend college. She mentioned that her family encouraged her to go to college and for Jennifer she stated, “I didn’t have any other option. Now my brothers thought there were all these other options and to me there never was.” This statement from Jennifer exemplified a common theme discussed later about the occupational options available within the Appalachian region.

With limited options for women to work, the overall economic landscape of Appalachia was also a theme given by the participants. Lenn discussed how she reflects on where she came

from and her current occupation as an assistant professor. To illustrate her feelings about her success she used a paraphrased version of a quote she keeps on her desk:

I have a saying that's on my file cabinet and it said—it alludes to the fact that I did not understand why God has blessed me so when others around me are even more deserving than I am and they haven't got it—they don't have it. They are still in the same position they were when I knew them 15 years ago.

Jennifer added to this by talking about how the poverty in Appalachia seems to pass along each family's generation. She said, "A mindset. It is. It's a culture. It's a culture all its own." After witnessing families of her friends, she explained that if grandparents and then parents lived on financial assistance then that is the option presented to the future generations. Jennifer stated that because of the repetitive poverty "it is hard for people to get out of that mindset."

Even with the overall glimpses of the Appalachian culture, the participants gave even more specific information regarding their Appalachian culture through the family structure, traditional role expectations, and the region's socioeconomic impact.

Elements of Appalachian Culture Learned through Family Structure and Interaction

Although participants were able to give examples of the overall Appalachian culture, there were enough data collected to separate the elements of the Appalachian culture into sub-themes. The family structure, occupations of family members, and how the participants were raised give a glimpse into their family lives within Appalachia. One of the major themes was the generational occupations that occurred, like Lenn stated, "I had already started college because I had family, aunts, who had been hair stylists and I had other kin as hairstylists." Other participants commented on their fathers' occupations if they were from a traditional family or their mothers' if they were part of a single-mother upbringing.

It was common to hear the participants speak about the occupation of laborers within the discussions. Tiffany, who is a 29-year-old finishing her degree this coming spring, mentioned that her father worked “in the local steel mill as a roll grinder.” Along the same route, Anne also mentioned that her father was a laborer and how he would not allow her mother work outside the home. Lisa’s upbringing resembled Anne’s family structure with a stay-at-home mom, and her father worked as a laborer as well. A couple of participants mentioned that their mothers worked. Marie’s mother worked in a factory along with her other family members. Marie’s mother was also a single parent and worked to try to make ends meet for her children, including Marie. Factory work was exactly what Marie found herself doing after high school. After marriage, Marie then decided to start an in-home daycare, which is what Tiffany’s mother also did for extra income to support the family. Lenn was the only one who mentioned that her father “spent some time in a music conservatory school.” Her father strongly advocated education and was a music minister. The only participant who did not mention an occupation with her family was Sara. Her father divorced her mother and, even though he was a high school graduate, he was not a big influence in her educational pursuits. Instead, Sara did find support in her stepfather, who was a farmer and had served in the U.S. Navy.

Along with parent educational levels and occupations, the women in this study illustrated a belief in having a good work ethic and how sometimes their work did not support college as an option. Lisa explained that because of her parents’ hard work, they tried to also instill in her the importance of making money, saving, and becoming self-sufficient. Her example below depicts this type of reinforcement and importance of hard work:

Yeah. My parents were—they were definitely the type of people. They didn’t give us anything so we kind of had to work for it. Once I was old enough to like get a job or you

know start babysitting that is when the whole responsibility level started kicking in. So my first job was at an ice cream store. So I worked here for two years. I saved up money and was able to get a car because I had to buy my own car, you know, because my parents weren't going to provide that for me. Which I think that—I respect them a lot more for that because you have a lot more compassion for what you bought instead of something being given to you.

Marie also illustrated having a good work ethic but took her perspective a step further by mentioning that even though her factory gave tuition reimbursements, the management did not promote the fact very much. Marie reflected on her experience, “It was...I am not going to pay for you to go to school and then you leave. I think just for people to know, today, ‘look—don’t feel stuck.’”

Elements of Traditional Role Expectations/Influences in Appalachia

Appalachian women are taught that they have certain roles to fill within the family and community system. Even if women were single mothers, the role of caregiver was often expected not just toward their children but also to members of the extended family. Participants who were interviewed were strongly influenced by their mothers on what a woman should be or do. Even though their mothers may not have seen the options that their own daughters are now pursuing, they are the foundation and support on which the participants stand in order to obtain postsecondary education. Although some participants chose to pursue a college education, they still felt a strong desire to still have the “second-shift” of being the main caregiver, but other participants saw the struggle their mothers had in the traditional role and decided to change their own fate as Appalachian women.

Sara explained how she was taught the expectations of “how a woman should be” by her mother’s influence. She remembered clearly how her “homework wasn’t priority, doing the housework was.” This was her view of the expectations she felt she needed to fulfill as a woman in Appalachia. She demonstrated this by finding herself married out of high school and staying at home as the main caregiver. The caregiver role was a dominant finding within the data collected from this study. In addition to Sara’s experience, Anne had an even more extended view of the caregiver role. She grew up with not only her parents and brother but also her grandparents. After her grandmother died and after her father became unemployed, Anne is currently trying to finish her college degree while trying to support her entire family financially. Taking care of the family was an emphasized value taught to Anne.

LaRay also gave examples of how her mother was her ultimate “hero” in the way she was able to work for her family as a single parent. Even when LaRay’s father would come around, her mother would still make him dinner and take care of him until he left again. The caregiving was a priority to her mother that transferred to LaRay. She remembered her mother “going to work at a midnight shift, coming home, staying up to do paperwork at the extension office and then she would go to her third job as a cook.” By financially providing for her family, LaRay’s mother was a caregiver in all ways to her family.

Another perspective on the caregiver role within the Appalachian culture is the expectation on women by their spouses (or ex-spouses). Lenn stated, “My husband did not want me to have a job because he did not want a babysitter to raise his kids so I would cut hair during the day and then clean up everything before he got home.” Even though Lenn worked while her husband was away, the money she earned went toward the household.

Tiffany and Lisa had very similar viewpoints of the caregiver role. Both participants saw their role as extremely important. Lisa remembered being taught what chores a woman was expected to do and “during the summer at a young age” she learned to cook and do laundry. Tiffany also witnessed this caregiver role because her father did not want her mother to work outside the home while he worked shifts. Even though both participants value the role of a caregiver, they saw the struggle of their mothers, which led them down the path to college.

Jennifer and Marie found themselves adopting the traditional role for women in Appalachia while also pursuing their degrees. When Marie found herself married and with three kids, her decision was to stay home instead of working outside the home. The thought of paying someone else to raise her children was not acceptable to her. Because she was often left at home alone because her mother was single and working, Marie expressed, “I didn’t want to leave them alone. I didn’t want them to come home and do their homework by themselves.” Even now, Marie feels tension between being at home with her family and pursuing her degree, but she has realized that obtaining her degree will help her family more in the long run. Jennifer still embraces doing the heavy cooking and laundry for her family in addition to attending classes and working on campus. She chose to do the second-shift because she felt that she was responsible to carry out the main caregiver responsibilities.

Even though all of the participants were taught the traditional role Appalachian women are still expected to carry out, there still exists tension between those expectations and pursuing/obtaining a college degree. The issue of guilt came up in a couple of conversations about how the participants felt when they realized they were not going to follow the traditional route taken by many of their family and friends. Lenn best explained that “we [women of Appalachia] are limited to always be the nurturer, the caregiver. Not all these other things.” She

went on to explain that in the movie *The Help* (Columbus, Radcliffe, Barnathan, & Taylor, 2011) when the character Aibileen tells the baby “you are smart, you are beautiful,” that in that moment Lenn felt freedom in being who she is and what she has achieved. She went on to explain that “as Appalachian women we are not told these things.” So, by watching the movie, Lenn was finally able to freely believe in herself. Anne also gave an example of how women in Appalachia are only viewed one way and not given credit by stating:

I guess...I know the society expectation of Appalachian society is not very high. And I mean that's very shocking and it's hard to take because there are so many women that are in good positions and really made a name for themselves and they are not getting the credit for it. And that kind of bothers me—that bothers me a lot.

Another perspective that came up was the tension between mothers and daughters—especially if the daughters were pursuing higher education. Lenn described that the tension does exist but at times the daughter influences/encourages the mother to the point where they are both walking at college graduation together. Tiffany also illustrated how her mother uses the caregiver role as a way to support Tiffany and her daughter. Tiffany mentioned that she had a paper to finish and her mother said, “I can't help you with that, but I can help in the ways I know how.” This was a huge support to Tiffany. Her mother was using all of her traditional skills to make sure her daughter was successful in obtaining the first college degree in their family.

Elements of the Appalachian Culture Learned Through Experiences in Education

The participants all mentioned snapshots of their educational experiences both in K-12 situations and in their observances of fellow college students. Although some participants described positive role models and high academic capital, there were a few instances where

educators viewed a few of these women through the stereotypes prevalent within in the Appalachian culture.

The academic capital was present with all of the participants. Anne distinctly remembered being very good at school to the point where she said, “Honestly, I did my brother’s homework when he was in high school.” Anne’s brother was older, and by the time Anne reached high school, she was placed in the college preparatory classes. Sara also showed academic capital through reflecting on her K-12 experience and remembering that she was intelligent even though she was never told verbally by her teachers. She figured she must have been because she “was asked to help other kids” in her class.

Lisa, Anne, and Jennifer all stated how education was stressed within their households. Grades were important so that scholarships would serve as a way to pay for school and would allow them the opportunity to attend college. Lisa said that school was not “spoken of” in her family, but good grades were a must if she wanted to continue playing sports; she added that when she decided to attend college her parents were hesitant because they felt she should go to work after high school instead. For Tiffany, school was never really discussed at all, but she felt that this was because she was the “good girl” and had a “good head on [her] shoulders.”

Not all of the experiences were positive during the K-12 years of the participants. Jennifer discussed how an algebra teacher treated her after becoming pregnant in high school:

So, I actually had this algebra teacher in high school—I got pregnant—I had the child.

The teacher said I was never going to amount to anything—I was always going to live in my county and live off of welfare.

Jennifer’s experience demonstrated some of the stereotypes teachers may have held toward their Appalachian students. Anne has a similar interaction with a high school guidance counselor who

told her she “wasn’t college material.” Even though these negative experiences happened, Jennifer and Anne both use these memories as motivation to succeed.

Tiffany expanded the conversation about the effect of the Appalachian culture on educational experiences by describing the lack of skills adults and high school graduates demonstrate when applying for admission on campus. While working in the computer lab, Tiffany witnessed how students of all ages “did not know how to work a computer and didn’t know how to fill out a FAFSA.” This speaks to the lack of preparation still occurring within the Appalachian culture and the K-12 system.

Overall Appalachian Socioeconomic Status

The Appalachian region has been identified as one of the most impoverished areas in the United States (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006; Latimer, 2000). The participants were able to illustrate that the area is still in dire economic straits by way of the lack of industry and the continuous fear people have that they will lose their job. One theme was clear—all participants seemed to make comments about how everyone else around them was also in the same situation financially. This creates a sense of community and grit to ensure that they are able to work somehow to provide for their families.

Lenn was able to give insight into what many Appalachian communities experience. She described being Appalachian as part of her identity especially in relation to her socioeconomic status and explained it in this way:

Because I am experiencing the same thing everyone else is experiencing. You know, the lack of industry, the lack of income, the lack of resources, you know. Everyone is in the same boat praying you can make the car payment. You know, because we are all two paychecks away from being destitute.

In relation to Lenn's perspective, Jennifer described the patterns she saw that had passed from generation to generation while she was growing up. She observed young mothers using assistance and stated, "I think they have known that [living on assistance] all their life and when they turn 18 they can go and get on assistance and have these babies...It is hard for people to get out of that mindset."

Because of the familiarity of being in poverty or using assistance, many people within Appalachian communities may see this as a way of life. Lenn remembers watching television shows such as *My Three Sons* and *Leave It to Beaver*. She commented that "although we [her community] were very impoverished, we didn't know we were poor because everyone around us was poor unlike what you see on television." The participants continued to give more specific instances of their socioeconomic struggles within Appalachia in regard to the use of financial assistance, the effect poverty had on their families, and ultimately, how their socioeconomic status affected/affects their educational experiences.

Socioeconomic constraints and the use of financial assistance. Another major theme within the socioeconomic culture of the participants was the use/need of financial assistance to survive. Without the assistance, many of the participants would not have been able to sustain themselves, let alone their families. The use of financial assistance did not seem to have been abused by the women interviewed and instead often served to motivate them to obtain their degrees so they could stop using the assistance programs.

Tiffany recalled that her parents were on some type of assistance when she was younger but managed to find other ways to sustain the family and eventually made their way out of using public assistance. She talked about how her father would make sure they at least had food by purchasing half a cow or pig and then freezing the meat to sustain them over time. In addition,

Tiffany explained that her father had two gardens: “We have two gardens—I remember canning once but I don’t think we ate canned very much.” Because of the resourcefulness of her family, Tiffany felt that they were able to have as much as they needed when she was growing up.

Currently Tiffany is now a single mother and uses Section 8 housing so that she and her daughter have their own home. In addition, she also received money from the Ohio Works First program that is connected under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. She was happy to say that she now uses the “food card” which helps even though her daughter has quite the appetite. Tiffany expressed her gratitude to have these programs to assist her while she pursued her degree but also expressed how she was looking forward to providing for her daughter without assistance.

Lenn experienced assistance when she found herself as a single mother. Her experience was captured with the following statement:

I received \$10 of food stamps a month. I made \$7 too much to get a medical card and that’s what really led up to the acute pancreatitis because I didn’t have the money to buy my meds. So, I didn’t take them. I paid my bills and I took care of my boys because my ex paid child support when he felt like it. Which was only in total \$100 a month, which he didn’t pay. So, no, I didn’t get a welfare check I really...\$10 of food stamps helped save our lives on some days. But that’s all I got.

Because Lenn was trying to work to sustain her household, she made just enough money not to qualify for assistance other than food stamps. This was very frustrating for Lenn because she had stated she only made \$7 over the allowed amount to receive welfare. This exposes a group of people that may need assistance but cannot obtain it because of these restrictions.

Jennifer, who was pregnant and having a child while in high school, gave another example of situations where participants found themselves on assistance. She made efforts to still provide for her son:

But I really struggled because I had my oldest son when I was 17. I got pregnant when I was 16 and had him when I was 17. So, I was on assistance then because I couldn't...you know I was working at McDonald's 20 hours a week and going to high school. So, he had to have insurance and his dad didn't have insurance at his job—his dad was a lot older than I was. So, I had to have assistance—I had to have the medical card—I had to have insurance for my son. So then life got better but then when I got pregnant the second time and had my son then I had to go back on assistance.

Even after her efforts to provide for her first son, Jennifer had to go back on assistance after her second son was born. She stated that she is also currently on assistance since she came back to school to receive her teaching degree. Her perspective about using assistance was that it helps to get through tough financial seasons, but her goal is to always come off of the assistance and to provide a more stable income for her family.

Anne also had experience with assistance once she turned 30 and after being let go from a local fast food chain. She stated,

We bottomed out and I never had a clue. I never even thought about public assistance. That was the one thing that I have used—the food stamps. For insurance I have never used the medical card. I have never did [sic] the housing and then people think because I live with my parents I don't have to pay bills. I have to pay rent...there are no free rides.

Although Anne is also responsible to earn income for her entire family, she mentioned feeling somewhat obligated to living and supporting her extended family. She expressed that

even though she is living with extended family, someone looking in from the outside may not understand that she is trying to sustain the household and is still responsible to find ways to pay for utilities and rent. She felt anger because of the stigma attached to people who use food stamps. Her comment illustrated her frustration when she said, “I would do anything where I don’t have to go to the store and use food stamps and have people judge you by the way that you look or the car that you drive.”

LaRay mentioned the frustrations she encountered when trying to make ends meet after becoming unemployed due to company layoffs. She was able to have unemployment but did not qualify for many assistance programs. She said, “The only type of assistance that I got was food stamps but I didn’t qualify for any, you know, housing.” She went on to say that even to gain more skills in a workplace, often trainings were restricted to only “certain” positions and in her perspective she seemed to never be able to qualify for extra trainings that would have helped her become more marketable for other types of jobs.

Socioeconomic influences on the family. The participants not only gave a glimpse into the overall landscape of the socioeconomic culture in Appalachia, but also went a step further by providing specific examples of the impact of poverty on their families. Some of these experiences helped shape their own identities and work ethics in order to make providing for their families and future generations a priority.

Lisa described that during her upbringing that she remembers her family not having a lot of money. “It was definitely like a paycheck-to-paycheck type [situation]” was a phrase used by Lisa when she remembered asking for \$80 sneakers. Her parents said that they would have to save up for them because \$80 was a lot of money. This type of teaching came from her parents to show Lisa that she has to work for what she wants, and this value still exists with Lisa’s

current work ethic. Lenn also had a similar memory concerning her family's socioeconomic status:

We might not have the money for clothes or shoes. You know, I remember having cardboard in the bottom of my shoes while I walk to school. Yeah. All my clothes—if I didn't make them, they came from Goodwill. Had my first job at 13.

As with Lenn's memory of starting work at a young age, Marie mostly remembers how much her mother worked to make ends meet by explaining, "I knew not to ask for things...I knew she was working hard to make ends meet." Even though she knew her mom was barely making ends meet, Marie still felt embarrassed by the car they drove but thankful at the same time that they never went hungry.

Even in participants' current battles with poverty, they are struggling to make ends meet despite the help from some assistance programs. Lisa added, "I never had biological kids for the simple fact that we [she and her husband] couldn't afford them." Having to sacrifice having a family was difficult for Anne, but she was appreciative that at least she had two stepchildren to take care of. To illustrate the reason for not having kids or not wanting to be on assistance, Lisa stated, "If you are in this town and you receive any kind of assistance—you are white trash—everybody considers you low." Lisa, when describing her financial situation, mentioned this stigma often. LaRay also displayed frustration with finances and how it affects what she is able to provide for her family. She stated, "I wish I made more money only because the cost of living is so high and that's hard to be able to put in a 70-hour week and still wonder how you are going to pay your electric bill." Even though LaRay had already graduated with her bachelor's degree, she was still having difficulty making ends meet with the salary she was receiving.

Sacrifice was another minor theme with how low socioeconomic situations affected families. Marie had mentioned that she did not believe her mother went on assistance as a single parent, but instead of going on assistance her mother worked a lot. Because her mother went above and beyond with work to provide for Marie and her brother, this meant that Marie was often home alone through her entire childhood. Her mother's work was providing enough financially to make ends meet but this made her sacrifice time with her children. LaRay mentioned a similar upbringing concerning her mother and how much she worked to provide but also mentioned that her mother would take them to her late job or made great memories with them by taking them to the park. Either way, both of these examples show some type of sacrifice from their mothers, which affected Marie and LaRay and how they wanted to live their lives. Both Marie and LaRay use their mothers as motivation to obtain a college degree so they would not have to sacrifice as much time by working—instead they would be able to secure positions that would give them more time for their children.

Socioeconomic impact on educational experiences. There were several instances in the interviews where participants would talk about the difficulties of obtaining an education while living in poverty. Most made comments about how if families did not have money, then the expectation was to go into the workforce instead of college because of cost and the fear of taking out loans. Some women who were interviewed also pointed out that they would have to choose between going to work and attending class. Because the priority was to pay their bills, they would skip out on courses. Even though there are negative influences due to their low socioeconomic backgrounds, for most of the women this propelled them to excel in academics to get good grades and hopefully attend college.

Most of the participants made comments that reflected the attitudes of attending college from their parents, extended families, and even communities. Jennifer talked about her parents and that most of her parents' generation just took it as a fact that "money was an issue and they just could not afford it—families could not afford it, so they did not go to school." For Jennifer, this meant that if she wanted to go to college, which was not really a choice according to her mother, she would have to figure out how to pay for it herself. LaRay tried to attend college after high school but because her family could not afford for her to live on campus, she found herself sharing a house with eight other college students. In addition her college was located in a larger city. This type of environment forced LaRay to quit college and she stopped out for many years. Tiffany commented that she only started college at the regional campus because she had earned a full academic scholarship. Otherwise, Tiffany would not have started college because she also could not afford tuition. Even though Tiffany quit college to work full time in retail, she has finally been able to return to school but wished she had stayed in the first place because of her financial situation.

LaRay described how her financial situation affected her decision to attend college. On the night she walked away from her husband after an altercation, her husband said, "You won't amount to anything. Just be one of those single parents that's living from job to job." Not only did LaRay express anger, even during the interview, about what he said, but she also commented on how she was determined to prove him wrong. After her divorce, LaRay found herself unemployed due to her position being eliminated at the gas company. She scrubbed floors just to get by and provide something for her two children when she finally decided she did not "want to be on [her] knees all [her] life." This financial situation propelled LaRay into applying and attending college.

Once the participants made it to college, they still experienced socioeconomic struggles with their education. The tension between valuing work to “make it” financially and attending class was a struggle for Lisa. “There have been times where I had to miss class because I had obligations at work and work is my priority because it pays the bills” is a statement from Lisa that directly emphasizes how she holds on to the value of work versus school—with work being more valued. Tiffany also expressed a similar value by stopping out of school because she was told it would take her a year longer to get into the nursing school. She had a decision to wait a year to begin her nursing program or taking a full-time retail job. At the time, Tiffany took the retail job so that she could provide for herself and eventually her daughter. Another perspective with the financial struggles while attending college dealt with financial aid. LaRay stated,

They messed up my financial aid—bad—I mean really bad. They paid me—by the time I figured out they had overpaid me there was no—that was when they were in quarters and so I was told...it was...I did two quarters and they overpaid me the second quarter. And so I finished the third quarter and I went to go get my grades because it was the end of our school year which was the end...to allow me to get a possible reimbursement—it was the end of that quarter—they were like, “Well, we overpaid you. You have to pay back \$4,000 before you are able to come back.”

Even though LaRay was depending on her loans to help provide necessities while attending school, this affected her more than just paying them back the refund the school had overpaid her; this meant that she had to figure out a way to make ends meet.

Overall Elements of Identity

This theme uncovers the identity development of the participants as it connects with their cultural expectations. This perspective will connect to their upbringing and how they view their identities in relation to their current situation.

For women, research has been conducted to discover the different stages of identity formation (Baxter Magolda, 2007). For this particular section, Baxter Magolda's four identity stages of self-authorship will be used to frame the discussion about the participants' identity formation (Baxter Magolda, 2007). If any development is to occur there has to be a moment of crisis or tension where individuals have to choose how they would navigate through their emotions and actions in order to grow in their identity. Before discussion can occur, the results of the interviews had to show situations or events in the participants' lives that explained certain points of crisis that propelled them to realize who they were as Appalachian women and propel them toward creating their self-authorship. Some women can definitely be perceived as reaching the highest level of self-authorship in some areas of their identity formation while other participants seem to still be trying to find their own voice in the middle of their current situations.

Stages of Identity Development

Identity development was evident throughout each participant's interview. In order to illustrate the identity development of each participant, the themes are broken down in this section under each participant's pseudonym. This will illustrate the crisis, or events of tension, that propelled them through their own unique identity formation processes without confusing one participant's experiences with another.

Sara. The moments in Sara's life when she moved through her identity development were evident throughout her interview. Sara mentioned a scenario of when she started to see that she must have been intelligent in her K-12 experience, even though she was never told or thought this about herself. She ran into a former history substitute teacher who remembered her. Her husband (at the time) made a "snide" comment to the gentleman about how Sara must have been remembered for bad behavior. The history teacher explained that he actually remembered Sara for her questions in class and her unique perspective. Sara described that in that moment she thought it was interesting "to have teachers remember me." She went on to explain that that was one instance where she was exposed to a new perspective about her intelligence. Another example that made Sara even more confident in her intelligence was the success she had while writing a self-reflection in one of her first classes (which happened to be at the 300 level). This gave her the extra confirmation that she was intelligent and capable of pursuing her degree.

Sara made the comment, "and the more educated I became, the further and further apart my husband and I became." This opened up her conversation about her identity associated with her marriage and the tension she felt between her education and professional pursuits, and trying to uphold the traditional role Appalachian women are expected to maintain. When Sara had the professional opportunity to visit India, Sara took advantage of this experience and took one of her daughters with her. While in India, Sara felt like she was "valued for the individual [she] is for the knowledge [she] possessed." Upon her return, Sara and her husband were in a marriage counseling session. It was a moment of tension that brought clarity to Sara about her situation. Her husband accused her of having an affair with the professor who took her to India. This professor was actually married and also took his wife to India, but Sara's husband was threatened by her experience. The counselor interjected, "She was not in love with the person as much as

she loved being respected as a person.” Sara commented that this among other experiences brought “validity to thoughts and feelings” she had all along. Even though Sara struggled with the tension within herself, she managed to divorce her husband and found her own voice.

Lenn. The identity process for Lenn seemed straightforward, but after listening to her journey, her voice and purpose were a result of overcoming many obstacles in her life. Growing up in a “very religious” household, Lenn was taught at an early age that her identity was as a daughter of God. This belief in her relationship with God allowed Lenn to face life without fear. As a young child and through high school Lenn described having a stuttering problem so bad that she sounded like “a machine gun” when she would speak; however, thanks to her father as a music minister in the church, he found that Lenn did not stutter when she sang. Using the gift of singing, Lenn overcame her stuttering. In addition, Lenn was born with the bottom of her feet facing each other so she would have to walk on her ankles. She had to wear braces on her legs to correct this and did so by the time she reached high school. As Lenn put it, “I recognize my limitations but my limitations never defined me.”

This snapshot of her identity development was brought in full force when she described the relationships throughout her past. In her high school, Lenn mentioned that she was friends with everyone. She did not judge people based on what they wore, who their parents were, etc., but instead she looked at people through their souls. This attachment of her to God was evident when she explained, “It was God using me. There is nobody that isn’t important to God, so consequently there is no one that is not important to me.” Because of her early identity development and truly finding her voice, Lenn has been able to be successful even through trials.

She discussed her identity as an Appalachian woman by using a scene from the movie, *The Help* (Columbus et al., 2011) where Aibileen tells the baby, “You is kind, you is smart, and you is important.” For Lenn, this moment was described as the following:

We [Appalachian women] are limited to always be the nurturer, the caregiver. Not all these other things. And for me that was—oh my God, what a Peter in prison moment when the chains fell off. I was like “Oh my God.” This is awesome.

The freedom she felt watching this scene was another step in being her own author of her identity and life purpose. Although Lenn had experienced the tension with being married and having a traditional role and then divorcing her husband after he left her and their two sons, she can now reflect on that time in her life as another push to finding herself. She put it this way when talking about meeting her husband: “My first boyfriend was my husband and I was looking through the eyes of love and not looking through Christ. He was not the man I should have been with but he is the man that helped me find me.”

Lenn exemplifies the identity development process with self-authorship. She has been able to know and learn about herself throughout each stage of her life. This is what makes her sure about her purpose to mentor other Appalachian women to help them achieve not only their own voices/identities but also the limitless opportunities they have in life. Without the obstacles or moments of tension externally and internally, Lenn believes she may not have had the tools she needed to become who God intended her to be.

Tiffany. Even though Tiffany is a single mother and decided to go back to campus to finish her degree, her experiences and feelings about herself show that her identity is still a “work in progress.” There were a couple of examples where Tiffany had moments of realization of what she does not want for herself and characteristics that do not fit who she is becoming.

Her mother runs an in-home daycare. Tiffany explained that her mother does not have a GED and said, “And I watched my mom and knew I didn’t want to watch bad kids all of my life.” Also, Tiffany described waitressing and she knew that that was also something she could not envision for her future. “I mean, when you see things you don’t want to be—it only leaves the things you CAN be” is the thought process of Tiffany when describing her future. Even though she holds high respect for her mother, Tiffany wants to do other things with her life to possibly provide even more opportunities for her daughter.

The most telling moment of the identity development for Tiffany was when she went on to explain how she felt about attending college again:

I don’t know. I feel like I still find out things about myself every day, so I don’t know.

Nothing is set in stone. Just like I said, I wing it with a lot of things and this is one of them too.

The fact that Tiffany is trying to figure out what her purpose is or what voice she has over her life is a good sign. Exploring her options and finding time to reflect on where she is and what she wants to achieve will eventually lead Tiffany to the next step in her identity realization.

Lisa. For now, Lisa is definitely exploring who she is as an individual. The first indication in her life that she had an identity crisis was when her long-time boyfriend broke up with her suddenly. She discussed how they had just gone on a vacation and had a great time and then the day they returned he told her he was not happy. Lisa immediately found herself moving in with her grandparents to recover emotionally and financially. She opened up about how devastating this experience was for her:

You know, being 21, 22, 25—I ended up living with them (her grandparents) for four-five years just trying... ’cause during the first year after the breakup it was kind of rough.

You think maybe this is “the one”—then no it’s not.

The emotions she still expressed illustrated how she is still struggling with her own voice as the author of her identity and how she envisions future relationships.

There was a moment of hope for Lisa and a breakthrough when she started to talk about how she felt about going back to college. She has started to move into a new perspective about herself while pursuing her degree. The options she has encountered give her a sense of excitement, and she proclaimed, “I think I am more excited with this than I ever was with education.” To her, the possibilities are endless with “more routes” than she ever thought could be open to her.

Jennifer. There were just a few glimpses Jennifer provided concerning her identity and self-authorship. When Jennifer described her K-12 experiences, she was immediately excited and exclaimed, “Oh yeah! Absolutely loved school—I loved it.” Her identity as a student illustrated not only her academic capital but also how much she embraced good grades in school so that she could go on to college because college “was her only option” besides joining the workforce in low-wage positions. Another event that helped her with her professional identity was her time spent with her husband as Cub Scout leaders. She found that she loved to teach the boys in their troop. The identity developed in school and her experience in the community has now led her to become an elementary teacher.

The mention of her husband and sons throughout the interview exposed another aspect of her identity development. Even though most participants observed the traditional role in Appalachia as something they either wanted to move away from or at least wanted to put off to

earn their degree before fulfilling that role, Jennifer decided to embrace her traditional Appalachian role and has successfully aligned this role with her aspiration of finishing her second bachelor's degree in order to teach and provide financial stability to her family.

Anne. In regards to identity development, Anne provided some insight into the moments of crisis in her life that propelled her toward finding her own voice and direction in her life. For Anne, school came very easily and she disclosed that while she was in middle school she would write papers for her high school brother that would earn As. This was shared in her statement, "I got As and Bs without trying. Like I never really felt that I earned my grades. Honestly. But I was really good through the middle school years." Then Anne turned rebellious when she entered high school. As a result of her rebellion, she left the house without permission and ended up in a traumatic car accident with her cousin driving. Anne was thrown through the front windshield where she ended up with five broken bones and severe facial trauma. She had to rehabilitate through most of her junior year to learn how to walk again and perform simple daily routines like brushing her hair.

Even though Anne described this season of crisis in her life, her belief that "things happen for a reason" held true for her and her identity development. During the moments that followed her wreck, Anne was introduced for the first time to a social worker. Because of the help she received from this professional, Anne took a step in her self-authorship by deciding this was her current purpose, which is why she has found herself pursuing a college degree. Without the moment of crisis, Anne commented, she may have never found this purpose and may have ended up walking down a destructive path in her life. Her validation with this feeling was well said when she mentioned, "After a while I would just do the everyday because I was lost and broken. But now I have a purpose. So I just really am just a stronger person than when I was."

Marie. In her journey, Marie found herself at many crossroads in her life. When she became pregnant in high school, her life changed for the better. Marie disclosed that she was hanging out with friends and did drugs and alcohol in the beginning of her high school career. When she found out she was pregnant, Marie stopped everything she was doing. She reflected on this part of her life, “And I always think to myself that was God saying—I am going to stop this [her destructive path], I am going to direct you this way.” Because of her teen pregnancy, Marie knew she had to get her GED, and she managed to finish her GED before her friends graduated high school. She took pride in this and realized that she actually did enjoy learning.

Although Marie was experiencing some of these life situations at a young age, her identity as a mother and then later as a wife and a mother to two other sons became prominent. When she found herself with three sons, it was her decision that she quit working and take on the traditional Appalachian role as the main caregiver. She expressed that she enjoys this role and has aligned with it and with her other roles as college student and teacher for her church’s preschool. Teaching the preschool for her church was another point of tension in her identity. Coming from a background with her mother working in manufacturing, Marie never thought of teaching as an option. Because of her newfound opportunity through her church, Marie experienced workshops through a program related to the regional campus. This drew her in and she is now finding her voice by graduating soon with her bachelor’s degree. She is excited to reach this level of self-authorship because she recognizes the possibilities of how she can help her community after her degree.

LaRay. The main life crisis that LaRay shared during her interview was the tension between what she wanted in a husband and what she experienced in her marriage and divorce. Because her mother was a single mother, LaRay held this thought:

I always thought—I don't want a husband like that. I want a husband who is going to not only be physically there but emotionally and mentally there. I wanted a husband who was going to be a role model without question. To me it was like—I always thought I would want this nice little home and a dog and a couple of kids.

LaRay associated her identity by wanting the opposite of what her mother experienced. Not until she found herself leaving her husband after he shoved her did her own self-authorship start to appear in her life.

When LaRay experienced the physical abuse from her husband, she had called the police. They knew her husband and told her that because they did not witness him shoving her they could not do anything. At that point LaRay said, “Oh? Okay. But I am out of here, so if you could stay long enough for me to get my kids and my things I would appreciate it.” LaRay found her voice and “didn't turn back.” She expressed that her ex-husband had touched “a part of [her] that was untouchable...[her] pride.” After LaRay experienced this crisis, she no longer tried to live her life through the voice she created by witnessing her mother, but created her own path.

Spirituality in Relation to Identity

Although there is not overwhelming research to prove how religious or “God-fearing” the Appalachian culture is, there was certainly a strong theme from the participants that showed how their spirituality or religion directly impacts who they are in their identities. Most of the glimpses of this religious take on the Appalachian culture have been portrayed in stories, movies, and music. The religious ties found within the interviews also resemble a generational belief in God that has been passed on to the current generation, as society has seen through historical media such as in the series the *Hatfields & McCoy's* (Greif, 2012). All of the women noted belief in God. A couple of women saw God as providing opportunities and it was their own choice to

step through those doors. Only one participant showed a more global perspective of spirituality, who ironically was also the only participant who had traveled overseas and lived within another culture outside the United States. Even though her perspective was more global, she still gave credit to God for providing direction in her life.

With the exception of Marie, all of the participants expressed how they were brought up in a church. Although some participants expressed they did not “get it” concerning how spirituality worked with God, the values and lessons they learned were “invaluable” and they were “thankful for the upbringing” as Tiffany stated. Lenn, Tiffany, LaRay, Jennifer, Lisa, Anne, and Sara all mentioned at least attending church. Anne, Sara, and Lisa expressed that even though they went to church when they were younger, they ended up not attending very often in their adulthood for reasons such as not agreeing with new church leadership or having to work on Sundays. Marie did not grow up in a church but has joined a church and has become an active member in her adulthood, after her marriage. Once she joined the church and started to rely on God, Marie stated, “Everything that I want to do now kind of revolves around that—is it what I am supposed to do? Will it benefit others? Is it His plan?”

The reliance on God showed up in all of the participant interviews. Even participants who expressed they do not regularly attend church mentioned that they still have faith and pray to God every day. Lisa commented, “I definitely pray every night and have those connections where I thank God for getting me through...” To echo the practice of prayer, Jennifer spoke about how she prays for strength every day before walking into the school for her job and describes herself as a “God-fearing Nazarene.” Lenn and Tiffany mentioned prayer and church activities as a major part of their lives and how they try to instill those values in their children. Lenn explained it best:

I raised my two sons with the same ideology, the same core values and the fundamental beliefs that God is the first in everything you do and He will take care of you. It doesn't mean you won't go through struggles and trials, it simply means that you have a hope. And the hope isn't in you or your flesh because in the flesh you can do nothing. Your hope is in the Lord and that is what you have to lean on. Trust Him that he is going to make a way for you because He will always make a way of escape. So consequently, deliverance will come. You know—my philosophy is “Everything is temporary.” My God, I just had my tenth surgery in January. But it was temporary you know what I mean?

Anne also spoke about how her faith in God came through even after her wreck. She mentioned that in addition to her severe facial trauma and broken bones, she had flat-lined twice after the accident. Anne expressed her faith in God's plan for her by saying, “But I always felt like I was put here for a purpose. Like, God was not done with me yet.” The examples of faith in God, belief in the power of prayer, and the expression of how important it is to pass down the values of their faith to their children were strong themes throughout all of the interviews. Believing in God was a part of the participants' identity that could not be ignored or separated from their life journeys. The tools of relying on strength beyond themselves seemed to give them the power and persistence to overcome their obstacles. Obtaining their college degree is something they all expressed is part of God's plan for their purpose.

The following statements from the participants pertain to instances when, in addition to their strong beliefs in God and Christianity, there was also the belief about their own responsibility concerning their faith. God was evident in all of the participants' lives, but a couple of participants commented that they believed the opportunities came from God but that it

was their choice and determination to take advantage of these opportunities. The Appalachian culture and their belief in God intersected in this perspective concerning their spirituality.

Sara expressed, “I don’t know how much faith, the ritual of religion is, but I do believe that things happen for a reason you know—there’s God winks or coincidences.” Sara alluded to her responsibility for recognizing situations, people, or events as God winks so that she could decide whether to act upon or engage in these instances. Marie also expressed how God can provide opportunities and commented, “He has opened the doors but I have stepped through them.” This also best described Jennifer’s outlook that it is up to her to take action on the plans or options that occur in her life, knowing that God will guide her down the right path.

Intersectionality Within Identity

All participants have overlapping layers to their identities. Even from an outside perspective, these women exhibit intersectionality by being women from Appalachia who are in or coming out of poverty. Three of the participants were also African American, which added another dimension to their experiences that influenced their values, upbringing, and internal drive to achieve excellence. Below are some examples of how their intersectionality shined through the interviews and how the environment in which they were living received their intersectionality.

Tiffany, Lenn, and LaRay all identified as being African-American Appalachians. Tiffany spoke about the lack of diversity in her neighborhood in regard to her ethnicity. She discussed how she, her dad, and her brother were the only visibly diverse community members. She mentioned that her sister has a very fair complexion and when she had her son he was also very White to the point where Tiffany expressed how he could never declare being one quarter

African American. Tiffany did not express in any other part of her interview her diversity but with her few comments, she had expressed her intersectionality within her identity.

Lenn was much more forthright concerning her intersectionality of being an African-American, Appalachian woman. Her thoughts were best expressed in her own words:

When you think of Appalachia, you don't think African American. For some reason you think African American is here and Appalachia is way over here. But Appalachia is also an aspect of being African American. They are not separated. It's not a majority culture. So those are things people have to understand. I am not an African American living in Ohio. I am an African-American, Ohio Appalachian individual. Because I am experiencing the same thing everyone else is experiencing. You know, the lack of industry, the lack of income, the lack of resources, you know. Everyone is in the same boat praying you can make the car payment. You know, because we are all two paychecks away from being destitute.

She went on to explain that there still existed racial disparities within her Appalachian region. An example she gave illustrated how African Americans who apply for loans end up with much higher interest rates because the social construct still exists that African Americans are not seen as being able to make those payments. She explained that for African Americans "it's not as easy to acquire quality goods."

LaRay expressed how she was not even aware that she was Appalachian until she hit college. She described her reaction when she realized that she was African American and Appalachian by saying, "And it's like, 'Oh, I am part of that region? Oh, I am part of that culture.'" LaRay took her realization of the intersectionality within her identity as a positive force. She took the negative stereotyping of her two cultures about "not amounting to anything"

and acted in her life in ways to prove people wrong. She commented that her identity is not tied to where she lives but the foundation of who she is, a “child of God.”

Identity in Relation to Degree Completion

Because this study addresses the overall question about what the experiences were like for Appalachian women in their journey toward degree attainment, the interview sessions also included a question that asked each participant how she felt about her achievement. Below are the responses each participant provided when asked this particular question.

Sara had one of the most powerful responses to the question concerning how she felt about her achievement of completing her college degree:

And the Dean had done this thing—and I don’t know if anyone has done it since—and he stood up and he welcomed everyone to the graduation and I don’t think it was the first year that he did it but it still touched me because he said if you are single, if you worked full time, if you...and there were five or six different things he mentioned. I stood up for every single one and I thought “Oh, my gosh.” And then I was introduced as the student speaker and one of the administrators introducing me said, “I watched and this person stood up for every one of those things.” [Sara got teary-eyed] And it was like [Sara broke down in tears] I really did it.

In relation to Sara’s reaction to her accomplishment of being the first in her family to attend college and complete a degree, Lenn simply stated that she felt “empowered” upon walking across the stage to receive her diploma.

Other participants who will be finishing their degrees within a semester or two had to pause before responding about how they felt. Most of them replied that they never thought about how they would feel about their own accomplishment, which reveals how selfless their goals

really are. Most of their attention is directed toward achieving a degree to help others. When each participant had a chance to reflect on how she will feel when she is the first in her family to receive her degree, there were many tears and comments, such as Marie's statement, "It's a little overwhelming to think this is going to happen." Lisa also commented that she would feel "proud." Jennifer was the only participant who did not have a direct response to this question, but throughout her interview Jennifer said that she felt accomplishment with her first degree but continuously sets new goals—she strives to do accomplish all that she can for herself and her family. Overall, even though some participants owned their accomplishment as part of their identity, others are still realizing how their degree attainment is connected to them personally.

Summary

The data collected from participant interviews gave specific examples of the Appalachian culture they experienced and moments of the identity development. The characteristics of these two themes are important to understand before presenting the themes of access and success in higher education. Confronting the external and internal oppressive structures in their lives, these women were still able to reconcile these structures with the formation of a new cycle of degree attainment. The next chapter will discuss how this was possible for these participants.

FINDINGS: ACCESS AND SUCCESS

The third and final category of themes that emerged from this study of the eight participants pertained to their motivations to go to college, resources that were most used, and success strategies of goal setting and reflection. Because the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of impoverished women from the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region who have matriculated at institutions of higher education, the actual skills they used are vital to understanding their success.

There were several types of motivation exposed during the interview sessions. Motivation categories were created to organize the comments made by the participants. The first overall category was the motivation that helped encourage participants to enroll in college to obtain their degrees. The second overall category were motivations that occurred due to life situations and included career changes, desire to prove stereotypes wrong, redemption from bad relationships, providing better for their family and children, economic motivation, motivation for family, and positively influencing other women and their communities.

Main resources used by the participants are in the next section and provide discussion about what resources were used and available to help the participants access college. Resources occurred in many forms such as campus services, faculty and staff members of their regional campus, and family support. In order to be successful once they enrolled on campus, participants expressed success strategies such as resource usage, goal setting, and self-reflection abilities.

At the end of the study, there was a definite overall theme captured throughout all of the participant interviews regarding why they were determined to be successful as the first person in their families to earn a college degree.

Motivation from Other Appalachian Women and One's Self

These specific quotes come from the parts of the interview sessions when the participants were speaking about how they found the motivation to attend college. This occurred either as a result of their own desires, or from a combination of their desire and the encouragement or major pushes they received from other women in their lives. All participants talked about other women influencing them in this way. Even though there was mention of men who helped aid them in obtaining confidence while trying to obtain their degree, or Lenn's father creating the motivation within her, there were no major examples of encouragement or explicit support from men when compared to the high levels found in relation to women.

Because Lenn's father was part of the church ministry, this might have been why he was the only man mentioned as giving explicit support for obtaining a college degree. Lenn described her father's philosophy to "always strive for excellence" and Lenn put it this way:

Yes, yes. It [the philosophy of excellence] is a sustaining theme. And when you put it that way the task is on you—if you want it then that is what you must do for yourself.

You don't beat the next guy you don't have to trample on anyone. It's all about you—you own this. If you want to be a better person then you need to do better.

Whereas Lenn's father was a major support of her efforts, the overwhelming majority of support for the participants came from other Appalachian women, whether it was their mothers or friends. Lisa had talked about going back to school with one of her co-workers, who in turn told Lisa, "you keep talking about it and this [going back to school] is what you need to do." Marie found motivation to attend school not just from her church but when she witnessed the attitudes of people around her when the factory in her community went downhill. She mentioned that so

many people were stuck telling themselves “I can’t do anything,” which was a phrase Marie rebelled against by enrolling in college.

One other example included LaRay and her mother. Because LaRay honors her mother through the life she chose to live, it was not a surprise that her mother was one of the motivations that pushed her into earning a degree. The phrase that stuck with LaRay from her mom was “if you are not going to be part of the solution you are going to be a part of the problem. And so what are you going to do?” This provided LaRay to always want to “do better.”

Motivation from Situations in Life

There were several examples of how motivation affected each participant’s journey toward degree completion. The catalytic events or situations that contributed to this motivation are listed below.

Career Change

This section related to motivations that occurred because of career changes that the participants faced due to different personal situations. Because the perception existed for many of the participants about limited occupational options that would provide enough for their families, obtaining a degree was imperative.

Sara had a career change with the encouragement of the campus dean after she landed her first position on campus. Because of his encouragement she found herself in a position that would require a college degree. This made it mandatory for Sara to start taking courses. Instead of deciding to leave her campus position, Sara gained confidence and support from her colleagues, and after being out of high school for 20 years, received her bachelor’s degree.

Another example of the need for a career change involved another situation. Lenn was a hair stylist, but after receiving a diagnosis of acute pancreatitis and ending up in the intensive

care unit on her deathbed, her doctor mandated that she not continue her current occupation. Standing up all day would continue to give Lenn health complications. She described it by saying, “My doctor said I would die. It will kill me” to one of the directors on campus to try to secure an on-campus job in the computer lab. Lenn had no choice—she had to finish her degree to change her career path. It was a life-or-death situation for her.

Desire to Prove Stereotypes Wrong

A couple of the participants received negative feedback and had stereotypes imposed on them while attending high school. Because of the stereotypical way in which they were viewed, this provided an extra motivation for the participants to do well in school and life overall. Jennifer was especially affected by a negative situation. Because this affected her so much, it became one of her main motivations for attending college. This is the best example in this study of pushing back against the stereotypes that professionals in local high schools used in their communication and teaching Appalachian girls.

I don't know. I just always...if somebody told me I couldn't do it—then I was going to do it. So, I actually had my algebra teacher in high school—I got pregnant—I had the child. [The teacher made her believe this] I was never going to amount to anything—I was always going to live in my county and live off of welfare. And I actually couldn't believe somebody said that to me...he verbally said this to me. And I graduated eighth in my class with a child. I took college classes when I was in high school and I worked. Yeah, I was like wait a minute...I was in National Honor Society. I was in band. I was in drama club. I was in all these things. It pissed me off and I was like how dare you? How dare you say that? He was a lay preacher so how can you be a man of God and say that to somebody? It was horrible. I went home and told my mom and she said “Prove

him wrong.” [She started to cry in the interview]. “Prove him wrong. I know you can do it, you know you can do it, I am here to help to care of your son and when it’s time for daycare—we will get him in daycare and we will prove him wrong.” So, it pissed me off and then here I go. It was like—how dare you? But now I look back on it and I am like—oh my gosh—17 years later. Yeah, I almost want to thank that teacher.

Jennifer did prove her teacher wrong and she admitted that his attitude toward her reflected how he stereotyped many of the girls in her high school. When talking about the negative stereotyping and negative expectations placed on her she stated, “I’ll be damned if I am part of that culture.”

Redemption from a Bad Relationship

Sara experienced a failing marriage where she was torn between the expectations of a traditional Appalachian woman and the woman she found herself to be after her experience in India and working at the local college. One of the great motivators for Sara was to succeed academically and show her ex-husband that she could survive against all odds.

When I applied for graduation I so wanted to do that in my maiden name and I couldn’t. I hadn’t legally changed my name because I had kept it for the children. And they wouldn’t hyphenate it. But you know I just wanted to walk across that stage and go like this [shook her fist] to him...to the person who didn’t support me. “Ha! I did it without you!”

This type of motivation was part of Sara’s self-authorship where she finally found her own voice and realized the power of her abilities as an individual.

Economic Motivation

All participants offered specific quotes about their motivation to receive a college degree.

Providing a more stable income and trying to earn the credentials for a better job were motivators for all of the participants when it came to supporting their families and children.

When Marie found herself pregnant in high school, there was no doubt that she wanted to obtain her GED. She accomplished this, and when asked in the interview about her motivation to do this, she responded, “I don’t know what made me do it. I knew if I wanted a decent job and didn’t want my son to go through what I went through I knew I had to do something.” Even as she nears the completion of her degree, she recognized just recently how her degree attainment would also positively influence her sons. When her son asked her about her homework and showed interest in what she was trying to do, this motivated her even more to complete her degree.

LaRay found herself divorced and a single mother with two children to care for. Knowing that she needed to do something to provide for them just as her mother did for her, LaRay had to look at her options. With so many positions asking for a college degree and realizing that scrubbing floors was not going to be enough, LaRay was motivated to enroll in college. She declared, “Failure wasn’t an option and being caught up in the system was not an option.” Anne echoed a similar perspective with her economic motivation to attend college. She explained, “And then I finally got sick of running ragged 40 hours a week and not having nothing to show for it so that made me come back.” Anne included that she felt like she “let her family down by being fired” so she started attending college for her family and to “get a career.” Tiffany also expressed how she wanted a better career option to provide a more stable income in a field she

was interested in. Witnessing her mother's daycare, Tiffany knew that she had to earn her college degree.

Motivation to Positively Influence Family

There were several instances where family was a very noticeable motivation for these women to obtain their college degrees. All of the women expressed the desire to succeed in ways that ranged from being a role model to their children to honoring the support and encouragement they received from family members.

Jennifer became emotional when speaking about how her motivation to attend college held strong even when she found herself pregnant in high school. She admitted that she did not care how it happened, but she had to go to college. That same determination that Jennifer had for herself is what she uses to encourage her sons: "And I keep telling my kids that, I have three now, and I keep telling them that there is no choice. You are smart. You can do this. We will find the money—you will go to college." Marie reflected the same encouragement for her sons by expressing how she wanted to make their lives better too. She tells them, "Yes, you are in a smaller area but in the Appalachian area you can step out of whatever. You can overcome whatever and step out—you can be resilient."

LaRay and Lenn provided another perspective by honoring the support and encouragement that came from their parents. Both Lenn and LaRay described that they wanted to pass along the same encouragement and support through their actions as their parents did. LaRay expressed that part of her motivation to attend college was because she wanted to provide for her children but at the same time did not want to do it in the manner her mother did. LaRay said, "Because I knew that I wanted to work someday to take care of my kids without killing myself [working] like my mom did." LaRay felt that her degree attainment has indeed positively

impacted her children now that her son has expressed the desire to also obtain his degree after high school. Lenn also mentioned her father's positive influence by supporting her. She always strives for excellence because that was her father's expectation for her in her life. She stated that he was the type of father you didn't want to disappoint because of his belief in her excellence.

Motivation to Influence Other Appalachian Women/Communities

Whether it was daughters, granddaughters, or nieces, the participants supplied examples of how they were motivated to finish and do well because each wanted to be a positive influence of future generations of women in their families. The participants were also actively contributing to their communities in different ways. Most gave an example of how they are doing this including others who aspire to contribute more in the future.

In regard to motivation for influencing other Appalachian women, Sara brought up the motivation and the result of her achievement when her daughter told her that she (her daughter) never thought about anything other than going to college after high school. For Sara, that was a great result of her motivation to positively influence her daughters. Tiffany is already seeing the impact of her motivation to provide an example to her daughter that college is an option. Tiffany said, "Even at three years old she is like, 'Yeah. I want to go to college. My mom works at the college.'" Tiffany expressed delight to see that her daughter already loves to learn in preschool and this has been a great motivator for Tiffany to finish her degree.

Lenn now has a granddaughter whom she is extremely close with. She is already telling her granddaughter "in order to be better, you must do better." The influence on future generations is starting to happen for Appalachian women in this area. Lisa even stated how she has been a resource to her niece who just began college. She expressed that she wants to help

her niece because she knows how important having support is when trying to graduate with a degree.

Influencing the surrounding community was also evident in the interview sessions. Tiffany explained that other students from campus that she has assisted with resources in the library come up to her when she is shopping and thank Tiffany for her guidance. Tiffany expressed that little things like that help keep her focused on her goal. Since Lenn completed her degrees, she has made it her community purpose “to help younger White and African-American women in Appalachia know that they can have that voice and can attain a higher level of achievement.” Lenn explained that this purpose will combat the guilt that younger women in Appalachia often feel when obtaining their college degrees and instead have them become leaders and (like in a relay race) be that woman who has her hand reaching back to keep moving women in the region forward.

Marie and Jennifer expressed future goals to help their community that help keep them motivated toward their degree attainment. Marie actually did not realize that she is already impacting her community until it came to her in the interview session that she was asked to grand marshal her community’s parade because of the advocacy work she did to save the community pool. In addition, Marie would like to talk to high school girls about their future opportunities, including those who may be already pregnant. She mentioned that the teen pregnancy rate was still high in her region and she did not want girls to lose hope or fall into the stereotypes placed on them by teachers, families, or community members. Jennifer expressed her desire to also give back to the area—especially in her role as an elementary teacher. No matter what influence the participants will have on future generations and their communities, their degree attainment has been and will continue to be necessary.

Main Resources

Participants gave insight into the types of resources that they used to help them achieve success in college. In this section resources are divided between programs/services and people who helped participants in their journeys. In addition, strategies that participants used in order to keep going in their classes and life off campus are examined. The categories are divided into examples of goal-setting and when participants used reflection as part of their skillset to help them succeed.

Programs/Services

Programs used as resources for participants varied. There was mention of service outside Appalachia, campus resources, and community resources that were helpful to only a few of the participants. Lenn mentioned that attending professional conferences outside Appalachia was a great resource for her as an African-American Appalachian. Having the opportunity to witness the large numbers of African Americans who are educated and have a voice is empowering to her to use her voice within her Appalachian community.

Anne described campus resources as a way she navigated through her degree as a first-generation student. Besides the financial aid and admissions offices, Anne mentioned that while taking a difficult course she did use the tutoring center as well. Marie also used a community program as a resource that introduced her to the initial thought of pursuing her degree. In order to receive her certification as a daycare administrator, she had to attend a community workshop led by one of the regional campus faculty members. The program was connected to a college program that led to licensure, and that is what enticed Marie to continue on at the regional campus.

People

The main resources that participants utilized throughout their lives, and especially in their experiences in higher education, had to do with people who acted in various roles. The themes are divided into high school support, faculty and staff support, family support, and church support.

Tiffany gave an example of how she was influenced to attend college. She described a female counselor who would visit her high school on a regular basis. Tiffany spoke to her about her options and found out that this counselor actually worked at the local regional campus as a multicultural advisor. She was a great resource to Tiffany along with Tiffany's best friend, who works at the community college campus also as a multicultural advisor. These two individuals helped shape Tiffany's motivation and goals to come back and finish her degree.

Another example of high school support happened to Jennifer. She used to be a student assistant in high school to the guidance counselors. One guidance counselor in particular assisted Jennifer by advising her on college. She even helped Jennifer with college applications and waived ACT test fees for her. Jennifer expressed her genuine appreciation for all that her high school counselor did for her.

A common theme for how people served as resources for the participants were the faculty and staff members of the local regional campus. Sara worked on campus, and she gave credit for completing her degree to the entire faculty and staff who provided her with the resources and help she needed. Sara would borrow books from professors because she could not afford to pay for them. She even described how faculty members would drive her kids to school events/practices when Sara had a class. She admitted that she "could not have done it without all those people that were there to help."

Lisa and Jennifer also expressed that faculty members on campus were extremely helpful and understanding. Lisa mentioned that she was “able to laugh and cry” and ultimately be herself in front of professors. Jennifer stated that the faculty members “get it” when it came to nontraditional student issues. Being able to text her professor when her son was sick and having him reply “that’s okay” was amazing support for her.

Lenn was offered the job in the computer lab for health reasons, but also because the director took notice that Lenn did not have a computer at home and would spend much of her time in the lab. The fact that he took notice and was very quick with offering her a job helped Lenn in a variety of ways. Marie also found herself panicked when confronted with an application deadline for a particular degree program. Not applying on time for this program would have delayed her graduation. Her faculty member was able to calm her down and then ask her the question, “How important is this to you? Because if this is important, then you will find the time to sit down and complete it tonight.” This type of support encouraged and made Marie accountable for what steps she needed to take to apply for her degree.

Family members and friends were another area of support. Participants carried a strong theme throughout the interviews regarding support from other women. These women included mothers, an ex-mother-in-law, a niece, and groups of friends/classmates. Mothers helped from simply watching Lenn’s kids while she checked on a job opportunity to Tiffany’s mother daily seeing her three-year-old daughter off to preschool and other school activities. Tiffany commented, “And if she wasn’t [helping] then I would not be able to do this.” Even Sara mentioned that her ex-husband’s mother still supported Sara by helping with her daughters so that Sara could earn her degree.

Jennifer not only talked about her mother's support while she had her son in high school, she was the only participant who mentioned support from her husband. Because her husband works on the weekends, he is in charge of making sure their kids do their homework and he may also do laundry. Even with his support, Jennifer still cooks on the weekend for the entire week, does most of the laundry, and takes her sons to their weekend sports activities while her husband works. Lisa gave the best scenario of how group women who were attending classes support each other when she said,

And once I had set on a major...when I first started it was education so I was in education and the girls I was in classes with—we all supported each other and helped each other out so that was a big support system there because we could call each other up on the phone and like “Like how do we do this?” So that was a big help there.

The support from these various people for the participants was key to their success on a daily basis.

Another group that was mentioned by a few participants was support from their church “families.” The network at church was a huge support resource that Lenn and LaRay mentioned. Lenn commented that her “church were [her] supporters.” LaRay talked in great detail about how her church supported her through difficult times. LaRay gave examples such as giving her a house with low rent, a church member giving her a car to use, and toys for her children at Christmas. LaRay talked about her appreciation of her church's support and how she believes that she started to attend her church for a reason:

I just think that it was God's ways of saying these are My people and My people take care of My people. I think...and you know when you bless someone you are always blessed. And they—we were taught—pastor's motto is you pass it on—you have to pay

it forward. You have to pay it forward because if you pay forward you are always going to have. You know it's kind of almost an unspoken thing – I don't believe I ended up in my church by accident.

Marie also commented on the support she has gained from her church. She discussed how some women in her church might not understand why she is pursuing her degree but still support her in her goals.

Strategies Used

The participant interviews revealed that each person had some kind of strategy to get her through her college experience and to be able to even consider college as one of her opportunities. Goal setting and reflection were the two main strategies participants used.

Goal Setting

Participants described instances where they made goals and then achieved them. Sara and Jennifer even went back into their childhood and had memories of “playing school” because they loved to do well and help others learn. Lenn said that she had made a list of things she wanted to accomplish in her life:

I always had this list of things that I wanted to do in my life. Of course I wanted to ride a motorcycle as my parents did...I wanted to ride a motorcycle. I wanted to be a Christian counselor. I wanted to be a hairdresser. I wanted to ride in a helicopter. I wanted to ride on a cruise. You know the things...the fantasy things you think you will never be able to do.

Fortunately, these were not fantasy things because Lenn has been able to achieve all of her listed items except for the helicopter ride. As she discussed her list and achievements, she mentioned causally, “maybe I should make another list.”

Life goals were part of the interviews but so were academic goals, which spoke to the grit and persistence of the participants in their pursuit of their degrees. Tiffany explained that she was on probation status with her grade point average. Because of this status, Tiffany recognized the importance of raising her grade point average and commented, “I feel like I have to be extra disciplined because some of them [courses] are very slim in the assignments so if you don’t do spectacular on every single one, you know that can bring you down.”

Lisa, Anne, Marie, and LaRay expressed in general setting high expectations for performance in school and life. Upon returning to college after stopping out, Anne stated, “I have higher expectations for myself” in regard to her coursework. Lisa also displayed frustration over a teacher-licensing test she could not pass. She pushed herself to study in every conceivable way and took it four times. When she did not pass it, she finally was forced to change her major, but this change has not stopped Lisa from wanting to finish her degree. Marie and LaRay both mentioned wanting to go on to receive a master’s degree and become licensed social workers. LaRay even set the goal to at least receive her licensure even if she could not afford a master’s degree program.

Goal setting was a highly used skill among all of the participants in this study. Because of setting high expectations for themselves, they provided another layer of motivation. One other skill was evident during interview discussions. The practice of self-reflection was prominent with half of the participants.

Sara commented on a reflection paper she had to write for one of her courses. During her reflection she came to the realization that she was pursuing her degree to break the “generational cycle” she saw her grandmother and mother both go through. She also reflected on how she was questioned by her now ex-husband about why she would want a degree and then how she

immediately received confirmation about her decision when her professor from the main campus told her she could “do this.”

Other experiences with reflection happened differently for a few other participants. When Lenn was in the intensive care unit struggling to survive, she remembered using that time to reflect on God. This time in her life gave her a situation where all she could do was pray and reflect. She stated, “It truly helped me to see that I am nothing without God in my life.” Her illness propelled her in her faith and relationship with God because He was the only thing she had in that moment.

Anne and Marie also expressed reflection related to their academics. Anne kept a list of pros and cons about things and would reflect on why and how she was going to accomplish her academic goals. Marie also reflected by visualizing how she would feel walking across the stage at her graduation. With reflection, participants were able to assess where they were within their identities and also where they wanted to go in life, including degree attainment.

Overall Theme: An Obligation to Future Generations

Throughout the interviews, one major theme stood out when talking to the participants about why they decided to pursue a college degree against all the odds (for example, being in an impoverished culture and being a first-generation student): the feeling that they must do better for the sake of their future generations. In the Appalachian culture, generational cycles are entrenched in relation to degree attainment, poverty, traditional roles for women, and family values. Even though some generational cycles support a positive outlook on community and culture, there are some cycles—especially those that impact women the hardest—that still need to be broken. All of the participants have demonstrated the motivation to break generational

cycles by forging ahead with their education to provide even more opportunities for other women and the Appalachian community.

All of participants mentioned doing better not just for themselves but for their families, future generations, and their communities. Sara expressed that she strives to be a better role model for her daughters, and Lenn expressed the same sentiment by explaining that she already tells her granddaughter that “in order to be better you have to do better.”

Tiffany realized during the interview that by finishing her degree she was ultimately breaking the cycle of not attending college by being a first-generation student in her family. She became emotional thinking about the impact that finishing her degree will have on her daughter. The same emotion carried through to Anne, who is pursuing her college degree to better herself and to “better [her] family.” Lisa does not have children of her own, but her niece was someone she mentioned whom she wanted to positively impact, by providing her niece guidance while she is also starting college. This gives Lisa a glimpse at the impact her success in college will have on her family was well.

Jennifer discussed how she recognized that her grandparents wanted better for their family and supported higher education. Even though her grandparents and parents received good grades, because they were “very poor” no one in Jennifer’s family was able to even think about attending college. Another statement made by Jennifer showed rebellion against the stereotypes of Appalachians living off of assistance programs. When she stated, “I’ll be damned if I was going to be part of that culture,” her expression displayed a strong desire to keep pressing forward and achieving the goal her grandparents always wanted for their family.

LaRay’s overall purpose was similar to Jennifer’s because she also did not want to be part of the stereotype “that you [Appalachians] won’t amount to anything. Her desire was to

positively influence her own children by showing them they had options. She mentioned that her son is now telling her he wants to obtain his degree after high school, which has made LaRay proud of her role modeling. Marie discussed how she did not want her son to go through what she went through, so one of her main purposes in obtaining her degree is to “make their lives better too.”

Summary

The interviews with the eight Appalachian women proved to be an enriching experience. Their willingness to share their backgrounds and journey was overwhelming. In the next chapter, the quotes and experiences will be analyzed and compared to the research findings drawn from the literature review. Although it seems that some elements of the Appalachian culture have not changed over the years, it does not mean that the community of Appalachians has given up despite dire economic restraints. Instead, it seems that fierceness has emerged to break the generational cycles that affect not just financial struggles but also thought, career aspirations, and much more.

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of impoverished women from the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region who have matriculated at institutions of higher education. Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who enroll in college and desire to obtain a college education often find themselves shifting in and out of welfare and other assistance programs and are typically unsuccessful in attaining a college degree (Kates, 1996). Calling greater attention to this problem may motivate more scholars to analyze the conditions of women in poverty in relation to the attainment of college degrees and generate fruitful insights that should eventually yield more effective higher education programs and assistance (Deprez, 2003).

This chapter includes discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research related to the outcomes of this study. The discussion will examine the main themes that emerged from the interview data, comparing and contrasting the findings with the foundational literature. Themes will be discussed in the order they appeared in the results chapters (five and six). After the discussion, I examine why this study is important and the implications it could have for various professional fields. Finally, the last portion of this chapter presents recommendations for future research. To support these recommendations, more examples of existing research are provided and then expanded on to offer a better understanding of how research on student success in higher education can improve theories, practices, and institutional policies.

Elements of the Appalachian Culture

The data collected from the interviews of Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women gave a consistent and accurate outlook on the current culture of Appalachia. Comments from participants that pertained to the overwhelming lack of industry and the low socioeconomic

status that most community members experience align with past and current research depicting Appalachia as one of the most impoverished regions in the United States. Research performed by Henderson and Tickamyer (2006) and Billings and Blee (2000) described the same impoverishment of Appalachia, noting high unemployment, low educational attainment, and the lack of jobs. Even though women are usually the victims of poverty in the region, there tends to be a culture of intergenerational poverty among Appalachian families (Billings & Blee, 2000; Latimer, 2000). With all of the participants representing women from Mid-Atlantic Appalachia, their experiences of poverty within their communities still represents the same climate of economic hardship (especially for women) that has occurred over past generations.

Another aspect of the Appalachian culture reported by participants is the feeling that communities were very close-knit and relied extensively on their members for sustainability. The closeness explained by the participants relates directly to family capital (family-based social capital), which includes the relationships with family members and their culture (Gofen, 2009, p. 107). High levels of family capital show up throughout many of the sub-themes reflected in the data collected. This high level of family capital was a powerful resource these particular Appalachian women were able to use to push through the various barriers they faced while attending college.

Transmission of Appalachian Culture through Family Networks

For the Appalachian women interviewed, family capital was very high, as exemplified by how their values and traditions passed from generation to generation. Nearing their graduation from college, these women still hold family as one of their top priorities. But this family culture can also have a negative impact on progress. For example, if a family has a high-level family capital but is isolated within a community, opportunities such as access to higher education may

never present themselves (Gofen, 2009). In contrast, if a woman from Mid-Atlantic Appalachia comes from a resilient low-income family that has not bonded in isolation, then her chance of obtaining a higher level of education is better (Gofen, 2009). The participants within this current study all have, or will soon be obtaining, their bachelor's degrees, suggesting that all may have been influenced by this factor, which could account for why they were able to progress and improve the status of their families for future generations.

The values of work and personal responsibility for contributing to the family were evident in all of the interviews. This was reflected in the pattern that most of the participants who came from a traditional family all mentioned their fathers worked as laborers, with the exception of one who was a music minister in a church. Even participants from single-mother households mentioned pink collar jobs or manufacturing as the occupations their mothers held while struggling to make ends meet. As mentioned by Harper (2000), the reliance of people working together to provide finances or other resources for survival is a strong cultural tie for women in the region. However, the value of hard work often conflicts with the option of attending college when going to college may interfere with a woman's immediate ability to provide economic resources for her family (Harper, 2000). For the participants, a strong work ethic was prevalent within all of their families. These women were able to gain support for going to college, however, because it eventually offered another way to provide a more stable income for their families. Some of the participants took on pink collar jobs temporarily, but the general feeling was that ultimately a college education would lead to jobs that would provide more than what they were currently earning. The tension that goes along with valuing hard work, maintaining a stable job, and obtaining their degrees did create stress for the participants,

especially as they struggled to face the pursuit of a higher education and how it affected their families and the larger community (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993).

Traditional Role Expectations in Appalachian Culture

The findings of this study reinforce the fact that traditional role expectations for women still exist in Appalachia today. Participants described learning at a young age “how a woman should be” and the “chore responsibilities” of women. This learned culture value of being the main caregiver for the family unit was prevalent among all participants, whether they lived in a traditional family or single parent home. Latimer (2000) also emphasized this expectation as an important part of the culture for Appalachian women.

In the interviews it was apparent that the caregiver role seems to encompass not only fulfilling the traditional responsibilities of wife and mother but may also extend to providing financial support. This pattern might, of course, reflect the fact that a woman’s progress toward earning a college degree instills hope that financial stability may finally be achieved through earning a professional position. Bui’s (2002) research seems to support this interpretation, given that the participants in the current study indicated their main reason for attending college was to assist their families financially. But it is also possible that the pattern represents the ongoing battle of finding balance between family responsibilities and being successful in their pursuit of a degree (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Stieha (2009) also provided support for this in noting that Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who are involved in family relationships while at the same time trying to adapt to the expectations of college life reported that they experienced guilt or tension as a result.

Influence of Appalachian Culture on Educational Experiences

The experiences reported by the study participants illustrated diverse levels of emphasis on the importance of education. Because the women interviewed were all first-generation college students, many of their parents only had a high school diploma (with the exception of one mother who did not have a high school diploma or a GED). In addition, the participants who naturally excelled in K-12 education and had good grades often mentioned that education was not verbally emphasized to them while growing up, yet there was an unspoken expectation that they do well. For the women who took part in this study at least, parents encouraged their daughters to do their best, strive for excellence, and get good grades in order to obtain scholarships or other forms of financial assistance so they could attend college. Women in this study seem to have come from resilient low-income families, which helped them resist negative attitudes toward school and allowed them to see the economic advantages of receiving a college degree (Gofen, 2009).

Interestingly, McCarron and Inkelas (2006) reported that although the best indicator for educational aspirations of non-first-generation students was parental involvement, the best indicator of educational aspirations for first-generation students was the importance of good grades. The parents of the participants in this study were reported to have encouraged good grades (verbally or through unspoken expectations), so this support may have helped to counteract certain cultural values in Appalachia that at times work to undermine the attainment of a college degree.

Elements of Poverty and the Impact of Low Socioeconomic Status

The socioeconomic landscape of Appalachia seems to have remained stagnant over the years, according to the data collected from the participants of this study. The experiences the

study participants reported indicated that they all had lived in poverty. Some participants were enrolled in public assistance programs periodically and others may have been on such programs continuously or will not have a chance to get off those programs until after the individuals complete their college degrees. The impact of their low socioeconomic status correlated with other findings of the overall poverty rates for women in the United States. The single mothers within this study all used, or are still using, public assistance to make ends meet. Of the three African American and five White women in the study, all used public assistance.

The feminization of poverty (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001) exists in Appalachia and was depicted throughout each participant's interview. The failing policy structures discussed by Latimer (2000) clearly shape these gender-linked economic outcomes and the impact of poverty on women in Appalachia. Especially for the single-parent families, participants struggled to make ends meet even if they worked more than one job. As Jennifer explained in her interview, she felt that her brothers had "all these other options" but not her. The lack of employment opportunities made Jennifer even more determined to get a college degree. The main goal for all of the participants in the study was to improve the socioeconomic status of their families, and they believe that obtaining a college degree would help make that possible (Ishitani, 2006; Jones, 2004).

Socioeconomic Constraints and Use of Financial Assistance

Participants shared their experiences of having to use public assistance and how this affected them in relation to their families, perceptions of assistance, and the lack of jobs/benefits. All participants used public assistance at one time or other during their lives. Not only did they have to use public assistance, they also witnessed the use of public assistance within their communities. For all of the participants within this study, if they were currently using some type

of program or special funding, their desire was to try to get off of the assistance as soon as possible. Other participants who had already received their degree were able to come off of their assistance but still faced economic hardships because of the lack of well-paid professional positions within the area.

Even with some participants being employed in pink collar jobs, the use of public assistance was a necessity. Although most women in poverty agree that higher education is likely to produce better employment opportunities, the programs and resources they are forced to use provide little in the way of education and chances for building valuable skills (E. K. Anderson & Hoy, 2006). As Adair (2001) suggested, just because welfare reform policies have helped decrease the number of people using assistance, this does not mean it actually propels families out of poverty. These persistent problems in the Appalachian economic system that all participants described underscore why receiving a college degree is monumental in its consequences.

Socioeconomic Influences on the Family

The upbringing and current lives of the participants were discussed throughout their interviews to describe the effect of low family socioeconomic status. Participants became emotional when describing events that ranged from having to “wear cardboard in the bottom of shoes” to not having any medical coverage for their families. The struggle of trying to make ends meet was not only a normal part of their culture, but also at the same time painful to these participants. The impact of being in poverty was a major factor when deciding to pursue and obtain their college degree. With a degree they felt they would be better equipped to battle poverty and to assist their immediate and extended families.

Because there is still inequity in yearly earnings between women and men, women have to work more to make ends meet, which also takes time away from their families (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). This creates a tension between the demands of family and work to the extent that a few women verbally expressed their tension/guilt during their interviews. The single mothers who were interviewed commented on these feelings most directly, with LaRay still holding on to the hope that she will one day be able to support her family without “killing herself like [her] mother did.”

Socioeconomic Impact on Education

Expressing their identities as Appalachian women, the participants openly shared how their low socioeconomic status brought out stereotypes of them as women in poverty—especially in their K-12 experiences. The impact of poverty also affected the access they had to college and their ability to obtain the basic necessities they required while finally attending school. The women were not only hurt and surprised by the stereotypes that some high school counselors and teachers held and by the verbal downgrading they received from these professionals, but for some participants it provided the motivation to “prove them wrong.” Without stable financial situations, many of the participants were forced to choose minimum-wage jobs over attending classes, which delayed degree attainment for all of the participants interviewed. Reay (2003) also pointed out this same dilemma and reported that when women find work to come off welfare, the work often conflicts with college coursework. This cycle has some women caught between systems. The women in this study were able to combat their guilt of being away from their children by reminding themselves of the benefits a degree will provide once they finish.

Another dimension of the difficulties low socioeconomic women face while in college is the lack of consistency of financial aid—especially for the women who relied on financial aid for

necessities while in school. According to DeFreitas & Duffy (2004), financial aid has become the new welfare in higher education. As reflected in the case of LaRay, if she depended on some of her financial aid to assist with school and living expenses then the mistake made on her financial aid package did have a huge impact on whether she was able to stay in school. Because some women may rely on financial aid, they not only struggle to attain a degree but will also have substantial amounts of loans to repay when they graduate—an outcome that is likely to offset a substantial part of their financial gain (DeFreitas & Duffy, 2004). However, because these women had experienced poverty, they may have been less likely to take out loans because of their reluctance to accrue debt (Bergerson, 2007; Furstenberg, 2008).

Elements of Identity

The culture and external conditions of life in Appalachia impacted the participants in many ways, but it especially shaped the natural progression of their internal identity development. Even though all participants have received or will be shortly receiving their degrees, the disparity between the models their culture presented to them and the realization that they had other options of who they could become created tension for all of them.

Given the nature of their environment and the patterns found within the data, two theories of identity development help to explain the participants' experiences. Baxter Magolda (2007), for example, stated that self-authorship exposes the area of identity development where students remove themselves from authorities and begin to develop their own values, feelings, and purpose. The authorities for women in Appalachia range from the oppressive structures they confront regarding the lack of finances, adequate employment, traditional role expectations, and the negative stereotypes expressed to them. Because of these pressures, the participants expressed moments within the interviews where they felt oppressed but managed to find their

own voice eventually, or are well on their way to doing so. Because identity crisis can lead to growth, the women interviewed were all able to face their different situations and survive (Gilligan, 1993). Gilligan (1993) also mentioned that in order for women in poverty to be successful in navigating through crisis, they must also succeed at building social capital and networks. All of the participants have been able to do this by linking their current status as a college student to the rest of their world as mothers, daughters, and community members.

Exposed Stages of Development

During the interview sessions, participants were able to expose times of tension within their identity development process and then show the result of how they thought about themselves and the amount of authorship they had over their lives. Findings from Baxter Magolda (2007) and Gilligan (1993) provided important insights into the situations that molded each participant. In some cases, participants had a clear moment when they realized they were controlled by outside expectations and began to develop their own goals and desires in response to this recognition.

One of the main themes in regard to moments of crisis or tension focused on the marital stability of the participants. Lenn, Sara, and LaRay all had experienced divorce before or during their pursuit of college degrees. In addition, Lisa went through a break-up of a long-time relationship with a boyfriend. Because poor women often held lower levels of capital and lower socioeconomic standing, their emotional learning would not come after their degrees were completed but instead would occur right along with the adjustments and stresses that the college experience can bring (Baxter Magolda, 2007). In some instances, divorces or break-ups propelled them into pursuing their degrees—not just for increasing their financial capital, but for becoming who they found themselves to be as individuals.

Other moments of identity growth came in the form of finding/realizing their intelligence. For some participants this occurred while going through the K-12 system when they recognized that they “loved to learn” and were able to complete work more successfully than their classmates. In Anne’s case she found that she could write high school papers for her brother while she was attending middle school. Even if this realization got lost in moments of their lives, it is the academic capital they possessed that gave them more encouragement that college was an option. Because they had relatively high levels of academic capital, this may have helped to lead them into connecting their purpose in college to their relationships with family and friends who recognized their academic potential.

Spirituality in Relation to Identity

One of the unique findings within this research that has not received as much attention as it may deserve is the strong connection of the participants’ spirituality with their identities. The media has tended to depict residents of the Appalachian region as extremely religious and this study confirms that characterization. Not only did all of the participants express to know God but they also described living a life of prayer and believed they had a higher purpose. Only one participant even discussed the possibility of a more global perspective of God, but this was the only participant who lived and worked outside the United States, in India, for a short period of time. Prayer, church activities, and leaning on God for strength were all mentioned by the participants in their interviews.

Feldman and Moseley (2003) supported the notion that the Appalachian region has a strong Christian tradition. This is also revealed in findings from Wortham and Wortham (2007) that described the tradition of religion as so strong that it forms a type of family subculture. The moral obligations within this subculture are evident in the participants’ interviews. Anne stated

that even though she did not attend church regularly she still had her “moral compass” and said that she was alive “because God wasn’t done with [her] yet.” Other findings from Wortham and Wortham (2007, p. 444) noted that characteristics such as increased optimism, greater civic responsibility, more tolerance of racial and ethnic groups, and longer academic performance (attending post-secondary education) correlated with spirituality. These characteristics were true among all of the participants in this current study as well. As women in poverty from the Appalachian community, these women supported each other no matter what race or ethnicity an individual was. In addition, for these women to succeed in college, a certain hope had to exist. This sense of hope served as a linchpin linking a strong responsibility to improve one’s community and family situation with the eventual attainment of a college degree.

LaRay and Lenn exemplify this best when they described the support they received from their churches. LaRay commented that in her perspective the support she receives is “God’s way of saying these are My people and My people take care of My people...you know when you bless someone you are always blessed.” It has been recognized that having a nonjudgmental outlook on people can contribute to the development of social capital because it allows individuals to relate and support marginalized groups (such as themselves; Wortham & Wortham, 2007, p. 444). This characteristic may hold true especially for women in this study who are going against their traditional cultural roles by exploring other opportunities, obtaining a college degree, and developing intellectually (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993). Overall, the participants’ spirituality may be a tool they use in order to cope with unbearable circumstances (Greenlee & Lantz, 1993).

Race, Gender, and Oppression

Freire's (2009) pedagogy of the oppressed is relatable to the results of this study. He discussed how there is an unjust society in which oppressors (those in power) and the oppressed are in constant battle. For this study, themes revolved around the Appalachian culture and illustrated a few of the different oppressive structures in place for the women in this particular study. Traditional role expectations, lack of options for women in employment, the need of financial assistance, and patriarchal leadership structures within the community and family are all examples of the oppression these participants battle or have battled. Just as Anne and Jennifer pointed out while in the K-12 system, the negative stereotypes were prevalent because of the oppressive structures in place. Being told they were "not college material" or "would end up on welfare" illustrates a small part of what these women had to experience in their region and Appalachian culture.

A few other examples of the oppression within the Mid-Atlantic Appalachian region for these participants involve the overtly accepted traditional role of women. Lisa explained that she was taught at an early age which chores women were responsible for in the home. Sara also described that through her mother she learned "how a woman should be." This gave Sara the perception that housework was the priority not homework while she was going through K-12. Even the participants who were married and with children found themselves feeling tension between the traditional role they were still expected to fulfill and their role as a college student. Lenn best explained, "...we (women of Appalachia) are limited to always be the nurturer, the caregiver. Not all these other things."

One of the important features of Freire's (2009) pedagogy is the idea of dialogue and how informal education/conversation needs to happen to form structures of respect in order for

people to work with each other. The women interviewed in Mid-Atlantic Appalachia demonstrated this dialogue by being able to build social networks through dialogue to combat the oppressive structures that would normally hinder them from college degree attainment. Lisa made it very clear that without social support with faculty and other students, she would not have been able to continue college.

In addition, Freire (2009) emphasized the importance of praxis—which is informed action that is linked to values. If dialogue is occurring among people that involve respect then this needs to lead to action that increases justice within society and learning (Freire, 2009). The women in this study have been examples of how they could be informed about the value of education and through dialogue reconciled this to their traditional role expectations. The action of these women being successful in college within an impoverished region is bringing a counter-balance or sense of justice for the marginalized populations that have been oppressed by structures of racism, classism, and sexism. An example given by Lenn was her goal to make sure women who take on leadership roles within the community hold on to the position or pass it along to other women to continue to battle against patriarchal leadership structures.

Another movement that supports challenging the oppressive social structures by using praxis is through critical race theorists. Critical race theory (CRT) was created to combat the oppressive structures of racial discrimination developed in the United States. Not only is CRT dedicated to understanding how racism was formed in the United States but also how members of society are able to combat it. This information is disseminated through scholarly research (Chapman, 2013). As Chapman stated, “the goals of CRT is to eradicate injustice based on undeserved, systemic inequalities” (p. 102). Related to this study is the movement for social justice for marginalized populations that could include classism and patriarchal structures

(Chapman, 2013). This group of scholars uses praxis in the form of engaging in social justice through research and activism (Chapman, 2013). The community engagement of the women in this study mirrors the same type of praxis by using their college degree attainment as resources to battle the injustices found within the Appalachian culture.

One aspect of critical race theory is the interest convergence principle (Bell, 1980). The interest convergence principle was developed by Bell (1980) that asserted how Blacks in the United States are only able to progress in society if their goals/interests are aligned with White elitists (or those in power). This principle sums up the fact the racial discrimination in the United States is a permanent structure and creates race realism (Bell, 1980, p. 14). This may also be reflected in the experiences of the African American women who participated in this study. Because the African American participants are also experiencing the same Appalachian culture as White women, their efforts align and create a strong network to combat the oppression they face on a daily basis. Lenn asserted that her purpose is to mentor Appalachian women (White and African American) to help develop their sense of confidence and abilities to create a new generation of community leaders. Her experience leads to the topic of intersectionality.

Intersectionality

The African American women in this study illustrate an extra dimension of oppression. Their intersectionality of not only being female and of low socioeconomic standing is combined with the other layer of being African American. Lenn, LaRay, and Tiffany provided small glimpses into their experiences as African American women living in and attending college in Appalachia.

Along with identifying as Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women experiencing poverty, the interviews picked up other traces of intersectionality within the identities of the participants.

Intersectionality denotes when an individual is able to possess different layers of an identity (E. K. Anderson & Hill Collins, 2013). The intersection of different aspects of an individual's identity could include being a woman who is African American, living in poverty, and lesbian. This is an example of how there are many different pathways toward an identity and where the pathways intersect yielding the fullest description of a person's individuality or perspective. LaRay, Lenn, and Tiffany all reported their ethnicity as African American. This was a unique perspective compared to the other women in the study, but it did not illustrate any major differences because being in poverty seemed to drive many of the similarities within the identities of the participants. There were some important key points in LaRay, Lenn, and Tiffany's comments that spoke to some of the racial disparities that still occur within their communities.

Racism still occurs in this region in a few forms. Lenn had a campus professional speak with her when she first visited the campus to apply and was advised by him not to attend college by stating that she should "stay home with her boys so that they do not become part of the system like so many other African American males." In another instance, Lenn explained that even trying to obtain a loan from the bank is difficult because of her race. She explained that even though she might be able to receive a loan, the interest rate would be much higher than average, around 10%-15%. LaRay also mentioned that her professional position advocates for people by connecting them to resources such as housing and financial programs. Over the phone she has asked about availability for an apartment for her client. She is told that there is and then when she physically goes with her client to the apartment complex and meets the landlord, all of a sudden there is no vacancy. Tiffany even stated how she, her father, and her brother were the only visibly diverse people in her neighborhood. Although she did not state explicit

discrimination, Tiffany recognized that her race made her stand out among the White majority of her community.

Crenshaw (1990) emphasized that in order understand women of color (in this case African American), they should also be viewed through other layers of their identity, or intersections of racism and sexism. Patricia Hill Collins (1999) also stressed the importance of paying attention to the injustices of race, class, and gender, and this produces lower social standing for African American women. Lenn best illustrates the Black feminist approach to not just assist African American women in Appalachia but to positively impact the Appalachian community at large (Hill Collins, 1999). In essence, LaRay and Lenn both feel a purpose that resembles Davis's (1990), "lift as we climb" (p. 3) movement by not forgetting their Appalachian and African American sisters, but instead finding ways to develop them as well.

How Degree Attainment Relates to Identity

Participants were surprised when asked how they feel about completing their degrees despite the trials of poverty they have faced along the way. Some of the participants in this study were able to describe in words how they felt, but many showed their feelings through breaking down emotionally. This occurred especially during the interviews when they may not have ever been asked or had time to think about how completing their degree made them feel or will make them feel. This was a very emotional part of the interview but it exposed how much the caregiver role—to do better for their families and communities—was still a part of their identity. This illustrated that even those who are choosing a path that would break generational cycles of poverty continue to uphold the values instilled in them through their Appalachian upbringing by acting out an ethic of caring. This also reflects the spirituality of selflessness—achieving something not just for themselves but for others as well.

Access and Success in College: Resources and Strategies

After learning about the participants' backgrounds as Appalachian women and their identity development, the interview sessions naturally led into a discussion about how they were able to still push through to attend college and attain a degree. Some research posits that because of their parents' education level, first-generation students will not be as likely to succeed in college and may not complete a degree. The women in this study diverge from that pattern. Even though their parents had lower levels of education, the participants in this study mentioned the parental support they received.

Along with family support, participants explained other sources of motivation in a variety of ways. Motivation was high for all of these women because education, to them, offered a way to improve their current financial situations and a way to provide better opportunities for future generations. Even though motivation was high for these participants, finding resources such as programs and services to aid them in their journey toward success in college was difficult. Despite the lack of programs and services, the most useful resource was their ties to other people. This displayed how the women were able to construct social capital through the utilization of varying networks.

Motivation to Attend College

My analysis of the interviews revealed high levels of motivation within the women. In addition to their value of hard work, these women had many different reasons to stay motivated in college. The grit within these women was apparent. Grit can be defined as stick-to-itiveness, which is a trait identified by Mangan (2012) that assists with success in academics. Situations that ranged from poverty to bad relationships to facing negative stereotypes had to be confronted

and overcome. Amidst all of the situations, the participants found sources of motivation to obtain a college degree.

The intellectual pursuits of the participants were a common way of finding their self-authorship. Being motivated to prove others wrong or redemption from a bad relationship carried an undertone of proving their intellect—which was something that may have even played a part in driving a wedge between them and their spouses or significant others. One of the major motivations for all of the participants was the realization that obtaining a degree would positively influence their families and future generations in important ways. But increasing their family's income was only part of the picture concerning motivation. The motivation to work hard in academics was also a way they could reconcile their traditional caregiver role while at the same time pursuing a goal to develop their own voice in their life. Other motivations ranged from attending college for a career change, as in the case of Lenn and Sara, to influencing other Appalachian women and their communities positively.

S. Katz (2009) provided an explanation of the major motivation found within this study. In her findings she noted that women in poverty often view obtaining a degree not only as a way to achieve upward social mobility but also to increase the chances of their children attending college and becoming leaders within their communities. Fighting against negative stereotypes is also not a new cultural challenge that women face in Appalachia. Although most of the participants received some sort of governmental financial assistance, a few of the women mentioned the white trash stereotype that was often associated with it. Henderson and Tickamyer (2006) also noted this and indicated that it often hinders women from coming off of welfare. Again, however, women in this study displayed an opposite reaction by fighting against the stereotypes and “proving them wrong.”

Main Resources

When asked about the resources they may have used, participants in this study took a while to respond. Although there was an evident lack of resources within the communities in which each of the participants lived, all of them were able to name people in their lives who served as resources by either providing encouragement for the participants, helping them obtain new skills, or just believing that they could be successful in achieving their educational goals.

Knowledge about services/programs. As the analysis showed after the interviews were completed, few resources in the form of programs or services were mentioned. Lenn said that attending conferences outside Appalachia helped her to see other educated African Americans and empowered her to use her voice in her community. Anne discussed using tutoring for one of her difficult classes and Marie was exposed to college for the first time through a workshop for daycare certification. Because of their first-generation student status, the participants did not express using resources or even knowing what resources may have existed for them in their community.

Pascarella et al. (2004) described this lack of resources best by explaining first-generation students like the women I interviewed have limited awareness about how to apply for college, the costs, and other support services available to them. Because of this lack of information, first-generation students also do not know the impact that their traditional family and workplace responsibilities will have on their college success. The women within this study did show this lack of resources described by Pascarella et al. (2004); however, they were able to manage some kind of balance between their schooling process and outside responsibilities.

People: A most important resource. People represented the most valuable resource that the women in this study used. College faculty/staff, high school professionals in their K-12

schools, family and friends, and members of their church communities were all mentioned as important sources of support for participants and their ambitions.

Although some participants experienced negative stereotypes held by their primary and secondary school teachers, others received great support. Jennifer mentioned a high school guidance counselor who helped her fill out applications and waived the ACT fee to help her achieve her goals. Tiffany also mentioned a visiting multicultural counselor from the local regional campus who gave her the encouragement to attend college. The professionals who gave the most support for all of the participants, though, were the faculty and staff members at the local regional campus they all attended. Comments like “they get nontraditional student issues” and “he gave me a job in the computer lab because he understood my situation” described the supportive environment and the high ethic of care (Noddings, 2012) that surrounded these women as they moved toward degree attainment. The support from these professionals was outstanding. Sara mentioned that some professors would even drive her kids to school or practice if she had a class to attend. This goes above and beyond in the strategies most campuses use to ensure student success.

In a study by Pascarella et al. (2003), a finding showed that persistence of first-generation students at the community college level might be due to the fact that the campus provides a less threatening/more accommodating environment for their needs. This can easily be applied to the participants in this study since all of them were persisting or had already persisted at the local regional campus. Regional campuses may be more in tune or equipped to accommodate students who have nontraditional student issues, no matter what age they enter campus.

Another one of the major resources for participants was the support they received from their families and friends. Throughout the literature there is the consistent notion that for women

who are first-generation students, building social networks is mandatory for their success (Barry et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2004; Tinto, 1987). Even though Mid Atlantic Appalachian women have both external and internal obstacles to overcome in the form of their traditional role expectations, the participants in this study were able to join their caregiver identities with their student role in college. The women in this study were able to gain support from their parents and family, which provided strong networks from which they could seek encouragement and assistance. For example, Tiffany became emotional when talking about how much her mother has helped her with the daily tasks and with her daughter. Her mother believes in Tiffany and the benefits of a college degree. Without her support, Tiffany explained, she would not be able to attend college.

Jennifer and Marie held onto their traditional roles as mothers and wives and are still managing to finish their degrees because of the support from their spouses. Jennifer went into detail about how her husband understands her goals and has been sharing some household duties during the week. Marie also explained how her family has been very supportive—her son has even started to ask her about college, which further supported Marie in the decision to pursue her own degree. The ability to find networks in which they can discuss their college experiences allows participants like Jennifer and Marie to express themselves, which can lower their stress levels and increase their use of strategies to combat obstacles (Barry et al., 2009).

Church communities proved to be a surrogate family culture for a few of the participants. Lenn mentioned that she had major support from other church members and her pastor. LaRay discussed support from her “church family” that went beyond prayer—they provided her a home to rent, a car to drive, and other financial support to help her with her children. As Harper (2000) discussed, church may instill confidence in women about their abilities. This confidence coincides with the social support that participants such as Lenn and LaRay needed to succeed.

The Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women interviewed in this study proved that on top of the economic struggles they face, being from a rural area makes it necessary to develop networks in order to succeed (E.K. Anderson & Hoy, 2006). Due to the lack of resources available to them for college, such as transportation, the participants had to find a way to overcome those obstacles, and they provided evidence they have done so by completing their degrees (E.K. Anderson & Hoy, 2006).

Success Strategies Used

Along with external resources, the women in this study used other resources such as goal setting and self-reflection to assist them through their college experience. Having the skills to know how to set goals and follow through with them was a pattern that all of the participants displayed. A few participants also gave examples of how they were able to reflect on themselves, where they were currently, and then how they envision their success.

Astin (1975) explored the traits of successful college students. Ability, high school performance, socioeconomic status, employment, campus involvement, and educational aspirations were all identified as being important factors in his research. Characteristics that were not mentioned, however, were the specific skills needed. Because the participants within this study exhibited ways to combat and survive the obstacles of low socioeconomic status, employment issues, and balancing life and work, they also exhibited other skills to keep them pressing toward their goal to finish. Goal setting and self-reflection were highly used by all of the participants as strategies that would promote their success. They did not just hope they would finish their degrees. Because of their circumstances, the participants realized at some point in their experience that they would have to have a plan.

Anne and Lenn explained how they would write out a list of goals to obtain and then make sub-goals to ensure they would reach their ultimate purpose. By reflecting on their progress they allowed themselves to be flexible in their plans but still stay on track to complete their degree. Marie discussed how she would reflect and visualize herself walking across the stage at graduation. This helped her to anticipate her success, which ultimately led her to graduate within the next semester.

Implications of This Research

Implications that can be drawn from this research center on four main themes that are discussed below. First, student culture is what drives many decisions related to the delivery of services on college campuses. It was apparent in this study that the regional campus all of the participants attended represented an important source of support for these women. Administrators on this campus seemed to have developed a clear understanding of the students they served and what many of these students faced on a daily basis. Because of their knowledge about these obstacles, faculty and staff members were able to provide effective assistance for students and to convey to them their needs were understood. Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009) discussed how important it is for student affairs professionals to understand the context in which their students operate and within which the students define their identities. Several accommodations made by faculty and staff that were reported in this study clearly show support for educational the goals the women have set. It was mentioned by all participants that they would not have been successful without the support and ethic of care (Noddings, 2012) that the faculty and staff members exhibited.

Next, the ethic of care shown by the local regional campus described in this study is a

model for other colleges and demonstrates that it is not always advisable to follow the “one size fits all” approach. Faculty and staff members that work at any college or university should be trained at some point about student identity theory and how this could be applied to their various campus roles that involve teaching and providing services to students. All employees are responsible for retaining students and making sure students reach their goal of graduating. Because students should be the principal focus of any college decision-making done by faculty and administrators, there needs to be a clear understanding at each level of a student’s college career what services and types of care should be delivered to ensure that students are given the tools they need to succeed. This is especially true for underrepresented student groups and first-generation students, such as the women interviewed for this study. Underrepresented student groups (which includes students from low socioeconomic backgrounds) often face a more complicated process of identity development and confront numerous barriers that could hinder success. If professionals recognize this, however, an ethic of care (Noddings, 2012) can be cultivated specifically to support these students. Blake (2007) emphasized the importance of this knowledge so that faculty and staff members can understand the changing dynamics and demographics of their students and align campus practices and services accordingly.

Third, Appalachian communities also need to provide better outreach and financial literacy resources long before families and children consider decisions about college attendance. Because many individuals attending a local regional campus are first-generation students, this often means that they do not know the basics about applying for admission, financial aid, tutoring, or even what degrees are offered. Starting at the middle-school level and through high school, local colleges should be partnering with school districts to promote college as an option for all students. Many students may not view college as an option because of the negative

perspective they acquire from their families that school interferes with the work that is required to sustain their families. Outreach efforts need to include more families so they can come to understand the benefits of education, which may make the transition less difficult for first-generation college students. Financial literacy is another tool that should be taught within community-based programs. There are opportunities, other than federal loans and Pell grants, such as private grants, state aid, and scholarships that could help underwrite the cost of attending college. If families and children were informed about financial literacy in middle school and high school, then perhaps unrealistic fears about being unable to afford college could be dispelled for many students. Southern Vermont College offers a program that is directed toward families and parents of its students (DeCiccio, A. Gross, & K. Gross, 2009). The program is part of its new student orientation process and covers topics that range from the benefits of college to the importance of parental support, and includes a discussion with the Dean of Students and other campus professionals (DeCiccio et al., 2009). This might be a good example of a program that could be applied in Appalachian communities to promote learning and the importance of support from parents and other family members.

Finally, the last major implication of this study exposes the oppressive social structures that still exist for this population of women. The Appalachian region has not been able to progress economically, which is still a hindrance to community and economic growth. The impoverishment of women that is generated under these conditions is evident in their experiences presented in this research. Generational cycles of poverty, traditional role expectations, and the work-versus-school battle rage on in communities throughout the region. What made these women successful through it all is their utilization of networks that connect people and build social ties to diverse types of human resources. Often such social networks link

women to other women who can offer encouragement and help. Along with their faith in God, this network-building is one of the key strengths that characterize the participants in the current study. Instead of rejecting their Appalachian heritage to be successful, these women have been able to navigate around obstacles and reconcile their learned culture with the new culture of higher education to which they have been exposed. This is an important insight. Given that all of these participants experienced poverty during their lives, and that racial differences did not appear to be a principal focus of their concerns, surviving the oppressive socioeconomic cycle in which they were embedded appears to be the most significant characteristic that unites them. Doing better for their families and communities is the main goal. Once women support other women in degree attainment, then a new cycle is born to combat the oppression these women and past generations have had to face. This leads to the perseverance and grit that is evident among these Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women who have achieved college degrees. This research indicates that some positive traits developed through exposure to Appalachian culture can motivate women to attain a college degree against often daunting odds.

Recommendations for Higher Education

Clearly, more research is required in a variety of areas to help understand better not only the culture and identity development processes operating in the Appalachian region but also the effectiveness of any programs about higher education that are targeted primarily toward lower income families.

The theme of spirituality and the impact of membership in a Christian religious community was a strong and consistent theme among all participants in this study. Elements of a spiritual life may encompass affirmation of a woman's abilities and provide a way to cope with struggles or unbearable situations. The power of their faith came through in many discussions

with the study participants when they recounted how they were able to make it through their college experience. Perhaps future research could be conducted in the Appalachian region to examine the relationship between spirituality and motivation, focusing more directly on how spirituality can promote resiliency and the level of grit needed to persist and overcome obstacles in the educational process. Does spirituality or a belief in God positively influence the identity development of believers? Or is it just an added coping mechanism like other strategies that nonbelievers are able to develop when faced with adversity? A study performed by Jenney (2011), which showed a strong correlation between spirituality and the development of a pro-social character in college students, may provide some leads. Pro-social character goes beyond the usual focus of programs on college campuses that encourage students to engage in ethical behavior; instead, pro-social character extends to instill a more community-based and global sense of engagement that leads to the development of more positive and productive lives (Jenney, 2001). Despite the adversities that women in this study faced, they do exemplify how their faith has anchored them and motivated their pursuit of a college degree. This future research topic could also examine how the spiritual capital of students from other underrepresented groups develops and how much of an influence it has on their academic success.

More research is needed on the availability and effectiveness of community programs that allow colleges to partner with K-12 schools and provide information about college attendance as a viable option for most students. Without this opportunity, some students might never hear about the benefits of degree attainment or that it is even an option. Although such activities or partnerships may exist within certain communities, how effective are the outreach initiatives? How do educators create programs that would be effective for families in a culture of

poverty? How much do existing outreach services affect enrollment in local colleges/universities? All of these questions need to be explored in more breadth and depth so that partnerships can be made effective and students realize that they are able to achieve a college degree. In addition, Adams (2012) stressed the importance of “soft skills” such as resiliency that students need to develop if they are to be successful in college, and partnerships between universities and K-12 schools could develop programs to assist with the acquisition of these skills. Self-regulation is another skill that could be developed in K-12 systems as well (Mangan, 2012). Self-regulation would allow students to be aware of what matters and form the discipline to resist temptations and avoid downfalls that may occur along the way in earning a degree (Mangan, 2012). Although the participants in this study all have been able to develop these qualities, many students may not. For more Appalachian students to be successful in college, training in self-regulation needs to be addressed at lower grades to help younger students develop and refine these skills.

Another recommendation for future research focuses on the effect that college student identity development has on student retention and success. Torres et al. (2009) stated that it is important for college administrators to understand the social contexts in which students live, work, and develop their identities. Absent such understanding, it seems unlikely that colleges will discover truly the best practices that can exert a powerful and positive impact on retention and student success. Once in a while a phrase is used that states, “everyone is responsible for student retention.” Even though the statement exists, how much do professionals and faculty members really affect student retention? Can blame be imposed on professionals and faculty members who are unfamiliar with theories of college student identity formation for not realizing the potential of their impact? All college employees should receive some training about student

identity theories and how their daily interactions with students can support or undermine a student's academic ambitions, and this information should be disseminated in forums ranging from routine bi-weekly staff meetings to those held at the upper administrative levels. If a college or university is applying this type of training on its campus, how do retention levels respond after the training sessions have taken place? One of the participants in the present study related a story she had about a negative encounter with an assistant dean. This dean looked at the participant and told her she needed to “stay home and take care of her boys so they do not turn out like the other African American males in the community.” Just this one encounter almost made her turn away from her dream of obtaining a degree, but instead her gift of perseverance made her find someone on that campus who would take the time to listen and help her. One word or one phrase can profoundly affect a college student—especially first-generation students who may already be struggling to find the support they need to attend college.

Recommendations for Appalachian Women

One of the major themes regarding success in college for Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women was the ability to create social networking in order to combat the oppressive structures. A recommendation for Appalachian women who are trying to succeed in college, or who have already successfully completed their degrees, is to continue to support other Appalachian women with their academic and career goals.

Participants, including Marie, Jennifer, Lenn, LaRay, and Lisa, explained their desire to positively influence not just their families but their communities as well. By becoming advocates to express college as an option for Appalachian women, the landscape of the Appalachian culture and the roles of women may change.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a few recommendations that seem to emerge from the preceding findings and implications. The overall landscape of poverty needs to be examined further to understand the types of reforms needed to combat entrenched poverty and improve federal and state policies. Additional research regarding generational cycles within the Appalachian culture may assist with examining any movements toward breaking negative cycles within an impoverished region, which could lead to grassroots resources or programs to assist any movements—if they exist.

It might be advisable to investigate other impoverished regions within the United States and cross-reference the findings to discover problems that afflict various federal- and state-funded grassroots higher education programs. Because poverty exists across the nation, with higher concentrations in some areas than others, what are the common struggles that people face? This current study was able to use experiences of both African-American and White women in Appalachia and found that their issues with poverty were very similar. If more qualitative research related to college degree attainment is conducted on urban poverty or even men in poverty, for example, then common themes may emerge to explain the national statistics that are reported. This information may help colleges and universities advocate for better financial assistance and develop services for targeted students that need them the most.

The last area of research involves examining generational cycles for women in the Appalachian region. Because one of the major themes throughout this study seemed to be women who are trying to break cycles of impoverishment by obtaining college degrees, a longitudinal study may be appropriate. By examining participants' children and their children's educational goals and achievements over the next 10-15 years, then this could illustrate if general

cycles are indeed turning into new cycles that are positively impacting Appalachian families and communities.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings from this study tend to support earlier research on women in poverty, issues confronting first-generation students, and the identity development that occurs among women who are poor as they matriculate through college. However, some slightly divergent findings did emerge that created more questions than answers.

Spirituality appears to make an important and somewhat under-recognized contribution to the identity development and success of the Appalachian women who were studied in this research. It is also clear that better support and outreach programs at the community level need to be targeted toward families in poverty, particularly those whose family members may be seeking college degrees. If such educational aspirations could be promoted, and families made aware of the benefits that a college degree can generate, then members of families in poverty may be better able to seek and attain college degrees. Such positive outcomes could obviously serve both members of one's immediate family as well as the communities in which they reside. In addition, it is notable how important a supportive campus environment is for students in poverty or any students who may be experiencing nontraditional issues while in college. By implementing training programs designed to raise awareness and sensitize faculty and staff to the needs of varying student populations, universities may increase the chances that they will be able to align their service programs more effectively and retain more nontraditional and at-risk students—especially first-generation Appalachian women living in poverty.

The testimonies of the women in this study highlight the impoverished conditions that still plague the region. But their stories also portray some of the abiding cultural values that

confer strength on its residents. Values that forge grit and resilience, loyalty to family, and concern for others and for one's community are undeniably powerful legacies that have helped these women to overcome the oppressive structures they have confronted and obtain a college degree.

There is one last finding that may explain the divergent findings of why these women were able to overcome entrenched obstacles. Throughout the literature and during the participant interviews, the term generational cycles was a consistent theme. Because of the negative tone the generational cycles have been associated with, many of the participants would comment that their purpose is to break the generational cycles their Appalachian families have faced over time. Henderson and Tickamyer (2006) spoke about the notion of generational poverty that exists within Appalachia. This cycle is the most prevalent because it produces lower human capital. When grandparents and parents struggle to survive by using public assistance, it builds a culture of poverty for their future generations (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006). Due to the generational cycles that occur, women face the negative stereotypes concerning their role and environment (Henderson & Tickamyer, 2006). The main theme for women of Mid-Atlantic Appalachia that were interviewed was their desire to break the cycles and provide stability and more opportunities for future generations within their family and community.

The motivation for breaking generational cycles is completed (according to the analysis of this study) by creating a new generational cycle founded on education, love, and care. This aligns closely with Freire's (2009) theory of forming praxis to combat structures of oppression. Through action and dialogue the oppressed save themselves and the oppressors (Freire, 2009). Within this study, the women in Appalachia who face poverty, negative stereotypes, and oppressive structures have taken action. Their actions are testimonies not only of survival but of

success—success of degree attainment that is an expression of love and faith that God can still use them to positively impact their families and communities. Love is where the motivations to succeed seemed to come from. Love makes it possible to not just survive, but conquer. As stated in the Bible (New International Version), verse Romans 8:37, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” These women have done this by wanting to do better. By doing better they are passing on the cycle of love, their faith in God, and the hope for a better tomorrow for their Appalachian culture.

Personal Statement

After performing and analyzing the interviews of eight Mid-Atlantic Appalachian women, I have had the time to reflect on what this means to me. With my own identity as a Mid-Atlantic Appalachian woman, I could directly relate to components of each experience. The interviews were powerful—emotional at times because of the memories or current tensions the women were facing. Thankfully I was able to bracket my own biases and experiences during the interviews; otherwise, I may not have been able to get through without crying and laughing with them. Their passion and determination were reminders to me about where I come from and who I still am thanks to my Appalachian heritage.

The internal identity development of these women displayed different levels of authorship. I still struggle as a full-time working professional and a doctoral student to maintain the traditional responsibilities within my marriage and to my family. Like the women interviewed, the tension may always be there because I believe that God is first and then family is a close second in my priorities. Relying on the promise that God has a purpose for me and that I have potential to help others through my research is a strong motivation to keep going and to do better for the future generations of my family.

Even though I currently reside outside the Appalachian region, I am still tied to the values of creating a culture of care in my current student affairs position on campus. For any students in poverty, there is a struggle to maintain financially, emotionally, and academically. As an undergraduate, I was a traditionally aged college student with nontraditional student issues. Health issues, marriage and divorce, working three jobs, and attending college full time were too much to bear at times. It is those nontraditional issues that should be a focus and priority to help support students in those situations. I understand my professional frustrations after this research because even though I had an extremely supportive campus during my undergraduate years with faculty and staff, my current campus continues to struggle with understanding how truly important faculty and staff are to the students. By creating a campus culture of care and support, students will believe that there is hope for their success.

The sacrifice and hard work from my parents is another resemblance from the participants' interviews. Without my parents, sisters, and my grandparents, I would not be the person I am today. My parents were able to work themselves out of poverty eventually. I remember many occasions when my father would remind my sister and me that "family is all we have." My mother would encourage us in our academics by constantly asking about our grades or taking the time to work on flashcards and handwriting with my sisters and me before we entered kindergarten. Watching my parents persevere still has an immense impact on me and I continue to want to make them proud.

Growing up in the church and having the influence of God's love pass down from my grandparents and great-grandparents is the greatest gift of all. Appalachia is a very rich culture that at times only has God to rely on when everything else seems impossible. My first song to remember and sing was taught to me by my maternal grandmother (MeeMaw) and it was "Jesus

Loves Me.” With this teaching of loving others and trying to live according to God’s plan is one of the main reasons why I have been able to succeed just like the women in this study.

Overall, this research has allowed me to accept and understand my identity. There are times when I may not fit in with the culture of my current residence because of my passion for others or the determination to never give up and advocate for others who are in need. Even though some may not understand where I am coming from, I am thankful to have met and interviewed the eight women in Appalachia who give me confirmation that I am okay. It is what we are made of: grit, perseverance, hard work, and a newfound commitment for education.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter



Board

Institutional Review

Terre Haute, Indiana 47809
812-237-3092
Fax 812-237-3092

DATE: February 20, 2013

TO: Andrea Welch

FROM: Indiana State University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [393022-2] Women in Poverty and Higher Education

IRB REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED APPROVAL

DATE: February 20, 2013

EXPIRATION DATE: February 20, 2014

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY:

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this research study. The Indiana State University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. The approval for this study expires on February 20, 2014.

Prior to the approval expiration date, if you plan to continue this study you will need to submit a continuation request (Form E) for review and approval by the IRB. Additionally, once you complete your study, you will need to submit the Completion of Activities report (Form G).

This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Informed Consent: Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant.

Reporting of Problems: All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported. Any problems involving risk to subjects or others, injury or other adverse effects experienced by subjects, and incidents of noncompliance must be reported to the IRB Chairperson or Vice Chairperson via phone or e-mail immediately. Additionally, you must submit Form F electronically to the IRB through IRBNet within 5 working days after first awareness of the problem.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

Modifications: Any modifications to this proposed study or to the informed consent form will need to be submitted using Form D for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years. If those research records involve health information, those records must be retained for a minimum of six years.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Kim Bodey, IRB Vice Chair, within IRBNet by clicking on the study title on the "My Projects" screen and the "Send Project Mail" button on the left side of the "New Project Message" screen. I wish you well in completing your study.

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself. This can include your background, where you were raised and currently live, and what you are doing now.
2. Where did you receive the motivation to attend college? Please explain any influences in your life.
3. Tell me more about your upbringing in terms of family, church, community, etc. How did some of these experiences help or hinder you as you decided and began to pursue a college degree?
4. How do you feel since completing your degree as it relates to self and home?
5. What strategies did you use while pursuing your college education?
6. What made you persist and finish your degree?
7. In what ways (or not) has traditional cultural values in Appalachia influenced your experiences?
8. What were your experiences like between your identity at home and your identity in college?
9. What resources or programs were available to you?

APPENDIX C

Personal Narrative/Reflection Writing Prompt

Pseudonym: _____

The personal narrative/reflection is optional to you as a participant in this study. Please feel free to enclose with this writing prompt cover sheet a personal narrative/reflection of your life experiences as it relates to your college success.

If you choose to participate, your responses will remain confidential to any outside parties. Please refer to the IRB consent form for details of how confidentiality measures will be taken.

APPENDIX D

Post Interview Form for Notes

Anonymous Name: _____

Location of Residence: _____

Areas of Human Capital:

Verbal and Non-Verbal Cues for Self-Authorship and Appalachian Cultural Influences:

Overall Observations: