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WHAT MATTERS AROUND HERE: A COMMUNITY STUDY OF RURAL EDUCATION AND POVERTY

by

Angela M. Kirby

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ABSTRACT

WHAT MATTERS AROUND HERE: A COMMUNITY STUDY OF RURAL EDUCATION AND POVERTY

By

Angela M. Kirby

The research shows that poor tend to be educationally disadvantaged and rural poor more educationally disadvantaged. Yet, educational policy reform typically uses urban-based models when addressing issues of rural education. This study expands a limited body of research in the area of rural education of poor students and their communities. The unique contribution of the study lies in its focus on articulating a set of understandings about the combined issues of place, poverty and education. In the two categories focusing on one community values regarding family and education, eight themes emerged. They highlight themes of isolation; social exclusion and limited access to resources accentuate the need to examine social networks and communal assets. The rural emergent community stories provide a powerful counterpoint to the supposition that poverty is primarily an economic issue. Findings illuminate the need to shift the educational policy focus from eradicating poverty based on quantified numbers of poor people, to addressing a comprehensive causal explanation of why rural people are poor, its effects on educational aspirations and behaviors.

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My personal thanks go first to my husband. Jim is the son of a small-town barber and the oldest of eleven children. Raised as a working class Catholic, he delivered papers and swept the barber shop floor in a rural town pulsing with life. Craving a life beyond rolling cornfields, bean suppers and church bingo, he saved his pennies and left his home town to seek his fortune in the city. He understood rural poverty. And his valued feedback grounded my own ideas. His experience helped me to understand the results of

this study. During the completion of this dissertation, he endured many hours alone while I was away and working. During that time he cared for our own five children and busy equine ranch. He is a patient man, a practical and benevolent father, as steady, deep and even as the current of a river that flows to turbulent waters.

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Final thanks go to the remarkable people who gave me permission to tell their stories. They shared their hearts, their homes and their intimate stories and experiences. As with any study, some of the results can be interpreted as unpleasant. I myself, as a participant observer, felt my heart tear when I recorded their experiences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, LITERATURE REVIEW

> A town is a thing, like a colonial animal. A town has a nervous system and a town has shoulders and feet. A town is a thing separate from all other towns, so that there are no two towns alike. And a town has a whole emotion. How news travels through a town is a mystery, not easily to be solved. News seems to move faster than small boys can scramble and dart to tell it and faster than women can call it over the fences (Steinbeck, 1953, p. 485).

Rural life is often overlooked in postindustrial society while urban problems garner greater public awareness. Urban problems seem bigger and perhaps more troubling than rural problems because of the concentration of large numbers of people (Fitchen, 1991). Yet poor rural towns have persistent and worrisome problems. One such problem is the reality that rural places have lower educational aspiration and attainment levels than others (NEA, 2001).

This narrative describes the educational aspirations, values and behaviors of one poor rural town and the social process that sustains community members. It is a community study with the school at the center. It is a phenomenological description of the community's educational values against a backdrop of existing social values, community life and social behaviors. Here, the community's great priority of cultural traditions is tied to the land. The family ties bind the community traditions with clans of inter-related kin, thinning homesteads, and communal living. The community remains

isolated from the larger world through internal governance and resistance to outsiders. Federal and state educational policy does not integrate well into the complex crevices of rural values. The school and faculty in this rural community act as conduits of educational policy by acknowledging this cultural clash while attempting to readjust the community's educational expectations.

It was this issue that moved me to investigate the educational attitudes and behaviors of a high poverty rural community and the social process that sustains it. As a former elementary principal in a rural area I observed educational attitudes, values, and behaviors that were in conflict with state and federal educational initiatives. Moreover, I observed that administrators and teachers received sanctions for schools that did not perform according to a set of criteria normed against urban or suburban data (DeYoung & Kannapel, 1999). Administrators, unable to negotiate these vast cultural differences, might be viewed as ineffective at the state level but highly effective at the local level. Rural educators, once known for softening educational policy, were increasingly forced to follow the policy, some might suggest, to the detriment of the school and the school community. It was this juxtaposition, this contest of wills between them that led me to a community study of rural education, poverty and cultural policy.

In this study, I seek to describe a set of understandings emerging from a poor rural town and with a population density so low that the term "frontier" comes to mind. This is an isolated community, far from urban hubs. The people who live here struggle to make ends meet, often traveling to distant towns and working several low-wage jobs. The school is the community's largest employer, yet few locals are employed within the

educational system. The school district's educational achievement data and the state and national test scores are low and have been classified as "failing" (Figure 12).

Purpose and Significance

Rural educational attainment lags behind urban educational attainment, especially in college completion. According to some researchers, these lags can be attributed to roles rural families and communities play in the educational progress of youth (Beaulieu, Isreal and Wimberly, 2003). These researchers suggest that disparities in educational success may be less a matter of metropolitan or non-metropolitan setting or geographic location and more a factor of variations in the ability of the family, school and community.

Wherever students live or go to school, those that come from low-income communities have lower educational aspirations than do their more economically advantaged peers (Hass, 1992). It appears that poverty reduces children's opportunity to learn, both in the family and at school (Huang, 1999). Compared to the educational research on urban poor students, the information on their rural counterparts is meager; however, some researchers have found that rural poor students have lower educational aspirations and outcomes than both their more economically advantaged peers and their urban counterparts (Marion, Mirochnik, McCaul & McIntyre, 1991: Center for Research and Evaluation, 1991).

These results are likely to remain static, as students who stay in rural places have the lowest educational aspirations of America's youth, and they earn less than those who leave (Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1990).

Relatively little is known about the social reproduction or mobility of high poverty *rural* families, or the social processes that underpin them. More is known about the concept of "place" and the importance of "place" to the rural student's educational aspirations. Haas and Nachtigal (1997) stress the importance of place and the connection that the students must make on how they fit into the rural community. Likewise, Paul Theobald's (1997) work focuses on the importance of place- conscious education in the development of rural values. Historian Victor Magagna (1991) contends that there were "intimate connections between territory and community" that historically defined rural lives and livelihoods. Like Magagna, Theobald describes this intra-dependence as a key construct in rural living. Taken together, these scholars contend that the influence of "place" outweighs social influences. In short, they suggest that strong ties to "place' underpin and guide social influences, including those of class and mobility.

But what happens when the concepts of "place" are disrupted or changed through economic or political influences? This study is not the first to recognize that educational attitudes and behaviors often have a social and economic basis and these changes have received theoretical attention as well. Some recent studies have explored and documented the social dynamics of citizens residing in rural enclaves when complex educational policy changes are imposed (Woodrum & Howley, 2004). One such study explored the impact of school consolidation on educational attitudes and behaviors associated with school and "place" in rural Appalachia. Other prior work has considered

the social elements of such changes as it relates to kin and in rural communities. They have been viewed as parts of an integrated system of changes acting together in a nested social network. Studies exploring rural poverty and policy in particular document strong social networks and an increased reliance on kin, naturally reducing a reliance on civic institutions, including schools.

In summary, the poor tend to be educationally disadvantaged, the rural poor more educationally disadvantaged. Rural schools face unique, complex, often difficult problems. Strong ties to community complicate educational reforms designed to lift them out of poverty by using educational gains as a vehicle toward a global job market. Furthermore, these problems are often influenced by socially reproduced notions of "place" that community members and students carry with them.

Several decades of quantitative sociological research have demonstrated that the social structure into which one is born has a massive influence on where one will end up (McLoed, 1995). But little of this research has a rural focus. And although class and geographic mobility in terms of relocation does occur, the structure of these social processes is an under-researched field. With that in mind, the goal of this research is to expand knowledge in the area of rural education of poor students and their communities.

It seems that urban-based models and systems have guided research on rural education (Kannepal & DeYoung, 1999). Moreover, there is a paucity of research and theory development in rural education and in the narrower category of educational aspirations and values, social reproductive properties impacting social mobility and social reproduction in the education of rural poor students. Most of the literature focuses on more industrialized populations: urban or suburban communities. The two categories of

schools share many problems but a substantial cultural divide works against the possibility of using urban and suburban research as a framework from which to compare and to understand rural educational communities (Theobald, 2005)

According to Theobald (2005) there are vast differences between these three groups as communities and as socially responsive entities. Some scholars have provided evidence that the educational aspirations of rural citizens are weaker than their urban and suburban counterparts (Breen, 1989; Cobb, McIntire and Pratt, 1989; Howley, 2005; McGranahan, 1994). The influence of the rural family and community on educational aspirations and experiences has received some scholarly attention, as well (Howley, 2006; Jensen, McLaughlin & Slack, 2003; Licter, Roscigno & Condron, 2003; Glasgow, 2003; Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberly, 2003). Geographic isolation and constrained economic conditions impacting rural poverty levels (Tigges & Fuguitt, 2003) are some of the obvious structural attributes that contribute to the social processes underpinning educational experiences, values and behaviors in rural communities (Jensen, McLaughlin & Slack, 2003; Licter, Roscigno & Condron, 2003; Glasgow, 2003; Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberly, 2003). Other less obvious structural red flags that notate the differences between urban and rural also include institutions that maintain and reproduce community (Bonanno & Constance, 2003) including community schools (Willis, 1977; McLoed, 1987). These contributing institutions have received scholarly attention as well (Fitchen, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1997; Maeroff, 1998; Scott, 1998; Theobald, 2005).

This research helps frame the conceptual issues of community isolation, poverty and family influence--factors that impact educational aspirations in rural places. Rural sociological research suggests that the community's local social relationships create

critical connections that bridge action and connect homogeneous groups within the community to each other and to the outside world (Flora & Flora, 2003). Recent research suggests that such features are key factors that impact educational achievement (Isreal, Beaulieu and Hartland, 2003). Other scholars indicate that rural educational attainment and aspirations are dependent on a set of complex interactions between school, home and the community (Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberly, 2003).

Taken together, these works suggest that there are several aspects of rural communities (family life, community life, socio-structural features) that are qualitatively different than their urban and suburban counterparts. Moreover, this body of research suggests that rural communities may play a critical role in the construction of educational attitudes, values and behaviors associated with education and educational mobility.

The significance of this study is that it expands the limited body of work in three important ways. First, it views rural educational communities as socially responsive entities--contributors to educational aspirations, values and behaviors. Second, this study expands the limited body of research in qualitative detail. Third, it looks at recent educational reform efforts on high poverty communities and describes the effects therein. As a community study, it offers an in-depth investigation of a single site and identifies factors that both feed and sustain the community social system.

Conceptual Framework

Sociological community theories that helped clarify the differences between social groups, which were utilized to formulate an understanding of the nature of rural educational aspirations, values and experiences in rural communities. Specifically, the

work of Ferdinand Tonnies (1955) is used to explain the existing community differences between these attitudes, values and experiences in large and small scale communities. Moreover, this theory is used to explain the naturally rooted social relationships that define rural communities, furthering the reproductive nature of educational attitudes, behaviors and values and the internal logic that sustains them.

Sociological literature illuminates the differences between rural communities and industrial community's, providing a foundation for understanding their individual differences. The work of Tonnies is based on the assumption that patterns of social relationships in small and large-scale societies contributed to the development of cultural assumptions. Moreover, Tonnies' work provides a construct by which to examine the social process underpinning educational attitudes and behaviors and the influence of place and of community and the internal logic that supports these assumptions.

At the turn of the century, Tonnies used the terms *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* as a way to describe the set of varying social relationships and distinct cultural values created by the phenomenon of workers in industrial societies that were leaving thier agrarian roots, relocating in industrial societies for employment (Howley and Woodrum, 2004). Tonnies described *gemeinschaft* communities as places where people are bound to one another through feelings of togetherness and with roles that are multi-plex and interwoven. According to Tonnies, *gemeinschaft* lives are intricately interconnected, based on family or neighborhood groupings, and are culturally homogeneous (Woodrum, 2004). By contrast, in *gesellschaft* communities, people live independently and are held together by an instrumental goal. In *gesellschaft* communities, one group that an individual belongs to may be separate from another, and the values held by one group are

often different and even in conflict with values held by the other yet they are held together by a common objective. Examples of *gessellschaft* social groupings include an investment brokerage company or a modern industrial sociality. In such a social grouping, cultural diversity is part of the machinery of *gesellschaft* communities held together by a common goal.

Understanding these concepts is at the heart of the debate regarding the roles schools play in these different communities. In *gemeinschaft* communities, the role of schools is to serve the needs of the local community and should reflect the values and needs of the local community (Maynard & Howley, 1997). In *gemeinschaft* communities, beliefs, schemes and mores are often shared and understood by those residing within the community. Community members share the bonds of friendship or a sense of togetherness. Each local place has separate and distinctive identities and behaviors independent of their neighbors (Howley and Woodrum, 2004). And in these local communities, residents have a sense of identity in the social network that accompanies community membership. Some researchers describe this sense of belonging as a narrational history representative of *gemeinschaft* communities (Wittel, 2001). Accordingly, detailed knowledge about individual and group roles and behaviors in the social network is commonplace. In other words, in rural communities, not only does everybody know everybody, they also know what the other is doing.

In *gemeinschaft* communities, the first role of the school is to educate students on the day-to-day operations of the school. The norms, mores and schemes of the community are part of the work of the educational social structure, centrally focusing on function and outcome (Howley and Woodrum, 2004). Second, rural schools play

important roles in establishing a visible institution of citizen identity and in defining the community. They are centers for sports, theater, music and important civic activities, where local talent becomes legendary. As symbols of community autonomy, membership, viability, integration and tradition, schools in rural communities contribute to a sense of survival in the adult culture.

Conversely, suburban or urban educators may advocate a *gesellschaft* role in the education of the individual child very differently than *gemeinschaft* educators. According to this way of thinking, individual membership is founded on public responsibility, not community groups. These are "complex social spaces" (Howley and Woodrum, 2004, pp.1) with elaborate divisions of labor tied to a political structure or divisions of labor. These are often relatively large organizational structures or social service institutions serving independent or "self interests." G*esellschaft* communities lend themselves naturally to a greater reliance on outside social and governance structures. Rather than community control being maintained by mores and norms, rules are enforced by civil institutions, with a greater reliance on formal structures for governance. The role of the school is to educate students within these complex social relations for a global economy and the universal job market with transferable skills for future jobs, often in distant places (Hass and Natchigal, 1998). In *gesellschaft* communities, education is used as a "vehicle" to transcend culture, geography and kin. A universal education means one of specification and transferability. As a result, the growth of *gesellschaft* communities has created an extremely mobile population, both geographically and socially.

Tonnies (1955) presented a concise differentiation between the terms "community" (*gemeinschaft*) and society (*gesellschaft*), arguing that "community" is perceived to be a tighter and more cohesive social entity within the context of the larger society, due to the presence of a "unity of will." Supporting this work, scholars McMillan and Chavis (1986) listed four elements that define a "sense of community": 1) membership, 2) influence, 3) integration and fulfillment of needs, and 4) shared emotional connection. These combined factors, according to Tonnies, constitute qualities found within *gemeinschaft* communities. The influence of family and kinship, the heartbeat of community, are the most influential, but other shared characteristics, such as place or belief, could also result in *gemeinschaft.*

Tonnies' (1955) work informs this study in several important ways. First, he illuminates the distinctions between two social groups through the development of the industrial age. To that end, Tonnies provides a basis for the deconstruction of the relationship between social groupings (specifically, rural) and the increasing power of the state. This understanding is central to this study because it sheds light on the social processes that underpin rural receptivity of educational policy developed by distant state heads. Second, Tonnies contends that there are two basic forms of will: (1) that to approve of others and, (2) to serve the goals of the social group. The differences between community priority and individual focus parallel those of *gemienschaft* and *gesellschaft* community focus. Tonnies' theory helps make sense of the data collected in this study, which suggests a rural resistance to educational pressures to achieve according to traditional urban-based models (DeYoung & Kannapel, 1999). That in *gemienschaft* communities, what matters locally is vastly different than what matters in the minds of

distant state heads facilitating the currency of educational exchange. It helps to explain why, in many rural communities, schools have become vehicles for educating people to leave, fulfilling the forecast that these depleted towns are doomed to continued poverty and decline (Haas & Natchigal, 1992). Tonnies' work provides a framework from which to deconstruct these intertwined, yet opposing goals.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the educational attitudes, aspirations, values and behaviors of poor rural students and parents and to investigate how this rural environment and community impact these attitudes and values. It attempts to illuminate the social processes of rural poverty and how it circumscribes the futures of rural youth. Moreover, it looks at the societal level where class structure is reproduced and investigates the ways in which schools and educational structures such as policy contribute to social immobility. The research will be guided by a series of questions, and our first exploratory question is:

1. **How do the rural poor experience education, and how does their experience become reflected in their aspirations and beliefs about education?** As will be explained in the samples, the areas chosen are not only rural, they are rural communities. They very small towns in relatively unpopulated areas; most of the residents have lived there for more than two generations; there is a strong sense of identity in the community and there may be an equally strong sense of values. And because some of those values are about education, this study seeks to understand those values and how they might influence the school and educational aspirations and social mobility. Therefore, the second exploratory question is:

2. **What are the community values regarding education and in what ways do community social networks enable or disable social movement?** The second exploratory question has to do with perspective and social reproduction. Does the community encourage particular attitudes and values among their children? How do community values impact student attitudes about education? How do children experience those? Do they see education as something imposed from without, or do they have educational practices that transcend school? And do these rural citizens see education as possibly taking their children away from them to urban areas and white-collar jobs? Therefore the third exploratory question is:
3. **What do the members of the community, parents, teachers, interested citizens do, in a behavioral sense, relative to education and how are these behaviors enacted and reproduced? Moreover, what is the social process or 'internal logic" that has evolved to support and sustain these behaviors?** What do citizens do to facilitate engagement or disengagement from the school community? Do they try to mobilize the community resources in the interest of learning? What educational practices do they engage in? How does a "sense of place" transfer into behavior observable in the community and school? In what ways are youth's aspirations defined by the physical and social boundaries, therein? What contributions do social networks make to reproduce class and level aspirations?

Review of Literature

This community study focused on the educational experiences, behaviors and values of one poor educational community, and the embedded social processes that

sustain them. The literature highlights two bodies of work in rural research focusing on (1) the family and, (2) educational aspirations in rural communities. The first section focuses on the literature which describes the ways rural poor families manage their lives and meet the needs of the family. The literature is presented along three themes: (1) the characteristics of rural families, (2) the means by which rural households support each other that frame their economic actions and, (3) the literature that focuses on the role of "place" in rural lives. The second section examines the literature on rural educational aspirations, values and behaviors. In this section, the literature is presented in (1) the role of place in educational aspirations, (2) the roles that communities play in educational aspirations, and (3) the dual roles of family and poverty in rural educational aspirations.

Literature Describing the Rural Family

Families play critical social and economic roles for rural people. Family ties and ancestral roots are often enough to root them to place and give them a reason to continue living in geographic isolation and a depressed economy (Fitchen, 1991). Living in poverty is often a tricky business that requires cooperation among community and kin. This section describes key features describing rural families in high poverty regions and the social processes that sustain them.

Characteristics of Rural Families

The primary characteristic of the rural family structure is it in its conformity to the "traditional family structure." In the past, "rural families were often distinctly larger, more stable and younger than urban families" (MacTavish & Salamon, 2003, p. 73). More recent literature however, provides evidence that rural family marital patterns are

changing (McLaughlin, Gardner & Licter, 1999). Recent research suggests that rural people experience residential mobility often within the family. Families may live as an individual household, but drift to a relatives homesteads and reside communally with other family members, often grandparents (Licter, Roscigno & Condrom. 2003).

Some research indicates that there has been a decline in two-parent families, affecting the economic and social conditions in rural areas (Licter & Eggebeen, 1992). Still others argue that as a group, the number of rural poor appears to be increasing with characteristics that distinguish them from urban poor (Huang, 1991). As a group, they are white, two parent households living without public assistance just below the poverty line. They live in high poverty counties that are geographically concentrated, far from urban hubs. The most impoverished live in the most remote rural areas, and those experiencing persistent generational poverty are disproportionately found in rural areas (RURPI, 2004). And because those living in rural areas often live in isolation, they have fewer options to improve their lot (Save the Children, 2003).

Studies show that poverty is a part of rural living (Licter, Roscigno & Condrom, 2003). Rural poverty rates for children are higher than for their metropolitan peers (Rogers 2001; Swanson & Dacquel 1996). Rural poverty is less likely to be influenced by neighborhood effects or racial segregation and more likely to be associated with rural isolation in culturally distinct regions, such as rural Appalachia. The rural poor are more likely to have children from married families rather than single parents. And rural poverty has distinctive qualities that impact rural families (Licter & Eggebeen, 1992; Jensen & Eggebeen 1994). Rural poverty is likely to involve families who are "under-employed" (Findeis, Jensen & Wang, 2000) and therefore need to seek out ways to

supplement meager incomes. These families are often employed in more than one job. Despite their efforts, rural families are more likely to experience acute and persistent poverty for longer durations (Licter, Roscigno & Condrom, 2003).

Economic Support

Many rural families today are described as the "working poor." While some are gainfully employed, they hover just below the poverty line. Those living in socially isolated rural communities may experience local economic conditions that facilitate a greater reliance on each other for each other necessary for survival. People living in places with high poverty rates with challenging labor markets are likely to seek greater social support from each other (Hofferth & Iceland, 1998). According to Cotter (2002) economic and population characteristics of rural places contribute to their poverty levels, reporting that rural poverty rates are as high as 63 percent in some areas.

Working class and poor families are reported to have close ties and a greater reliance on family (Lareau, 2002) and those that live in locations where they grew up are expected to have the closest ties to kin. Conversely, those that move may have weaker social ties (Hagan, et.al 1996). When individuals move, it takes time to build up social networks and capital in new places. Further, the research shows that the longer families live in a geographic location the more attached they are to their communities (Goudy, 1991). Rural poor with strong family ties, despite living in a community with a weak economic environment are less likely to leave the community (Hofferth & Iceland, 1998). Those living in generational rural poverty are likely to express ambivalence about education and school cultures, and are less likely to view education as a vehicle to move

them out of grip of poverty (Duncan & Hill, 1987). Studies by Concoran (1987) submit that this reflects generational social patterns identified as reflective of educational levels, work and power.

As a group, they are responsible for caring for greater numbers of dependents (MacTavish & Salamon, 2003). Recent research suggests that as rural families expand to accommodate greater numbers of dependents, they have a greater reliance on each other to fulfill multiple roles because rural areas offer fewer structural and support services (MacTavish & Salomon, 2003). Moreover, when these structural support services exist locally, they are less likely to use them (Fitchen, 1991). Rural places may lack affordable child care and after-school programming, adult care facilities or medical services. Reciprocal obligations, often characteristic of rural living, provide the necessary help that would otherwise be provided by institutions.

Mactavish and Salamon (2003) write that rural families are left to assume these roles and "make due" with their current set of resources (Nelson & Smith, 1999). Yet, the research suggests that rural families find it difficult to care for family in traditional ways. According to these scholars, feeding their families and maintaining a home has become more difficult for rural poor families. They report that limited rural incomes have stereotypically been known to supplement low incomes with traditions tied to the land. Gardening, canning, hunting and fishing, gathering wood and berries, are examples of these stereotypes (Jensen, et al. 1945). Rural people are known to barter and trade for goods and services. Traditional self-sufficiency and self-preservation practices are characteristics that distinguish rural families from their urban and suburban counterparts (MacTavish & Salomon, 2003).

Rising household costs and the suburbanizing of small towns has had an affect on the challenges of daily living for rural people (Fitchen, 1981; 1991). With an increasing set of housing restrictions, codes and inspection fees, suitable housing is a challenge for lower income rural families. Household structures have changed and the rural landscape, now dotted with manufactured or mobile homes. According to MacTavish and Salamon (2003) manufactured or mobile housing represents one in eight existing homes in rural America, and one in five new homes, with three-quarters located in rural areas. And because of the rise of rural familial dependence, it is likely that these homes are put up on family plots. They are likely to reside in more isolated, rural places, populated with concentrations of younger, poorer people with lower levels of educational attainment (MacTavish 2001). Moreover, residing in such affordable housing structures is one that is often preferred because family ties and reciprocal relationships offer a reason for rural people to stay in poor rural areas (Fitchen 1991; Fitchen 1992; MacTavish & Salamon, 2001).

Other economic conditions challenge rural families. According to researchers, rural households are likely to have one working adult member and they are likely to work in more than one low-skilled, low-wage job (Fitchen, 1991). Low-skilled and low-paying jobs concentrate in rural spaces while suburban and urban areas tend to draw skilled and technical positions (Jensen & McLaughlin 1995). This is because many skilled and professional jobs are often found in more metropolitan areas (McGranahan, 1988). Production centered jobs are more likely to be located in urban areas and this condition has increased over time (McGranahan & Ghelfi, 1998).

Rural towns are likely to realize lower educational attainment, lower income and job-skills, fewer opportunities for employment and lower levels of civic engagement (MacTavish and Soloman, 2003). According to recent rural education research, local demand for a skilled work force impacts rural students' educational aspirations and achievement (Cobb, McIntire and Pratt 1989; Smith, et. al. 1995). Systems explanations of rural poverty highlight the importance of local opportunity and regional economic demand (MacTavish & Salamon, 2003). The world of work fails rural people through low-wage, low-skilled jobs that offer few social connections to the broader social structure or a diminished social status (Fitchen, 1991).

Economic dependence on extractive industries is characteristic of impoverished rural areas. The issues of immigration, poverty and poor working conditions among rural working families put tremendous pressure on public service institutions, including schools (Taylor, Martin and Fix, 1998). In communities with extractive industries, depression has persisted for decades. School systems in those communities are fiscally weak often receiving the lowest per pupil funding. They typically face grave problems of deep poverty, affecting academic performance.

Literature on Rural Identity and Isolation

According to research, spatial qualities create physical and conceptual distances between rural people and "the outside world," (Fitchen, 1992). Space and place are especially significant to rural people to the extent that it becomes a part of their rural identity and impacts their participation with the outside world (Howley, 2005). Rural identity is important is important in the way in which people collectively identify

themselves in relation to each other and the broader culture (Howley, 2005). For some, one aspect of rural identity lies in the convention that rural community may be viewed as a "chosen" place (Fitchen, 1992). The trend to move away from rural places to the city for jobs suggests an exodus from a waning place or declining social condition. Those that stay are likely to identify strongly with their community as an inextricable part of their identity (Fitchen, 1991; Orr, 1992). To that end, rural residents tend to live longer in their communities (Friedland, 1982). This preference is reinforced by familial ties, "shirt-tail" cousins and personal connections to community (Fitchen 1991; Fitchen 1992; Logan and Spitz 1994). They are more likely to maintain strong connections to the land and to traditional ways of living (Congor and Elder 1994; Haas and Natchigal, 1997). Family ties and ancestral roots are part of the reason why people stay in rural places despite poor economic conditions (Fitchen, 1991).

There is a body of literature that suggests that "place" not only impacts how rural people analyze economic and political decisions, it impacts how they are involved (Berry, 1977; Haas & Natchigal, 1998; Orr, 1992; Tyack, 1974). Some researchers contend that place is of such significance to rural people that it becomes a part of their communal identity (Fitchen, 1991; Howley, 2005). Others suggest that place and geography grounds rural people to their relationships with others (Falk, 2004). Haas and Nachtigal (1997) argue the importance of place and context, a way that students determine how they fit into the community. Likewise, Paul Theobald's (1997) work focuses on the importance of place consciousness in the development of rural values. Orr (1992) contends we are inextricably interconnected and urged researchers to develop a more active understanding of place and space.

Education

Despite that fact that 45 percent of All-American schools are rural (NCES, 2003), just as urban and rural educational attainment levels differ, there is considerable variation within rural schools. The Rural School and Community Trust compiled data on all 50 states which confirmed that schools vary widely culturally, economically and ethnically (2003). Low educational attainment levels pose a challenge for many rural areas seeking economic development. High school completion rates correspond closely to the degrees of urbanization and industrialization while low education is highly correlated to chronic deep-seated poverty (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003). Seniors attending schools in metropolitan areas are 1.5 times more likely to have parents with at least a bachelor's degree than in non-metropolitan areas (Pollard & O'Hare 1992, in Haas 1992). And with the economic demand for technical and advanced training drawing youth to urban areas for advanced degrees and jobs, there is even less opportunity and stimulus for education in rural than in urban areas (McGranahan, 1988). Inferior achievement levels are said to be linked to a number of factors. The following sections discuss the most relevant influences presented in research today. This section describes a body of literature affecting rural educational aspirations focusing on (1) place, (2) community, and (3) the combined influences of family and poverty.

Place and Educational Aspirations

Researchers suggest that place provides an important contextual foundation for assessing the educational environment (Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberly, 2003). Recent

literature examining the differences between rural and urban places is founded on the critical argument that place impacts educational attitudes, values and assumptions (Ching & Creed, 1997). There has been a recent resurgence in scholarly attention around "place" and the community as a concept. Drawing from anthropology, sociology and critical geography (Massey 1987; Soja, 1989), scholars argue that concepts such as "space and place" (Feld and Basso 1996; Tuan 1977) and the local ecological contexts related to place (Gallagher 1993; Leacock 1971; Orr 2002) are critical to understanding the processes of socialization (Mitchel, 2000), persistent poverty (Duncan 1982, 1987; Jensen, McLaughlin and Slack 2003) , educational and intellectual developmentl trajectories (Lichter, Roscigno and Condron, 2003), educational aspirations (Howley 2005; Labovitz 1974) and employment (Berkman & Syme, 1979; Claude, et.al 2000; Flora & Flora, 2003; Flora and Luther, 2000; Furstenberg, 1993; Geertz 1983; Jensen 1999, 2003; Massey 1987 Tigges, et. al. 1998; Wilkenson; 1991; Wilson, 1987, 1995, 1996).

According to the literature, place matters with regard to educational attainment (Beaulieu, Isreal and Wimberley, 2003). Historically, rural areas have fallen behind urban in the areas of educational attainment of their adult residents (Killian & Beaulieu, 1995). Place related contributors to this problem include inadequate school facilities, problems in transportation due to geographic size of district, limited course selection (Beeson, 2000), and a sizable number of students coming from low-income and low-education families (Oakey & Cusick, 1994). A limited number of community members holding college degrees and a lack of local work requiring educational training impacts educational attainment levels are other place related contributors to low educational

achievement (Ballou and Podgursky 1998; Jensen and McLaughlin 1995; National Education Association 2001). "The challenges of advancing educationally in rural America are greater for children living in communities where adults are poorly educated" (Beaulieu, Isreal and Wimberley, 2003, pp.274). Those children are more likely to have reduced educational attainment rates (Carter, 1999; Hansen & McIntire, 1989; Paasch & Swaim, 1998).

Moreover, rural schools have problems that distinguish them from urban and suburban schools. Elementary and secondary schools in high-poverty urban and rural areas offer fewer academic classes and are less likely to attract teachers who are highly qualified (Licther, Roscigno and Condron, 2003). Disproportionate school funding makes it more likely that the students are more likely to be taught in older and more run down schools. Students in those schools, on average, score below those in suburban schools in both mathematics and reading on standardized tests. Moreover, they are less likely to earn high-school diplomas (Lichter, Roscigno and Condron, 2003).

Place impacts the ways in which educational policy challenges are received (Beaulieu, Isreal and Wimberley, 2003). Rural schools are often face greater constraints in funding (Hobbs, 1995). Pressures to cut consolidate and outsource impact how families interact with the school (Howley, 2005). Community members from rural areas may feel a loss of control over their child's education (DeYoung, 1995), resulting in declining civic involvement. Research suggests that structural aspects of community and school impact educational aspirations and outcomes (Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberley, 2004). For example, while some researchers assert that larger schools are more effective because they are able to offer a more varied set of course offerings (McDill & Rigsby,

1973), others contend that smaller schools offer positive features, such as lower class sizes that impact student-teacher relationships and ultimately, academic performance (Howley, 1995; Gregory & Smith 1987; Walberg, 1992). However, studies have found little evidence that the size of school impacts rural academic performance (Greenberg and Teixeira, 1998; Hobbs, 1995). According to researchers, parental educational attainment and family involvement are important factors in educational aspirations and outcomes (Beaulieu, Glenn and Wimberly, 2003).

Community and Rural Educational Aspirations

Rural research reveals that educational aspirations are a cultural phenomena (Trainer, 1993). People will likely take on the social characteristics of their peer group. Research done by Victoria Purcell-Gates (1991) on literacy education, social class and social reproduction with rural Appalachian families suggest that there is a profound cultural difference in the educational attitudes, values and experiences of rural poor. She asserts these cultural practices and beliefs are interwoven into all aspects of daily activities, attitudes and beliefs and help to define and distinguish them among cultural groups.

Rural college participation rates lag for rural people; they attend college at rates lower than the national average (Killian & Beaulieu, 1995; Pollard & O'Hare, 1990). Student educational attainment aspiration rates tend to be lower when surrounded by fewer educated adults (Carter, 1999). Limited educational attainment by parents and limited achievement increases the likelihood that children living in rural communities are more likely to have low achievement and aspirations (Stockard and Mayberry, 1992). A self-fulfilling prophecy, rural community attainment rates has important bearing student outcomes (Beaulieu & Isreal, 1997).

Poverty, Family and Rural Educational Attainment

The influences of poverty and family impact many areas of rural family life including educational outcomes. Rural poor children's educational trajectories are shaped by parental educational achievement and familial aspirations (Stockard and Mayberry, 1992). These effects are stronger than the direct influence of one's scholastic ability or previous academic achievement history. Moreover, they are much stronger than any direct influence from one's peer group (Spenner & Featherman, 1978). As a group, these students have lower educational aspirations than do their more economically advantaged peers (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001; U.S. Department of Education 1997). Data from the National Education Longitudinal Survey show large rural/urban achievement gaps for a nationally representative sample of U.S. eighth graders (NELS 2001).

Rural poor families often display ambivalence towards school and school cultures (Duncan & Hill, 1987). Concoran (1987) suggests that this is due to generational social patterns reflecting educational levels, work and poverty. Okey and Cusick (1993) found a similar result in their study of rural dropouts. Dropping out, according to those researchers, was less an individual act by one student than a pattern of behavior engaged in by three or four generations in the same family. Children who live in communities with poorly educated adults or adults with limited educational aspirations are likely to experience similar educational and professional circumstances (Stockard & Mayberry, 1992). Parental influences are crucial intervening links that explain the effects of social class on status attainment, effects that are mediated through parental aspirations for their

children (Coleman, 1988). Social class is a stronger determinant of parental aspirations than academic performance. Moreover, social class effects through parental educational aspirations and encouragement has been noted by researchers (Otto and Haller, 1979.)

Social capital is one tool utilized by rural sociologists to describe "the norms, social networks and relationships between adults and children that are of value. When parents create a home environment strong in social capital, it is one that translates into academic success for their student" (Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberly, 2003, pp. 278). Parental education and family income are two important social capital factors influencing educational achievement, aspirations and outcomes (Choy, 2001). According to researchers, "students with college educated parents realize a better than 80 percent likelihood of entering college after graduation from high school" (Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberly, 2003, pp. 278). Children from families with low parental educational attainment have a higher risk of failing academically or dropping out, due to social capital features associated with limited opportunities (Huang, 1999; Oakey, 1994).

According to rural researchers, some rural communities face barriers that limit the attainment of family social capital. Rural families tend to be bigger than their urban and suburban counterparts (Dagata, 2000; MacTavish & Soloman, 2003. Their income levels tend to be lower (Ghelfi, 2000). Parental educational aspirations and attainment are also lower (Hansen & McIntire, 1989). Rural poor families tend to stay together in married households (Fields & Casper, 2001), consequently increasing the influence of the family on educational aspirations, values and behaviors (Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberly, 2003).

Researchers suggest that parental human and financial capital--as a measure of parental educational attainment levels and family income—centrally affects educational

performance, values and aspirations (Quan & Blaire, 1999; Sewell and Hauser, 1975; Sewell and Shaw, 1968). Social, human and financial capital can create the physical resources to assist in educational performance, achievement, aspirations and outcomes (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988). Parents with higher educational attainment and aspirations tend to pass this along to their children. According to researchers, these children benefit provided that human capital, social capital and financial capital are grounded in a strong familial relationship (Quan & Blaire, 1999; Coleman, 1988). In short, according to these researchers it is the strength of the relationship between the parent and the child that is the basic measure of social capital impacting educational aspirations.

Social capital features held at the community level impact educational aspirations as well. Institutional support from schools, neighborhoods and communities provide cognitive environments that influence educational attitudes, aspirations, values and behaviors (Quan & Blair, 1999). Rural places are more likely to suffer disproportionately from inadequate funding formula's, structural inadequacies of the school and less experienced and/or qualified teachers (Lichter, Roscigno and Condron, 2003). Efforts to offset state funding imbalances are often thwarted by rural poor communities because they depend on local property taxes and are therefore at a disadvantage at reaching the children of rural poor families (DeYoung, 1990).

The social constitution of the school exerts a normative influence on educational aspirations (Coleman, 1961; Labovitz, 1974). Some studies focusing on interpersonal relationships and educational aspirations found that influences along three lines--parents, teachers and peers (Spencer, 1976)--affected educational aspirations to varying degrees.

This supports early assumptions that educational structural influences on educational aspirations and values are mediated by interpersonal influence variables (Fitchen, 1981, 1991).

In sum, the combined influences of low income and family stability play a role in rural cognitive trajectories, aspirations and academic outcomes (Lichter, Cornwell and Eggebeen 1993; Isreal, Beaulieu and Hartless 2001). Rural people living in areas with depressed labor markets surrounded by adults with low educational achievement and aspirations are less likely to suspend immediate needs by investing in education (Fitchen, 1983). A higher education is less likely to be rewarded in America's rural places (Lichter, Roscigno and Condron, 2003). Thus, the literature suggests that the combined influences reinforce low educational aspirations and achievement and contribute to rural poverty and marginality.

Summary of the Literature

In sum, there is evidence that rural educational attainment levels lag behind their urban counterparts. Moreover, educational behaviors and values of rural poor reflect generational patterns of educational ambivalence. The first body of research focused on the role that families play in rural communities. Research that highlights the composition and characteristics of high poverty rural communities was presented. This section described the literature describing the ways rural families make ends meet. The literature focused on economic support strategies and reciprocal relationships as strategies for survival.

Next, historically, rural areas have fallen behind urban in the areas of educational attainment of their adult residents. Factors linked to "space and place" that contribute to this problem include inadequate school facilities, transportation, limited course selection, and a sizable number of students coming from low-income and low-education families. Those coming from communities where educational aspirations are low and parents have low educational attainment are more likely to have reduced educational attainment rates and reduced educational aspirations. Geographic isolation and resistance to government interventions further rural reliance on kin and community for survival.

The second body of literature focused on educational features high poverty rural communities. The literature suggests that the community's role in the social processes that sustain and reproduce educational aspirations, values and behaviors in high poverty rural communities are likely to be rooted in long standing relationships necessary for survival. Residents living in socially isolated rural communities may experience local economic conditions that facilitate a greater reliance on each other for social capital necessary for survival. People living in places with high poverty rates with challenging labor markets are likely to seek social support. Because rural areas are extremely homogeneous, they are likely to receive support from kin, furthering reliance on the existing social structure. A lack of experience with outside agencies and institutions and a natural resistance and distrust of them as government institutions serves to reinforce the powers of the community and family social structure.

The research on the social process that underscores and reproduces these values centers on kin, community and social capital. Parental education and family income are two important social capital factors influencing educational achievement and aspirations.

According to researchers, children from families with low parental educational attainment have a higher risk of failing school, due to social capital features associated with limited opportunities. Rural communities face barriers that limit the development of family social capital. Rural families tend to be larger and income levels lower. Moreover, parental educational aspirations and educational attainment tend to be lower. Educational aspirations are likely to be guided by local economic demand.

Looking Ahead

Over the past several decades the relationship between social class, urban poverty and education has received increased attention by scholars, policy makers and politicians. Particularly notable are the works of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Annette Lareau, Pauline Lipman, James C. Scott, Jay McLoed and Paul Willis in sparking a growing interest in this field. Unfortunately, there has been much less attention on social class, rural poverty and education. While rural America has realized a steady rise in rural adult educational attainment in the 1990s and an increasing importance of education to rural workers and places, a recent report by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Gibbs, 2004) also finds that racial educational differences remain large and that adult education levels remain far below the national average in many rural counties. Counties with more educated populations appear to have performed better economically in the 1990s and have lower over-all poverty rates.

Some scholars have provided evidence that the educational aspirations of rural citizens are weaker, or more to the point "different" than their urban and suburban

counterparts (Breen, 1989; Cobb, McIntire and Pratt, 1989; Howley, 2005; McGranahan, 1994). Other rural researchers have provided research that helps frame the conceptual issues of rural isolation and poverty that impact educational aspirations and experiences (Jensen, McLaughlin & Slack, 2003; Licter, Roscigno & Condron, 2003; Glasgow, 2003; Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberly, 2003), including social capital features (Flora & Flora, 2003), economic forces (McGranahan, 2003; Falk & Lobao, 2003), geographic considerations (Tigges & Fuguitt, 2003), the social institutions that sustain and reproduce community (Bonanno & Constance, 2003; Warner, 2003), age, race and gender (MacTavish & Solamon, 2003; Glasgow, 2003; Tickamyer & Henderson, 2003; Licter, Roscigno & Condron, 2003). Taken together, these works provide a fairly comprehensive illustration of social class, rural poverty and education. There are, however, some gaps that beg for further research (Green, 1993).

One issue identified by several of these researchers is the exploration of the naturally embedded social relationships that facilitate the reproduction of educational attitudes, behaviors and values. In particular, there is a need to understand the social processes and internal logic that sustains them. These factors contribute to generational poverty as a by product of low educational aspirations and achievement (Beaulieu, Isreal and Wimberly, 2003). A second issue identified by researchers (Green, 1993) and in concert with this study is in the development of stronger links between social contexts and personal accounts to understand the conditions in which rural poverty is generated and the ways that educational aspirations are reproduced. Finally, there is a need to understand the unintended consequences of educational policies calculated to target these populations.

Organization of This Study

This dissertation is organized into four chapters. Chapter I was an introduction to the study. The problem and significance of the study were explained, and the purpose of the study was set forth. The conceptual framework used in the study was described in detail. Exploratory questions posed in the study were stated. A literature review serves to underscore the rationale for this study; specifically, literature denoting the distinct qualities and characteristics of high poverty rural educational communities and related social processes that describe them. Other important works include the literature on social capital and place, as well as empirical research that embodies current thinking about the educational aspirations, values and behaviors of high poverty rural communities is detailed.

The methodology for this study is described in Chapter II. Chapter III reveals the results of the study. Chapter IV is a thematic analysis of the data. Several themes emerged from the data in two main categories. The two main categories were in the areas of family and education. In the category of family the themes focused on family values along three lines; (1) traditions as educational tools, (2) vital connections through reciprocity and, (3) rural identity and isolation. In the category of education, the themes centered on perspectives and behaviors. The themes were (1) community perspectives on the purposes of schooling, (2) the influence of kin on educational aspirations, (3) schools as vehicles of social mobility, (4) distrust and, (5) survival in rural Rutgers. Chapter IV includes findings from the study, a review of literature, contribution and conclusions drawn from the findings, and implications of the results of this study.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In the literature review I attempted to illuminate the complexity of the rural educational experience and their accompanying educational values, behaviors and aspirations through a discussion of the tensions, experiences and paradoxes. I discussed the characteristics common to rural poor communities, highlighting the influence of place, kin, poverty, trust and the social processes that underpin them. Research on the naturally embedded social relationships that facilitate the reproduction of educational attitudes, behaviors and values in rural communities was presented. This study seeks to extend that literature empirically with a field study of one community, bring the literature up to the present time, and bring it into focus at a time when it is being pressured by educational policies. My purpose in this community study was to explore the educational attitudes, values and behaviors of rural poor community members and school officials, and the social process that sustains them. Understanding these experiences has the potential to help shed light on how these collective elements factor into rural educational outcomes in one rural area.

In this chapter the methodology employed is explained, the pilot study is outlined, and the disposition of data collection and sampling strategy is described. The method of

analyzing the data and the process of generating and revising probationary findings are explained. A description of field procedures is provided followed by a chapter summary.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the educational attitudes, aspirations, values and behaviors of poor rural students and parents and to investigate how this rural environment and community impact these attitudes and values. It attempts to illuminate the social processes of rural poverty and how it circumscribes the futures of rural youth. Moreover, it looks at the societal level where class structure is reproduced and investigates the ways in which schools and policy contribute to social immobility. The research will be guided by a series of questions, and our first exploratory question is:

2. **How do rural poor experience education, and how does their experience become reflected in their aspirations and beliefs about education?** As will be explained in the samples, the areas chosen are not only rural, they are rural communities. They very small towns in relatively unpopulated areas; most of the residents have lived there for more than two generations; there is a strong sense of identity in the community and there may be an equally strong sense of values. And because some of those values are about education, this study seeks to understand those values and how they might influence the school and educational aspirations and social mobility. Therefore, the second exploratory question is:

4. **What are the community values regarding education and in what ways do community social networks enable or disable social movement?** The second exploratory question has to do with perspective and social reproduction. Does the community encourage particular attitudes and values among their children? How do community values impact students attitudes about education? How do children experience those? Do they see education as something imposed from without, or do they have educational practices that transcend school? And do these rural citizens see education as possibly taking their children away from them to urban areas and white-collar jobs? Therefore the third exploratory question is:
5. **What do the members of the community, parents, teachers, interested citizens do, in a behavioral sense, relative to education and how are these behaviors enacted and reproduced? Moreover, what is the social process or 'internal logic" that has evolved to support and sustain these behaviors?** What do citizens do in a behavioral sense, to facilitate engagement or disengagement from the school community? Do they try to mobilize the community resources in the interest of learning? What educational practices do they engage in? How does a "sense of place" transfer into behavior observable in the community and school? In what ways are youth's aspirations defined by the physical and social boundaries, therein? What contributions do social networks make to reproduce class and level aspirations?

Method

This study borrows from both anthropology and sociology. It employs the techniques of ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interview in a carefully chosen

community. Ethnography, a type of qualitative inquiry used in this study, is employed when the purpose of the research is to study an intact cultural group in a natural setting during a prolonged period of time by collecting primarily observable data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Ethnography is distinguished from other forms of qualitative research by its focus on (1) discovering cultural patterns in human behavior, (2) describing the perspectives of members of that culture, and (3) studying the natural settings in which the culture is manifested (Gall et al., 1996 in Leedy 1997). In this way, setting or "place"--which is shown to have a marked influence on human behavior, and particularly in this study--is studied in light of educational experiences, values and aspirations (Sojo, 2003).

A high-poverty, rural Michigan community was chosen to expand current research in three important ways. First, it addresses issues of the social processes underpinning educational aspirations, social reproduction and social mobility and in a high poverty *rural* educational community. This is notable because prior work has focused on urban settings (Kannepal & DeYoung, 1999). Second, it views community members as integral parts of the educational process and the educational community as a nested social system resistant to policy pressures from outside. Moreover, it views the educational community from the community and familial level. In this way, this study considers educational aspirations, values, behaviors and social reproduction as strongly linked to both community and kin with perhaps dense networks of interpersonal ties. This design offers information about educational attitudes, aspirations and behaviors, allowing inferences to be made about educational aspirations and social mobility decisions. Notably, this study focuses some attention to both sides of the community continuum (school and community) and seeks to describe causative factors of educational

aspirations and social reproduction. Third, this study expands the amount of qualitative detail collected, making life histories and community histories an integral part of the study design. This study attempts to describe the social, cultural and economic influences that contribute to change, identity and survival in one rural Michigan educational community. This study is not an anthropological investigation as much as it is a specialized study of the social processes that underscore educational aspirations and values in one rural community, using anthropological methods highlighting qualitative ethnographic designs.

Social Processes of Rural Educational Aspirations and Behaviors

This study is not the first to recognize that educational aspirations and behaviors have a social, economic and class-related basis (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Lareau, 2002; Macloed, 1995; Howley, 2005; Willis, 1977). Many studies have explored and documented the ways in which social processes reproduce class and this has received considerable theoretical attention as well (Massey, 1987). Prior work has considered the elements of social mobility and educational equality, mostly focusing on urban settings. Several decades of urban quantitative sociological research have demonstrated that the place, social class and poverty have a massive influence on educational outcomes, aspirations and social mobility (MacLoed 1987; Willis 1977).

> "Although mobility does take place between these classes, the overall structure of class relations and educational attainment over generations remains largely unchanged. Quantitative social mobility studies have documented a pattern of social relationships but have difficulty documenting how the pattern of social reproduction

is developed and sustained. This is an issue of great complexity, and one that has endured through time in sociological research" (MacLoad, 1987, pp. 4).

This study is not the first to argue that leveled educational aspirations are powerful mechanisms by which social class reproduced over generations (Willis, 1977; MacLoed, 1995: Lareau, 2002). It cannot be broken down and viewed as a single action, but as an integrated complex of influences acting together to produce a particular outcome.

In this study, I argue that the development and sustained educational values in one rural community are part of a dynamic, cumulative process governed by several principals. A goal of this research is to illuminate and verify these principals. The principals presented can be viewed judiciously from the existing theoretical and research literature developed mostly from urban studies and from the results of this present study.

The first principal is that educational aspiration and related behaviors originate as a structural component of rural communities. In other words, local economic demands serve as a barometer of educational aspirations. According to Massey, economists typically view educational out-migration or a means of allocating workers between areas of low and high wages, which they assume reflect the differences in productivity (Massey, et.al, 1987). The wage gap does a poor job of explaining trends in educational attainment levels of rural poor, as vastly different numbers of students from rural areas seek advanced schooling, although the numbers of those rural poor who seek to advance themselves through alternative educational options including schooling remain relatively low.

The second principal is that tightly nested social networks, often made up of close association of kin, are a major part of the community social structure that enables or disables educational aspirations and therefore, social movement. Individuals from the same community, often kin, are bound together by reciprocal obligations upon which new generations enter and become rooted. The bracketing of the individual to the generational social structure reproduces educational aspirations and therefore, social mobility over generations (Bourdieu, 1973; Duncan, 1987; Macloed, 1995).

The third principal, based on generalization from sociological research literature and from the pilot study, is that social pressures described as "leveling" are powerful mechanisms by which class related roles and behaviors are defined and reproduced over generations. They are seen as socially and structurally constructed systems of social reproduction, which influence educational aspirations and effect class structure and therefore, social mobility (MacLoed, 1987). Schools, as social entities and conduits of educational reform, have a tremendous impact on social reproduction, through the effects of curriculum offerings, school related extra-curricular activities and the valuation of educational attainment and outcomes within the community.

The fourth principal is that conforming to this social pressure to "level" educational aspirations serves the functional purposes of both sustaining the community and ensuring survival within the community. Individuals in the social hierarchy come to accept and identify their own social position within the community and the broader culture (Fitchen, 1981; MacLoed, 1987). Moreover, they accept the class based inequalities within the culture as legitimate.

These, then, are the basic principals that shape the ensuing study: that educational aspirations and behaviors originate as part of the social and structural components of the community; that nested social networks, often made up of kin, contribute to enabling or disabling social mobility; the social pressure described as "leveling" is a construct of the school, community and familial structure; that these are powerful mechanisms by which class is reproduced, and the social pressure to "level" serves the functional purpose of both sustaining individual and community survival.

Pilot Study

The plan for this research was informed by a pilot study of rural community members and school administration conducted in the spring of 2004. The focus of the study centered on four variables: educational aspirations and behaviors, educational experiences, social processes that underscored educational experiences, and educational policy implications. For each of these variables, the question of how it affects behavior was asked. Further, the interaction and interrelationship of these variables was pursued.

A single school district in a rural community was chosen for the study. Data collected from artifacts, published reports from the Michigan Department of Education (2002), the National Center for Educational Statistics and state and federal grant applications provided baseline data from which to begin the development of questions used in a semi-structured interview protocol and the descriptive questionairre. The selection of volunteers was made in cooperation with the school administration. A list of community members was generated from which a sample of seven, four male and three

female, was selected. At the same time, permission was obtained to review school records to help verify the data.

The pilot study used an interview-only method based upon a set of open-ended questions written for each of the areas of investigation. Volunteers for the study were interviewed in segments which ranged from one hour to three hours, with a maximum of three interviews per subject. Prior to the first interview, volunteers were read a consent form detailing the purposes of the study, the potential risks and their right to withdraw without penalty.

The interviews opened with an opportunity for each participant to review a list of previously prepared and approved questions regarding the four areas of investigation. Though notes were taken, all of the interviews in the pilot study were taped and transcribed, then later edited. The notes and the transcriptions were later used to generate follow-up questions for future interviews. They also served as a guide in the development of questions for additional interviews used for this dissertation. In this fashion these early interviews allowed me to pursue themes and patterns relevant to the study. The interviews in the pilot study also served the purposes of gaining the confidence and trust of local participants. This was important because it later enabled me to secure an honest pool of volunteers willing to share information with me. No small task, in rural ethnographic work (Fitchen, 1991; Schaffer, 2003).

A wide range of characteristics which appeared representative of studies of larger populations (Howley, 2005) were found among the volunteers in this study. Both administrators and the five community participants reported the following themes

representative of community life: homogenous groupings made up mostly of kin, strong connections to place, poverty, tightly nested social ties, a deep distrust of outsiders and outside policies, a resistance to educational policy pressures from the state, and a process of social reproduction that the school administration described as "leveling." All of the community members were from lower middle class to poverty level households. Two of the subjects were rural pastors; one ran a food pantry and a summer school program. Two parent volunteers were on the school board and worked in business administration positions outside the community. One parent volunteer, a former factory worker, ran a butcher shop out of her home. All participants described a disconnect between the goals of the educational priorities of the state and the educational goals of community members.

Despite a wide range of educational experiences revealed in these interviews, the most consistent finding in the study was the pervasive influence of kin and community (often the same thing) with respect to school goals. Patterns of low educational attainment within the community coupled with a lack of local jobs demanding skilled workers contributed to a pattern of low educational aspirations and attainment. One parent indicated that college was not a viable option for many local families due to tightened fiscal constraints and local economic demand. She stated that schools failed students because of an increasingly academic and global focus. According to this parent:

> I think the more emphasis should be put on trade schools, building trades. Functional jobs. When kids are out of school, they should be able to be trained to do something. Cuz with every, all these kids are coming out of high school, expecting to go to Michigan State for the higher education is so much big business, it stinks. And there are some jobs that definitely need the higher, higher education but there's a lot of average folks out there that need to learn how to make a living and start it when

> they're out of school. Not when they're 24 or 25. There's a, there's a big gap in there where people are accumulating a whole lot of debt and they don't even know what they wanta do.

Another participant, a pastor, reported the following:

> The biggest issue in the education system is it's not meeting the local needs. You know, the MEAP tests a couple years ago, it was environmental something, was the MEAP stuff. Well, what in the world value did that have to a bunch of kids, you know, at third grade level? It had no value. How do I get that training? If I wanta work in a trade, if I wanta be an automotive mechanic, you know what I gotta do? I gotta get somebody to invest in me. I've gotta get a private employer to believe in me and invest in me cuz I have nothing to offer. On the other hand, if I was in high school and I was able to get a couple years of shop and mechanic, and auto mechanics, basic stuff, you know that'd give me a real leg up with the employer. But, no, the state has changed our priorities.

Based on the findings from the pilot study and with the support of several major research studies, the decision was made to focus the following themes: The influence of kin, poverty and the importance of community, distrust and the social processes that influence educational aspirations, values and behaviors. Since it was found that community members and school officials were fairly open about the above, the decision was made to continue the interviewing protocol. Finally, it was decided that interviews would be transcribed, when feasible.

Study Design

The study of class-related educational attainment has been an issue drawing attention by scholars, social scientists and others from a variety of disciplines (Willis,

1977; Wilson, 1987; MacLoed, 1995; Lareau, 2002). It has been examined widely using different data sources and a range of methodological approaches. The study of rural educational aspirations, values, behaviors and rural social mobility, perhaps resulting from socioeconomic, sociopolitical and educational factors, is an area that has received little scholarly attention. Most research that has been conducted along this vein has been in the form of anthropological ethnographies collected with little attention to causative factors related to rural social mobility (Fitchen, 1991). Scholars cite the influences of generational poverty, low parental educational attainment levels, employment inadequacies, housing shortages and familial instability in rural communities as factors that influence social mobility(Concoran 1987; Duncan 1987; McGranahan 1994). Taken together, these trends describe the deteriorating community situation lived by some rural individuals. Little rural educational research has been conducted regarding the sociopolitical processes of educational aspirations, behaviors in response to educational reform. Most of what has been done has focused on the issues of social reproduction and social immobility of classes in urban communities ((Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu 1977; MacLoed 1987; Wilson 1987).

Ethnography was employed as an "analytical description of social scenes and groups that recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of those people" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, pp.2-3). What distinguishes ethnography from other types of qualitative research is its explicit focus on the features describing the relationship between culture and behavior.

Method of Data Collection

The process of data collection took many forms. It was an interactive approach that required an extensive amount of time on-site systematically observing, interviewing and recording processes as they occurred naturally in the location. This study employed a variety of data collection strategies: participant observation, ethnographic interview, descriptive surveys, stand alone case studies, artifacts and educational life histories. The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding. Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation but an alternative to validation (Flick, 2006). This combination of multiple methodological practices can be best understood as a strategy to add richness and depth to this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The primary method selected for the pilot study was the ethnographic interview, described as "open-response questions to obtain data of participant meanings--how individuals conceive the world and how they explain or make sense of the important events in their lives" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p.423). The specific interview method selected for the primary study was a series of lengthy semi-structured guided and tape-recorded interviews.

In this section the method is explained and strategies, techniques and tactics are reviewed. The limitations of these are discussed, as well as issues of reliability and validity. Using methods both anthropological and sociological, I conducted 28 semi-structured interviews, which allowed me to construct oral histories of the families and their community. Supplemental data focused on (1) educational characteristics as defined

by local sources, and (2) structural aspects of the community. Also included were state and national data sets providing descriptive statistics.

The explanation of the method is brief and fundamental. The reason for this is logical. Field research is informed by proven methods and by reviewing the work of experts (Oakey, 1990). Despite this, each field study is a unique experience. To this end, the researcher narrating the actual events may best capture an accurate understanding of the field method. Therefore, the specifics regarding preparation for entering the field and the strategies, techniques and protocols employed are presented in a separate section of this chapter.

The interviews were semi-structured and initiated with a list of approved interview questions and a protocol (Appendix A.2). The semi-structured interview format was conducted in 3 phases. First, the participants were given the list of approved questions and asked to review them and select one that they felt was important to this study. The interviewee's were both the informant and respondents, necessitating a multiple-contract interview strategy. Initial interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 1 hour and to a total of three interviews per interviewee.

Questionnaire Design and Interviewing

Two questionnaires were designed for use in this study: a questionnaire for the semi-structured interview and a descriptive questionnaire. The questionnaire utilized for the semi-structured interview was the primary source of data collection. The design of the ethnographic design and semi-structured interview represents a balance between

interview research and ethnography in cultural studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). There is extensive history of these ethnographic methods in education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2003; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). As a researcher conducting a community study and working from a cultural studies perspective, I sought to understand the data in terms of location within a historical moment marked by the influences of place, economic standing and culture. This cultural studies use of ethnographic methods intent is to bring together a set of cultural understandings to this project. The ethnographic design and semi-structured interview protocol is a reflection of this.

The second questionnaire was modeled after Douglas Massey's Mexican Migration Project ethnosurvey design (Massey 2007). This questionnaire followed a semi-structured format and was used to catalogue and categorize data for this study and for future research (Appendix A.3). This protocol was used for local participants only and was completed by the fieldworker. Descriptive data collected using the descriptive survey was not collected for participants living outside of the community. This questionnaire was used to help categorize and catalogue data.

I sought a design that would yield a standard set of interpretive qualitative data in a non-threatening, unobtrusive and informal way. The form used in the pilot study, a semi-structured interview schedule, was implemented and improved upon; a series of tables that included community members listed along the downside and variables listed in the column headings. The goal was to solicit information in the way that the situation would demand using judgment about precise wording and timing. Each table would correspond to a different topic separated with more specialized questions in order to elaborate on a

theme. For example, in the pilot study one theme that reoccurred consistently among all subjects was the influence of social networks on an aspect of educational behavior. This was described as an intense pressure to "level" educational aspirations and behaviors within schools and within the community. This pressure served as a tool of social reproduction and limited social mobility. In this community, the regulation of aspirations and educational behaviors by locals was perhaps the most significant of all the mechanisms that contributed to social reproduction. The questionnaire design allowed an attempt to analyze the forces that contribute the conditions within the educational community and the consequential behaviors, therein. While this questionnaire is only used for categorizing data for the purposes of this dissertation, it also allowed for the future tracking of demographic and other statistical data to investigate patterns.

The ethnographic description of the data would provide a means of overcoming the limitations of the interview design by providing richness coupled with the historical depth necessary to understand the complexities of social networks. The ethnographic method allows us to understand the day to day regularities of these rural communities, shedding light on cultural, historical traditions and insight into how these societal enclaves maintain relations, ideology and function. Blending ethnography and survey methods allows us to employ quantitative measures and qualitative measure, supplemented by the richness of ethnography to study the social processes of rural educational aspirations and behaviors.

Table 1: Semi-Structured Interview Outline

Semi-Structured Interview	**Interview Focus**
Family Interview	Demographic data, life histories, educational aspirations and behaviors, social networks influencing reproduction and mobility, socioeconomic, social systems analysis
School Faculty Interview	Expectations, political, social and systems constructs, policy implications
Community Member Focus	Demographic data, life histories, educational aspirations and behaviors, social networks influencing reproduction and mobility, socioeconomic, social and systems analysis.

Sample Design

The questionnaires were applied to households and schools selected in simple random samples in a high poverty educational community located in northern Michigan. This community is a rurally isolated, high-poverty district far from urban hubs. The

school is undergoing educational reorganization in response to funding shortages; Rutgers School District will soon take to the voters a proposal to consolidate or annex with neighboring school districts.

Three criteria were employed in the selection. First, I chose a community in which I had prior ethnographic experience. With an established unobtrusive presence and a network of trusted informants, the threat to study these complex social processes would be considerably reduced and the validity enhanced. Second, I sought a rural area in which school reorganization was imposed due to state-initiated fiscal constraints. This not only increased the likelihood of working in a high poverty rural region, but also allowed the inquiry into the effects of such state and federally mandated educational policies in one isolated rural social enclave. Lastly, a community that qualified for Title VI Part B Subpart 2 Rural and Low-Income School Program was chosen, which allowed me to document changes over time using federal data sets.

The unit of analysis in this study is "the community." Participant sampling in the community began with an initial ten to fifteen families randomly selected from the pool of parents within the school district. Departing from that, a snowball selection followed to access willing community members and kin living in the school district but not necessarily those with children currently enrolled. Finally and very importantly, fifteen school faculties participated in both the informational interviews and the surveys.

Detailed maps showing the location of dwellings in the rural communities relative to the school providing demographic data assisted in providing sampling frames to code and track data. Participants within the educational community were selected using these

maps and more often through informal networks. School officials were surveyed and interviewed, as well as community leaders. Because accessing the rural poor participants is notoriously challenging (Schaffer, 2001) participants were offered a small stipend of fifteen dollars to participate for the initial informal interview. Because rural communities are often small, a random sample of 28 total interviews was secured.

One of the goals of this sampling design was to produce four different kinds of data to be combined in different ways for different purposes. The fundamental data are the representative educational community samples. Also in this sample are interviews and surveys from staff. These data are supplemented by other sources such as ethnographic artifacts (such as school newspapers, local resources), the data from school grant applications, Standard and Poors, Title VI subpart B Low Income and Rural School Program data and data mined from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). Families and schools living in receiving communities will also be included in the sample but coded differently for future research. While data from Standard and Poors provided data on the efficiency of schools relative to other schools, mined from MDE and NCES include:

- SES
- Social Characteristics and Demographic Data
- Enrollment Data
- Educational Attainment
- Student Families
- Achievement
- Finance

In general, the strict community was used when the goal of analysis was to study the state of affairs within that social enclave. When the purpose of the survey is to examine the social and cultural reproduction of class, mobility and educational aspirations in rural educational communities, the strict community samples will be supplemented by data gathered. The community sample includes community members, kin and school faculty.

Obviously, interviewing only community members who reside within the region limited the validity of this study, as those that choose to out-migrate were under-represented. Therefore, representative random sampling using "snowball" or chain referral method helped access rural community members who were harder to reach. Specifically, those that had chosen educational out-migration by way of homeschooling, dis-enrollment and re-enrollment in another district or those choosing to attend college or move to another location were sought out as informational sources.

Throughout the course of fieldwork phases of this study, I devoted considerable time to conduct a thorough search for historical data to supplement the ethnographic data. I read historical documents in local archives, constructed genealogies of educational family trees and conducted in-depth interviews, compiling a series of case studies that have the potential to "stand alone" as an anthropological work. The study draws from ethnographic data mined from the descriptive questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews and supplemental data gathered through intensive fieldwork.

Participant Sample

The questionnaires were applied to community members and school officials through random sampling. The chain referral methods allowed access to key informants and continue to build a trusted network from which to gain insider information. Demographic, geographic and macro and micro historical information was compiled. Household economic information and socioeconomic information was sought but could only be accessed by national data sets. Information regarding the social organization of the community was collected and analyzed. In particular, the behaviors and educational aspirations of this rural community were investigated in light of recent educational reform efforts. Specifically, the sociopolitical basis of educational behaviors and aspirations of kin, community members and school officials, highlighted against the broader theoretical framework of social reproduction theory, informed the data and ultimately informed theory. Finally, a detailed analysis of this information provided a data against which other studies might be compared.

The sociocultural data mined from the pilot study has allowed me to anticipate some key categories. And as is often the case in ethnographic work, the findings helped me reconsider our guiding research questions and redirect our focus. The first category was the strong influence of kin as critical in virtually all aspects of behavior. Tightly coupled social networks served to inform and regulate behavior and limit mobility within these high poverty rural educational communities. In this way and according to social reproduction theorists such as Max Weber, Emile Durkhiem and especially Pierre Bourdieu, the rural communities "lived" social reproduction of class-related behaviors, aspirations and values. According to data collected in the pilot study students, parents

and school faculty reported intense social pressure to "level" educational aspirations; a form of social reproduction in high poverty groups (Fitchen, 1987; MacLoad, 1987).

Attention was further directed to the ways in which schools unintentionally reinforced social inequalities. On one hand, educational leaders reported conflict over recent educational reform efforts that push middle class notions of upward mobility onto rural working class and poor families (Kirby, 2006). They pressed for curriculum developed by "outsiders" and with an "outside focus," thereby demoralizing the community values. The students, families and community members resisted the educational pressures for academic achievement and distanced themselves from the school and the faculty. Displaying the working class values of kin and locality, they saw these pressures as a threat to both individual and community survival. School leaders, once known for softening policy, now found themselves essentially at odds with those they served (Kirby, 2004).

In general, the findings helped guide the revision of the study design, to include a broader approach that would represent a compromise between the exigencies of a modified survey research and ethnography. This initial anthropological work took a decidedly different turn. The pilot study data showed that the predominant issues in the community were the social reproduction of class and class related aspirations and behaviors within high poverty rural communities. Moreover, it was found that educational policies such as school reorganization reinforce social inequalities, depreciate local class and culture. The study design changed because the research required that it be capable of securing valid and reliable data points over place and time. A mixed methods approach was sought for categorization and descriptive purposes.

A modification of the ethnosurvey method developed by Douglas Massey (1987) was chosen because it provided a historic depth and interpretive richness coupled with quantitative rigor. There is well-established literature on both the method (its conceptual and theoretical underpinnings) and its application (The Mexican Migration Project). Many of its articles have focused on the social processes (social networks and social capital) and while the context is different the application is similar. It offers an interdisciplinary analysis of a rather narrow subject: social reproduction in rural educational communities in Michigan, and the influence of schools and of educational policies on social mobility, on educational outmigration and the reproduction of class.

Community Profile

Rutgers Area Schools can be found 8 miles north of Elk Creek, off the I-75 expressway in an area known as "the Snow Belt." The small, extremely rural one school K-12 district is located in a pocket of poverty in an otherwise modestly profitable county. Some lucky residents find employment at the factory housed within the city limits, or at the school; these are the area's two largest employers. Many adults work two jobs to make ends meet. Many hold jobs in extractive industries; logging, farming and seasonal jobs such as snowplowing provide income for local residents. Hunting, mushrooming and tapping sugar maple supplement family incomes and generate a small seasonal tourist trade. Parental educational attainment levels reflect local economic demands, which are extremely low. Compared to the national average of 25 percent, only 7.4 percent of the adults in this community have *some* college experience (Standard & Poors, 2001).

Poverty rates are as high as 63 percent in this district (Standard & Poors, 2002). Free and Reduced Lunch rates are over 50 percent compared to the national average of 25

percent. School administrators report that because of high poverty rates and low levels of educational attainment, children come to school unprepared to learn (Learning Without Limits Implementation Report, 2003).

The students in this district have a history of poor school attendance, poor student achievement on standardized tests, with Michigan Educational Proficiency Test (MEAP) scores well below the state average. The district scored below the 30th percentile on the MEAP in all subject areas, in both primary and secondary (MDE, 2001). Listed as one of Michigan's failing schools, the district has been receiving technical assistance from the state office of Field Services for several years.

As is often the case, school enrollment declines reflect the area's economic declines (Stern, 1994). The school district has declined by one third in the last three years, (Kirby, 2004). Graduation rates also appear low but such rates can prove deceiving for rural and small schools. Sandy Whipp, the district's Superintendent, explained that the low graduation rates and low-test scores had high variability because the school was small. The district had only two girls drop out of high school in the 2004-2005 school year, due to pregnancy, but because the numbers were small, it appeared as if the declines were overwhelmingly large.

Many rural schools are small and report a greater risk of being labeled as "in need of improvement" because of the volatile nature of school level reporting from year to year (Figlio, 2002; Kane & Steiger, 2002). If grade levels are small, they are at greater risks of considerable variation. One student's scores are more likely to skew the results for an entire grade level. Most rural elementary schools in the United States contain an

average of 68 students per grade level (Kane & Steiger, 2002). If fewer than 100 students are tested in each grade, averages are likely to fluctuate from year to year, thus yielding unreliable scores. Thus, under NCLB, rural and small schools are subject to greater scrutiny and are at risk for being labeled "non achieving."

Compounding existing tensions, the district on the verge of bankruptcy is being forced to reconfigure. The district faced a $200,000 shortfall last year, and faces up to a $500,000 shortfall next year (McWhirter, 2005). Superintendent Whipp said that "employee benefits and salaries consume 98 percent of the district's budgets, leaving just enough to pay for utility bills. New textbooks and building repairs can only be paid through grants." Whipp herself has resigned from her position to relieve the district from this debt and teaching staff has been cut, leaving 16 teachers for the 194 student body. Moreover, the district special education position has been included in those cuts. The current principal will take on the additional duties of the Superintendent, without pay.

According to locals, this decision to bend to state pressures to reconfigure is a difficult and painful one. This is because the citizens of Rutgers live in rural isolation but with strong and interwoven social networks. They draw clear and distinctive cultural lines between themselves, the school faculty and neighboring districts. LaCroix County is highly segregated by class. The county is divided into three areas with clear socio-economic distinctions; the working class agrarian western portion, the more prosperous south central portion which provides many of the "city jobs" in the county, and the poorer non-agrarian northern section. Residents of Rutgers, in the rocky northern region of the county, complained of "open discrimination" from the "city folks." These were the

government officials from the larger, more affluent south central neighboring town of Elk Creek. Residents shunned notions of a school merger, citing "bad blood" and the schools ability to deliver on its promises, especially, if the school officials making those promises were not "from around here" (Kirby, 2004).

The outgoing Superintendent suggests that Rutgers's potential school district reorganization is likely to do more harm than good in terms of student attendance and enrollment rates. Says Whipp, "We are likely so see more students and parents feeling like they don't fit in, and they are likely to drop out and *homeschool.* They are more likely to be at risk for high poverty and an even lower employability rate.

Meanwhile, Whipp leaders have discussed whether to annex their district of 194 students with rival LaCroix Community Schools, or to consolidate with Badger or Hanson school districts. Recently, the latter two districts have declined consolidation due to their own financial woes (Record Eagle, April 15, 2005). Rutgers officials say that they don't know how they will reconfigure, but closing is not an option. "Rutgers doesn't quit," says one school official (Record Eagle, February 18, 2005).

Data Coding and File Construction

The study design uses the Mexican Immigration Project (Massey, et. al., 1987) as a model for encoding data and file construction but on a much smaller scale and for a single site. The transcribed data was transferred to specially designed code sheets (Appendix B.2). Transcriptions done of audio-taped interviews was done by a hired clerical worker and coding done by the researcher of this project, familiar with the descriptive questionnaire used in this project. The information was organized into data

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files and categorized to match the information needed in the design goals. Basic information containing demographic and social data on the community (some drawn from federal and state resources such as NCES and MDE) comprised a separate portion of this data set. Geographic and socioeconomic data germane to these communities also contributed to the findings of this study. Stand alone case study data was collected and will be presented in narrative vignettes illustrating the findings. This information will be presented in Chapter III. Images in this thesis/dissertation are presented in color.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is threefold: first, I investigate the educational experience of rural community members and how it is reflected in their educational aspirations, attitudes and behaviors. Second, I wanted to understand the community values about education, the ways they become communal and how they enable or disable social movement. Third, what do the members of the community, parents, teachers, interested citizens do, in a behavioral sense, relative to education and how are these behaviors enacted and reproduced? Moreover, what is the social process or 'internal logic" that has evolved to support and sustain these behaviors?

In this study eight themes emerged from the data in two main categories. The two main categories were in the areas of family and education. In the category of family the themes focused on family values along three lines; (1) traditions as educational tools, (2) vital connections through reciprocity and, (3) rural identity and isolation. In the second category, which focused on education the themes centered on perspectives and behaviors related to education. The themes were (1) community perspectives on the purposes of schooling, (2) the influence of kin on educational aspirations, (3) schools as vehicles of social mobility, (4) distrust and, (5) survival in rural Rutgers.

In the first category which focuses on family, the interviews and observations suggested that like Annette Lareau's study of social class, race and childrearing, "crucial aspects of family and community life cohered" (Lareau, 2002, pp, 752). They were distinguished by three key themes. The first theme was that family and community traditions were valued educational tools that fulfilled multiple vital functions within the community. Linked to the land and most often defined by production, these traditions supplemented limited family incomes and helped sustain the community in tangible ways. Second, rural people in Rutgers maintained vital connections to each other that were characterized by reciprocity. Families in the community, often inter-related, helped each other in important ways. Primary relationships such as those within the family gained importance over secondary relationships, thereby inflating their effects. Two examples that are featured illuminate the rural culture and the important roles families play in sustaining culture. These focus on rural household structures and economic support.

In the second category which focuses on education, the interviews and observations suggested that the people of Rutgers had strong views about education, about schooling and about educational policy. From these, five themes emerged. First, community members and school officials reported a subaltern-like resistance over the purposes and practices of schooling. This resistance took the form of specific behaviors, detailed in the following section. Locals, who reported that they wanted the schools to teach their children how to be good community members, were in conflict with the school officials whose educational ideals and practices mirrored the states. The result of these educational attitudes is reflected in the next finding.

Second, family's educational attitudes had a tremendous impact on educational aspirations, values and behaviors. Most often, it was reported that the educational levels of parents or grandparents combined with regional job-skill demands defined educational aspirations. Leveled educational aspirations, "a powerful mechanism by which class is reproduced" (McLoed, 1987, p. 9), were a tool utilized mainly by kin to limit social mobility. Leveling served the functional purposes of both sustaining the community and ensuring survival (in the most literal sense) within the community. It structured overall class relations and educational attainment over generations.

Third, schools were viewed as vehicles of upward mobility. Locals reported concerns that schools pressured students to leave the community, thereby threatening both individual and community survival. Fourth, locals reported a general distrust for outsiders and outside institutions such as school, police and local governing bodies. Formal, sanctioned, influential structures are considered suspect because they do not follow local culture. Distrust of outsiders included both faculty and school administration, all (but one) of whom live outside the district and commute to work. Participants also reported distrust for educational policies and reforms developed by distant state heads, citing that policymakers did not understand "what matters around here." Fifth, a dominant theme in this study was the focus of survival. This theme underpins all behaviors related to education. For Rutgers, surviving economically and socially, local will and determination are critical.

In this chapter I will present and analyze these themes as they related to the community, experiences, behaviors and the social processes studied. The first two sections of the chapter describe the setting and introduce two major categories: (1) family

perspectives regarding beliefs, values and behaviors; (2) family perspective regarding schooling. Within each category, key themes of the school, community and family are detailed. In these sections the findings are described and analyzed according to theme. This chapter is closed with a discussion of the community's values regarding schooling.

The Setting

The semi-structured interviews, descriptive questionnaires, observations, community forums and family visits which provided the bulk of the data for this study were conducted between April of 2004 and spring of 2007. Beginning in April of 2004, I began this study with a two hour meeting with the then Superintendent, Sandy Whipp, who directed me to her administrative staff of one, Principal Mike Zerbe. These administrators suggested I begin my study by meeting the community at a school board meeting. There, wearing a suit, I was introduced to the attending community and school faculty, clothed in considerably less formal attire; flannel shirts, a combination of camouflage and hunter orange and Carhardt's. At break, I attempted to mix with attendees but was completely shunned, an outsider to this community. Literally, no one would talk to me or look at me. I resolved to gain anthropological ground and "make sense of the local situation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, pp. 17.)

I visited the community school several times in an effort to gain access to a pool of participants. It took months to establish a presence for the pilot study. It took three years to obtain sustentative data. I spent time at the gas station/coffee shop and ate sandwiches at the Galley, the only restaurant in town. I bought beef jerky and bait at the bait shop, shopped in the now defunct corner market and visited families in their homes

and at their camp sites. I brought milk and candy bars to the kitchens of local women, as gifts for their children. I conducted interviews in churches, homeless shelters and soup kitchens, at picnic tables over coffee and over the counter at a feed co-operative. I conducted one brief interview with a farmer on his Ford tractor taking a break from haying his field, surrounded by giant fragrant round bales. Another interview, far less fragrant but equally colorful, was conducted in a resident's home/butcher shop during the first week of deer season. I left that interview with a fist full of venison jerky and a particularly memorable stand-alone educational life history. And finally, I spent a great deal of time at the K-12 school meeting with faculty, parents and school board members.

Throughout rural northern Michigan I traveled north on the I-75 corridor passing vast pine forests, potato fields, rolling hills dotted by great boulders and an occasional cow. It seemed to me to be more sandy fields and rocky terrain than productive farm land. An hour could pass by traversing a rural road and then a single town would emerge—Badger or Atlanta. These are small indiscriminant towns housing little more than a bar, a dollar store, a gas station and a post office. These towns in varying stages of economic decline slip into the distance of the rearview mirror. A more prosperous place, often located next to the freeway may have franchise food chain to drawing a modest tourist trade on their way to more glamorous locals. As a group, theses towns were unmemorable except in their bleakness.

Similarly, the site of this study displays scraps of life in a frozen rural landscape. At the center of commerce in a town with a single blinking yellow light is a post office, a bait shop and gas station, a pizza parlor, a restaurant open only for lunch and a bar with a parking lot full of tractors and pickup trucks with gun racks. Here, locals gather in the

morning at the gas station in the newly installed booths for coffee and gossip. It is the watering hole. Here an idea for something can take ground and erupt exponentially impacting the town and all its citizens.

In the distance beyond a line of decaying manufactured housing is a grouping of skeletal trees in a small park near the town church. Across the intersection and further north, a wood and brick store boarded up and layered with out-of-business signs and graffiti signals and the decline of the town. This was the only market in the city limits. For a time, local businesses took aim at a dwindling tourist trade when the land proved too brittle and acidic to produce and the growing season too short. The town never realized the growth to which it once aspired. These few businesses barely survived serving the local clientele.

These boarded up buildings and decaying homes held the story of this place; how a small rural isolated high poverty town became home to a small group of people, mostly kin, and how this town seemed to raise a fist against the outside world. The people who live here now, the ones who have lived here for generations, try to make it through their daily challenges: how to make the mortgage, how to make the truck payment, how to keep gas in the truck, how to keep food on the table and how to keep their children from moving away.

The township itself dates back to 1877, established by a former land baron and university president as a long ago railroad and logging town. Rutgers is a general law township consisting of approximately 108 sq. miles of land; equal to about 69,120 Acres. Approximately 33,280 acres of that land is state land, which provides a modest economic

draw for tourists. There are several miles of rivers and steams that run through the township feeding into small bodies of water, mostly mud lakes and swamps. The streams are good for trout fishing and the lakes are abundant with smaller pan fish types: crappy and blue gill. The camping is good and the locals take advantage of this. The area is known for its extractive industries: logging, fishing, maple tapping, morel mushrooms and elk hunting. Most local families supplement meager incomes by hunting and gathering. Some set up roadside stands and sell maple syrup or morel mushrooms to tourists.

Family life, a priority here, is tied to place and linked to cultural traditions tied to the land and defined by production. Deer blinds and hunting stands dot the rural landscape. Hunting and gathering expeditions are a family affair recognized and sanctioned by the school. Extractive family traditions have significance in tying generations of people to the art of living where they are and families take great care in educating their youth to stay rooted to this place. This critical distinction between inhabiting and residing, says David Orr in Haas and Natchigal (1997), is reflected in such connections to the land. These scholars write that a resident is a temporary occupant, putting down few roots and investing little, knowing little, and perhaps caring little for the immediate locale beyond its ability to gratify. An inhabitant is one who bears the marks of the land in their patterns of speech, dress and behaviors. Families from this Northern Michigan area have been called "hick, not hillbilly," a derogative term denoting someone both rural and under-educated strongly tied to community. This, in fact, holds some truth in that only 6.7 % of the community has some college experience (Kirby, 2006). In this setting, where everyone, including the children, is acutely aware of a lack

of money and exposure to outside resources designed to facilitate regional growth, the families interviewed existed on limited resources. Teachers, who lived outside of the school district and commuted in for work, observed that the depressed economic climate was partly due to a resistance to industrial opportunities.

Both the community residents and the school faculty describe opportunities for regional growth. For example, a tribe offered to build a casino within the city limits and put in a greatly needed city sewer. Local people resisted this development, despite the obvious economic gains, and the township voted the offer down. Locals who fought it cited their desire to maintain their lifestyle. Research contends that economic well being is linked to three factors: our ability to compete in a global economy, the ability to incorporate global technology into our productive lives and the capacity to develop knowledgeable and skilled workers to function in a complex work environment (Judy D'Amico, 1997). To that end, the local economic environment, lacking a pool of skilled workers, has struggled to sustain a healthy climate; one that invites businesses to the area.

Geographic conditions and harsh climates contribute to social isolation and social inter-dependence. This study is located in a remote northern Michigan area, approximately 60 miles south of the Mackinac Bridge, which connects Michigan's upper and lower peninsulas. The area is known for its large herds of roaming elk and an occasional black bear. The geography is rolling and rocky and the soil sandy and acidic from an excess of pine trees. The "snow belt" climate is harsh, with temperatures regularly dipping down below zero. In fact, the state's lowest temperature on record was reported here on Feb. 9, 1934, at -51 degrees (Epodunk, 2007). With long winters and short growing seasons, not many farms are able to survive in this area, yet like many farm

families in more forgiving environments, locals here are strongly connected to production and to the land.

Light industry plays a minor yet significant role, followed by a number of small livestock farms from acreage dairy, poultry and pig farms. Most residents reported commuting to neighboring, more prosperous towns to work in low skilled trades or the fast food industry. A small manufacturing company remains the areas largest employer and source of stable income for a handful of residents. The school, which is the community's largest employer, employs faculty from outside of the community. All of the school teachers (with one exception) and the school Principal and Superintendent live outside of the district.

The recessions of the 1970s and 1980s and the continued weakening fiscal environment in northern Michigan have had a powerful impact on this area, resulting in a declining population. The surrounding rural villages and small towns have also suffered due to the loss of industrial jobs in this region. Several of the regions manufacturing plants located in this region have shut down. Unemployment is rampant. And the region's surrounding farm community has fallen victim to the global agricultural market and the over supply of non-local farm goods and products. Many farms have been forced into debt and dependency of government programs. The plight is evidenced by the rundown appearance of barns, fences and outbuildings. Those that stay and try to make a living often replace collapsed family homes with manufactured housing and mobile homes. However, current transfer tax laws make it difficult for landowners to pass land on to their children. Thus, farms owned by families for generations, are put up of sale, for sale to wealthier outsiders at the higher, re-appraised values.

Participants

The entire study was conducted over a three-year period with a sample of 28 participants in a single rurally isolated high poverty community of 587 people. According to the 2000 census, 241 households and 148 families reside in Rutgers. This is a homogeneous community. Of the 587 residents, 97.8 percent are white and of German ancestry, .2 percent is African American and 1.7 percent is Native American. As a group, they are white two-parent households living below the poverty line, with a 2000 per capita income of $11,973, compared with $21,587 nationally (Epodunk, 2007). Collectively under-educated, only 3.2% of Rutgers residents age 25 and older have a bachelor's or advanced college degree.

Thirteen of the 28 participants included in the study lived in this rural community. Of these, eight lived communally with kin on large family plots of land. Others lived on family roads and, as a group, shared the responsibility of day to day life with family members. The remaining 15 participants in this study, the school personnel, lived outside the community and commuted in for work.

The interviews and observations suggested that critical aspects of family life bound the often inter-related social groups. Within the cultivation of these social relationships, key dimensions may be distinguished. These dimensions do not capture all important aspects of community and family life, but they do incorporate core themes presented in the investigation (Table 1). The organization of family traditions and values and the insular quality of the community served to cohere existing relationships and

social relationships, while furthering an innate distrust for things outside of the community. Moreover, the field observations revealed behavioral activity related to these themes which dominated the patterns of daily life. Conceptually, it is important to consider the influences of rural isolation coupled with a lack of exposure to outside opportunity as crucial dimensions influencing the social processes underpinning community life, family life and schooling.

Table 2: Summary of Findings

Emerging Themes	Behaviors or Views	Social Process	Purpose or Effect
Category I: Family			
Traditions as Educational Tools	Extraction, production	Taught by kin, defines role within family	Supplement income, foster solidarity, skills for daily rural living
Connections and Reciprocity	Mutual inter-dependence , multiple obligations	Kin provide economic, social and psychological support	Mutual interdependence , foster solidarity, strong extended family ties
Rural Identity and Isolation	Social distancing, highlighting distinguishing features	Inflated primary relationships, multiplex roles heterogeneous groupings	Solidarity, companionship, strained primary relationships
Category II: Education			

Purpose of Schooling	Locals press for local need to be reflected in the curriculum, schools should attend to local immediate needs and educate to that end.	Resistance to educational objectives, rejection of educational objectives developed by outsiders	Conflict between educational purposes at home and at the school
Influence of Kin on Educational Aspirations	Limit educational aspirations to regional economic demand.	Restrict through mutual need and reciprocal relations. Focus on family survival.	Leveled educational aspirations and attainment
Schools and Social Mobility	Criticisms and interventions on behalf of the youth over objectives	Limit educational aspirations to local economic demand	Leveled educational aspirations and attainment
Distrust of Outsiders	Social distancing, suspicion, of government and school, view influences as coming from "high class" outsiders	Inflated primary relationships, strong ties to kin and community, general acceptance of community views	Sense of powerlessness and frustration, solidarity against the "other"
Survival in Rutgers	Underpins all behaviors related to education.	Conflict between outside institutions that are viewed as threatening to community survival	Rejection of "outside" influences, dependence on current practices

The Family

This section analyzes the structures and processes of family life in a community featuring a high poverty rural school district. This analysis includes a description of the

characteristic themes and a delineation of the underlying values. This section seeks to identify key themes that have emerged from the analysis of both the pilot study and the dissertation study related to family life and education in Rutgers. The analysis is based on interview data, observations, field notes and artifacts collected over three years. Whenever quantitative profiles are used, the goal is to provide detailed information about the community or to illuminate a condition found within similar communities.

The purpose of this study is threefold: first, I investigate the educational experience of rural community members and how it is reflected in their educational aspirations, attitudes and behaviors. Second, I wanted to understand the community values about education, the ways they become communal and how they enable or disable social movement. Third, what do the members of the community, parents, teachers, interested citizens do, in a behavioral sense, relative to education and how are these behaviors enacted and reproduced? Moreover, what is the social process or 'internal logic" that has evolved to support and sustain these behaviors? In light of the focus of the study, three themes underscore educational values and aspirations related to family. They are: the family value of cultural traditions tied to the land, the family value of sustaining vital connections to kin and community, and the family focuses; kin, rural identity and survival.

Family Values: Traditions and Educational Tools

A basic theme of family life in this community is its uniformity of the nuclear family grounded in tradition. In the 28 interviews conducted between spring of 2004 and

spring of 2007, twenty-seven described patterns and behaviors of cultural traditions tied to the land. Only one school faculty member who resided outside of the community negated the influence of these traditions on family life. These traditions were part of the community structure and holidays were scheduled around them. For example, hunting expeditions are a family affair recognized and sanctioned by the school. There is no school on November 15, the opening day of deer hunting season. On the occasion that school is held that day, no one shows up for class. The superintendent acknowledges this cultural tradition:

> The teachers said, "Gee, let's go to school on fire-arms opener. Let's change the calendar. You know, other places, you'll go to school on November 15, we should, too. You don't have very many people who hunt anymore." The board and I all said, "Wait a minute. That's a family day here. Even if daughter isn't hunting, she's preparing the meal for the hunters who are going out. You know, and there's that family aspect to it." And (when we changed the calendar and held school) we didn't have average attendance on November 15. It cost the district $5,000 to bring them back another day.

Families reported choosing a camping site on state land in early spring before the thaw. Moving a trailer and setting up camp, usually with kin, they move their families from their winter homes to these camps to live before school lets out. Thus, small clans of kin reside in the wilderness, hunting, tapping maple (which they called "sugar shacking"), gathering berries and morel mushrooms, fishing and two-tracking. The former superintendent attends traditional family functions because her husband has ties to the community. She describes a typical community outing:

> My husband was out at a sugar shack last night and it's like of like a spring time version of hunting camp. Family clans, there is at least 30 different families that come to this one family piece of land every year and they bring everything from dinner to the 30 cases of beer. And, you know, they were like Jim, why did you bring your own beer? We've got 30 cases! And you know, you don't have to bring your own beer. Yeah, stay for supper. And you know, everybody goes out and taps the trees and brings in the buckets of sap and there's the boiling shack and there is this and that. It's the entertainment of hunting camp, whether you carry a gun or not. And a piece of that is always gossip about somebody. This is very important to our community.

One teacher described the family values associated with hunting and fishing in this rural community. In his opinion, the family stresses the importance of family traditions tied to the land. They value these traditions over many other activities.

> We're a small, tight knit, family oriented community. A lot of our activities are outdoor, hunting particularly. We probably have 70 percent of our high school students who hunted. I mean boys and girls. The outdoor things tend to be within the financial means. Production related stuff. Tapping maple; that sort of thing. Parents and students do this together. Grandfathers, fathers, sons and grandsons, the whole group of them head out for trout camp or deer camp. They spend the whole weekend. This is what we do.

Figure 1: Fish Camp

A former Superintendent describes similar settings of the family dynamics of the working class and rural poor who make up the bulk of the school's population. They work together, live close to one another, help each and depend on one another for support and entertainment. These descriptions point to a nested social situation of interconnected family and community life.

> Families tend to come together every night; large, large extended family stuff. And it's kind of the entertainment. And because everybody's not taking off for this music lesson or that soccer practice or whatever, and they gather. And at that gathering, there's gossip. And at that gathering, there's problem solving. And at that, and people tend to be pretty rambunctious. Conflict resolution is very old style and only family can be trusted.

Figure 2: Smoking Catfish

Hunting and gathering, family traditions sanctioned by the school, were important elements of social fabric of Rutgers. The social network of extended kin contributes greatly towards cultivating values. The family dynamics described by the former Superintendent described the influences that place and tradition has in the lives of community members. In this community, as in other working class and poor communities, extended family networks are deemed important and trustworthy (Lareau, 2003). They have strong family ties built over generations.

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Family Values: Vital Connections through Reciprocity

A second predominant theme underscores the vital connections to kin and community. Relationships served multiplex and functional purposes that perpetuate the community culture and sustain life. Individuals, families and community members described the necessity of these relationships along two categories: household structure and economic support.

Household Structures

In this rural place, families often live communally. Families may be taken in and drift back to other family residences, living temporarily in a series of shifting households. At any one time, and more often in the cold season they report, families can expand with some extra people in addition to the primary nuclear family. These extended families may live on large patches of family land, setting up a series of neighboring trailers that offer permanent or temporary homes, depending on the harshness of the season and the durability of the structures. Families are expanded at one time and tend to be nuclear at other times. One man offered to take me to a family plot of land.

> I could take you in the winter to places where there are two mobile homes duct taped together and 25 people living in them.

Figure 3: Extended Families Living on Family Land

Some families who live communally will share a single structure for meals, heat and utilities, while other adjoining structures remain for sleeping. One participant, a pastor who runs a local food pantry, describes some of the housing challenges faced by local families that foster communal living for rural poor:

> We have people living in places you wouldn't believe. I mean, I've had to send my son down to a widow's house to kill the possums that were crawling through the holes in the wall, eating the food off her table. But… it's just, that's part of the deal here.

A common theme in Rutgers, neighbors share reciprocal obligations that serve as mechanisms for survival. Locals who are the most poor share a sense of struggle characteristic of this community. They observe that many of their kin, falling on hard times, struggle against government regulations to "grub out a living."

Figure 4: Family Home in Rutger School District

Counterbalancing the familial solidarity that sustains family is the frustration for those trying to improve their lot.

> The other thing, in rural America, poor areas, you and your husband, you're both 20, you get married, you know. Your family says, okay, kids, we're gonna help you put up a 1 bedroom little house and we'll add onto it when you have your first baby. That ain't happening no more. You gotta have permits and you gotta have codes and you gotta have minimum square footages and… you know, and again, it's a daunting thing. And some may not read well. I'm not opposed to building codes. I mean, I work in the construction industry but, but it's getting tougher and tougher for poor people to build housing. You can't do it. It's just getting harder and harder.

Problems of daily living frustrate these rural residents. Between one instance of mutual assistance to the next, kin tend to act as shock absorbers against housing regulation. They provide a buffer against harsh housing policies that undermine rural self-sufficiency. Another interview provided insight into how locals decide to live communally.

> Lake County now has a new code, 720 square foot minimum, you know, to build anything. … If you were my daughter and you got married and said, Dad, you know, would you mind if we went down the road here on your property and put up a cabin … a one room deal and it'll be really nice and we can have the baby there… Can't do it under the government's standards. It's too small. You know, it's substandard housing and it's gonna ruin the economy of our county and it's gonna lower our real estate rates. … And yet on the other hand, if you own property and you put some skunky, nasty old trailer on there that meets the minimum codes, you can charge four people four to five hundred dollars a month and pay their own utilities while the possums crawling in and out. Why, because you don't charge security deposits or anything so people will rent from you. And not much will be done. … So we live together; put up another trailer, side by each. It's cheaper and there is less government involvement.

The most frequent form of family expansion followed this route; putting up a trailer on an existing family plot of land. Occasionally, expansion would include family relative or husband and child living on parental land. This living situation allowed kin to share transportation and other expenses. Distant families residing in remote areas commuted together to town for work, school and necessities, reducing costs. Money management in high poverty rural regions requires creativity, constant maneuvering and a strong supportive social network.

Figure 5: Extended Family Living Communally on Homestead

Economic Support

Another common theme that underscores the vital connections to kin and community is along the lines of economic support. A challenging economic climate makes it difficult for chronically poor rural families to manage resources and meet the needs of their families. A basic assumption in rural research is that poverty is a much more complex and far-reaching phenomenon than is indicated by income levels or district free and reduced lunch numbers. Janet Fitchen explains:

> Poverty is not just an income below a federal guideline: it is an economic situation, an economic niche, and, often, an economic forecast. And poverty has social, psychological and cultural concomitants as well (1991, pp. 61.)

A predominant assumption is that economic actions of high poverty rural groups should be examined against the beliefs and assumptions of the dominant culture. Specifically, the assumptions that the rural poor remain in poverty due to a lack of work ethic, foolish spending and low aspirations dominate explanations of these stereotypes. The data from this study challenges these assumptions.

The rural families in this study can be called the "working poor" in that most families had two-parent working households gainfully employed in more than one job. In the previous section, it was noted that incomes were supplemented with traditions tied to the land. Families hunted and fished, collected and forested, tapped sugar maple and canned. These community members took pride in such traditions and the self-sufficiency it offered.

Figure 6: Ice Fishing

There is very little employment in Rutgers, with most community members commuting at least 8 miles each way down the interstate to work. Extractive industries and the service and tourist trade dominate regional employment markets. One manufacturing company offers a modest wage for a lucky few. Other jobs are created by setting up bait shops or roadside booths.

Figure 7: Local Employment

Unskilled labor in the food industry was the most frequent second job reported. Despite being low-wage and unskilled, these jobs were highly valued due to a lack of employment opportunities. Like other rural researchers (Fitchen, 1991; Fitchen, 1992) I found a network of kin and neighbors served as informal employment agencies, often remitted through barter and trade.

The bonds of friendship, kin and community provide the necessary connections that sustain people and impart wisdom from one generation to the next (Haas & Natchigal, 1997.) For the rural poor, this is especially true. A parent describes the importance of family, church and community:

> I'm poor now, but have hope that a lot of others don't have due to my spiritual connection with Jesus. "Stuff" just doesn't have the appeal it used to. One of your questions was what are some values of the poor. Most I think would say to get rich. In truth though, I think values aren't established or talked about, as a rule, because existing is using all their energy. Every action is based on a reaction of something beyond their control. Be it medical expenses, heating expenses, transportation expenses, court costs of some kind-you name it. If and when one or more of these things occur they have to be taken care of some how with seemingly nothing. There is no 3-month savings account for emergencies; there usually isn't some other family member able to take care of these financial things. It is a bleak existence.

A parent comments that life is difficult for rural people; it's hard to remain self-sufficient. Local economic conditions remain depressed as corporate owners buy out neighboring farms for housing developments, marketed to "down-state buyers." With the emergence of multi-national corporations and the search for the cheapest labor, many manufacturing jobs have moved to less developed nations. Here, living well depends largely on hard work, traditional values and on the connections people have with one

another and their surroundings. These connections are a conscious choice and are vital to sustaining the community.

> The community values local business staying local. Keeping Mom & Pop grocery stores open. Being able to give credit when needed, possibly even using the barter system to help each other out. Traditional family and community values. And the community values churches and the support they can give. Churches give youth attention and nurturing & guidance. Churches help feed people. Churches help people heat their homes when no other resources are available. This is a very real problem in our area. Churches provide recreation that only requires participation-not out of pocket expenses. Pot lucks, small study groups, Sunday school for all ages. Churches can be a welcoming family when you don't have one of your own or an extended family if you do.

> People get by here with shopping at the thrift stores, not eating out, buying bread at the bakery outlet in bulk and freezing it. Shopping at yard sales in the summer. Some people only have cell phones-not land lines in the house. Growing their own animals for food. Hunting for food. Mothers get their young and sometimes themselves on WIC, a program where they get milk, eggs, cereal. cheese, peanut butter, juice. Health insurance comes from government programs for children. Parents go without here if it's not part of their employment package. We depend on each other for everything. This is how we make it.

Figure 8: Downtown Rutgers

Families cut corners and help each other when help is needed. They pay in cash because it is at hand and credit cards create a threat of debt, which threatens the survival of the family. They rely on each other for barter and trade, reducing the need for civic institutions such as banks. Their household financial strategies center on keeping cash liquid, solvent, accessible.

> We value simplicity-using cash-paying in person or by mail versus internet or direct deposit. That other kind of lifestyle is scary to simple people.

The local demand for employment compounds the problem for rural poor, failing working poor families in many ways. Financial rewards for work are low. Because the work is often outside of town, often in a neighboring more affluent town, social connections and social status are minimal. The existing social connections through kin and community then gain greater importance. In a broader sense, work provides an avenue for placement in the social ladder. It is important in not only providing an income but affects their thoughts and behaviors, as well. The low skill jobs equate to a diminished social status in neighboring communities. In Rutgers, any sort of work is seen as respectable. A pastor comments on the effects of poverty and lack of work on the Rutgers community:

> There's a real lack of community spirit or fragmentation of the community, sense of community due to a lack of local jobs. People here need to work hard to gain employment; that means a position in the community. What effect do they have on families and social relationships? The impoverishment, partly because of the dysfunctionality of families, I see as morale- spiritual issues. It's not just money. These families lose their self esteem. Their social context diminishes and as a result, there's more tendency for breakdown because they don't have the social or other supports around them.

In Rutgers, a strong connection to community, innate resourcefulness and creative bartering allow community members to remain self-sufficient, despite a family income bracket well below the poverty line. Yet families are tied to one another through reciprocity. One parent of preschool children explains that cultural norms guide social behaviors related to economic factors in Rutgers:

> You had to support each other, you were a community, and you wouldn't survive if you didn't do bartering, trading, I'll do this for you, you do this for me. And that, I think that kinda still goes on. My husband does that a lot. Rather than pay somebody for work, they still do that bartering kinda system . You know, I will help you on dump day, if you help me.

This issue of survival is validated through the necessary social connections to community. Cultural traditions tied to the land reeducate generations of kin and reinforce self-sufficiency. Recognition is gained by locals by those who do it well, and by those who feed the culture through trade, bartering and hard work.

Family Values: Rural Identity and Rural Isolation

A third theme of life in Rutgers strongly relates to the aforementioned themes. With only 587 community residents, the population is sparse and spatial qualities create physical and conceptual distances between "the outside world," and locals, creating a sense of solidarity. Locals indentify themselves as rural and distinguish themselves from other rural places through conversations about themselves and the land that surrounds

them, the people who have lived there for generations and the social relationships that ground them to place.

Figure 9: Family Living Year Round in Travel Trailer

People in high poverty areas may be especially tied to necessary descriptions that characterize their lot (Fitchen, 1988). The primary descriptors are the qualities or characteristics that describe their uniqueness in terms that are not always clear to "outsiders" but they are very clear to the people who live locally. The common expression that "we are different around here" is usually coupled with the phrase "we stick together." Although there is no clear reference point for comparison, it can be presumed that these phrases reflect individual and group identities against a threatening "other."

They distinguish themselves from their more affluent neighboring towns, describing themselves as "tough rednecks" and "backwoods". One resident expressed that "We are hick, not hillbilly." Such distinctions serve to acknowledge their poverty,

but claim it as a quality that can be viewed positively. Specifically, the underlying meaning of this phrase qualifies their rural identity and illuminates how they distinguish themselves. The deeper meaning is that they are locally connected by choice with a self-sustaining social structure. The bravado that underscores this term reaffirms relationships and proclaims solidarity. One resident explains:

> You see it in the animosity between the folks in Rutgers and the Elk Creek community. Some of it is the Rutgers bravado. You know, we're rough and tough. We're low income. We're out mudding in our trucks. You know, and so we wear that as a little bit of a badge of honor. The reality is the community is very gentle. The community is very law abiding as a group, but they are not viewed that way from neighboring towns. The Rutgers community used to be known for having a lot of logging and farming families whose children knew how to work. I've had people, business owners in Elk Creek tell me, you know, look, you know, 30 years ago, we would hire a kid from Rutgers any day of the week because they knew how to work. They knew how to do physical labor. They might look down their noses at us but there is also a little bit of fear there, too.

A local community leader makes a similar observation:

> People from Elk Creek refer to us as Rutgertucky. Sort of a poor step sister of the county. And Rutgers partly would be a resentment because the more affluent our education level, etc., that they see in the greater Elk Creek area. There are things that contribute to this; as our businesses close down people here have to shop in the greater Elk Creek area. They have to, but, they prefer to buy locally but the stores here are all closing.

This rural identity is defined in terms of spatial qualities and in terms of community ties. In Rutgers, as it is in other rural places, people construct community symbolically in terms of locality. It is easy to define the village and neighboring hamlets of kin. One faculty member describes a particularly well known family plot:

> I could take you out to a little area known as Demonville and it seems to be... family groupings... It's very clannish. Extended families living within the same geographic location. There is a good deal of repairing cars and trading parts there. Kids here can't do fractions but they can fix just about anything.

Community is also constructed through a repository of communal resources that replace the need for civic institutions. Residents can describe physical boundaries, distribution and consumption, socialization, social governance and mutual support. A grandmother serves as the family baby-sitter, the bus driver, the cook and the Laundromat. Because families often live communally, it is likely that family members assume functional roles. These roles help sustain this community, which lacks civic institutions such as libraries and public transportation. According to one School Board member:

> I think they call that multi-clutch relationships and a lot of times, people who are local fulfill multiple roles in the community; like they do lots of different things for the group. That's how you survive. But it can also be how you don't survive if you don't get along and do what everybody does around here. You have to fit in and be a part of one of us.

Rural low income neighbors function as a social unit in Rutgers and the residents express a clear understanding of how they fit into the broader community. "The deeper meaning of community, while locality-connected, is of the mind: the ideational or symbolic sense of community, of belonging not only to place but in its institutions and with its people" (Fitchen, 1991, p. 253). Residents frequently mention the uniqueness of their community and the necessity to protect it from outside entities influencing change, which they view as threatening their rural way of life. This quality represents the rural

values written about in the "Springdale" study (Vidich & Bensman, 1958). In this study, residents described the "smallness" and "family atmosphere" in an upstate New York village. One parent comments on how a family atmosphere in the community and the help that they offer each other contributes to a feeling of solidarity:

> You know, every time there's a need in the community, the community pulls together. But when there's not a need everybody just goes about their lives. You know, there's never been a time that I can think of when this community wasn't together. You know, or pulled apart. I can't think of a time where they were separated on any issue. Everyone pretty much pulls together on everything.

Similarly, Vidich & Bensman report that in their classic study of a rural town, borrowing and lending back and forth is a widespread act (p. 33). Such traits are characteristic of the Rutgers community where, "residents claim to know everybody, speak to each other at the gas station and know when a helping hand is needed."

For years, farmland and hardwood forests have provided a buffer of space and geography for local residents. This buffer is physical and conceptual, in that it reduces outside influences and protects locals from things that make them feel uncomfortable (Fitchen, 1991). It furthers their rural identity as individuals and as an inter-related community. The abundance of state land, parks and wildlife refuges combined with the wilderness provides a symbolic representation (Johnson, 2003) that "we are protected from outside influences and can live our life our own way." This separation between "down stater's" and "country folk" further embeds existing social patterns held by community members that serve to support and separate a rural identity (Fitchen, 1991).

Another anchor to community identity is the connection between kin and community. The people who live here are a homogenous lot. Residents are more likely to talk about a group of people with whom they shared coffee that morning at the town gas station than to describe a club or a civic group. This is partly because the spatial and social planes of the community are often aligned. They are similar along many lines in that they share a collection of like characteristics. One school board member explains:

> People around here hang with the same people, talk to the same people all the time. They get opinions and become role models that look alike. They stay here, help each other out or don't help each other out. But it's the same relationship over generations.

Most residents report that they are distantly related to their neighbors, increasing the homogeneity of the district. Many relationships are built over generations. A parent illustrates:

> One of the people that I worked with, she sent me down to the high school to talk to somebody and I was talking about, they called themselves the hen party and they were talking about their friendships and sorts of things they were doing, so I was teasing her and she said I'm not really a very good friend. I've only been friends with her for 18 years.

A School Board member and parent added that these tightly nested relationships can create challenges for those attempting to introduce new ideas into the school community:

> You have to watch what you say because everybody and anybody is kinda related to one another. You know, we've got shirt tail cousins all the way around.

Neighbors are part of a functional social unit where people share similar ideas, social stigma, similar goals, values and aspirations.

A small town comprised mainly of recognizable generational families, locals express that "this is a family town." This conceptualization points to three things. First, Rutgers is literally a family town, full of "shirt tail cousins" where everybody is interrelated. Second, it identifies Rutgers as composed of families steeped in rural agrarian traditions tied to the land. Third, it makes the point that family, as a social organization, is a priority here and fulfills roles necessary for survival. A local pastor, who runs a community food, pantry, makes a similar observation about importance of family for rural people. According to this pastor, it is very difficult to survive in this rural place without the benefit of kin, so the importance of maintaining family ties is a priority.

> You can face anything... If you're not alone, if you're not going home alone, you know... If the husband's got a wife that he can depend on, the wife has a husband she can depend on... You know, there's a family structure, a larger structure there. Where there is an extended family, there is a safe situation. You can survive this.

Rural isolation is a factor that contributes to the how rural people see themselves in the community and within the global world. A former superintendent explains that in Rutgers, tightly woven families live in isolation and have very little experience or connection to the outside world. Rural isolation furthers a collective vision of community as a close-knit, homogeneous place (Greenhouse, 1986, p. 131). The spatial isolation

contributes to community identity, but creates discomfort with unfamiliar elements. Poverty and rural isolation are two factors that contribute to a lack of social experiences outside of the community.

> They can't afford to travel outside of the community, so they don't go. We talk to children from this area and thinking how easy it is… I mean, here we've got proximity to I-75. You hop in the car and you go. These children haven't been south of Grayling and haven't been north of Indian River. So geographically, you know, entire generations are living within a 60 mile radius.

Distancing oneself of "unwanted or unfamiliar things from outside the local community allows long-term residents to continue make claim to the traditions and customs that everyone in the community knows" (Fitchen, 1991, p. 256). Unknown people, customs and ideas from outside the community become victims of social distancing. In Rutgers, the community is small and made up of an inter-related population. The superintendent shares her observations:

Figure 10 Extended Family on Rural Homestead

> You know, every day I'm amazed at which family is related to what other families and how interconnected they are. And how very few have had any college experience at all in the extended family. It's very clannish; extended families living within the same geographic location. ... It's like on a piece of property or on the same dirt roads where large family clans live together. They may put a lot of money into their cars but they don't put money into their children's clothing or into extra experiences. They don't leave the community very often. They don't mix with the outside world.

The complex and interweaving qualities of rural identity, rural isolation and the overarching influence of kin and community are some of the forces influencing values in Rutgers. A hard won reputation for "holing up" and resisting outside elements such as school and governance in such a community may cause the community to be viewed by others as "dysfunctional". Geographic boundaries and spatial influences distance locals both physically and ideologically, furthering these perceptions and furthering the existing experiential divide.

Figure 11: Home Bordering School Grounds

Locals experience the "outside world" with tiers of distrust. In a sense the whole community maintains a separate identity grounded in a resistance against imposed regulations or experiences from outside the community. Family life is the priority here, and the schools, as agencies of the state, are viewed with suspicion--a potential threat to "family ways." One teacher explains:

> The family is extremely important in Rutgers. I think that's part of the thing with keeping their kids close and not encouraging them to go out. If they go to college and get more education, they might find a job someplace else and then that separates them from their family.

Because schools are seen as agencies of the state, they are "outsiders pushing outsider ideas." They are viewed as threatening to local families. Locals express or exhibit some degree of disdain or aloofness regarding the school. They express concern about education aspirations driving their children away. When asked, they are very clear about their rejection of educational initiatives that will take their children to distant places for advanced education. Consequently, they develop strategies to keep educational aspirations in check and maintain their families and communities.

Education

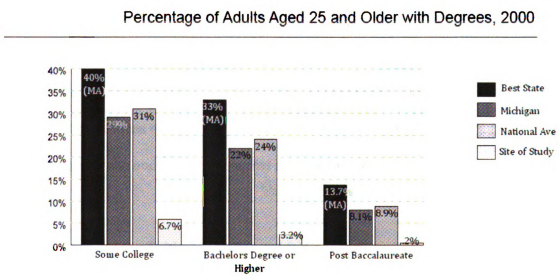
Figure 12: The School

Introduction to the Family Perspectives on Schooling

For most adults in rural depressed areas formal schooling is limited (Fitchen, 1988; Duncan, Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberly, 2003) and educational attainment levels are lower. The greatest gap is seen at higher levels of education (Lichter, 1993). As of 2001, more than 26 percent of metropolitan residents possess as least a college degree, compared to only 15 percent of those living in nonmetropolitan areas (ERS 2003). This disparity is especially notable in Rutgers, where only 6.7 percent of the adult population has some college experience and only 3.2 percent hold a bachelors degree (Table 2). Despite major social trends to improve educational access to high poverty groups, compensatory education reinforces inequality because children must compete with unequal resources (Connel, 1994). Keen observers of educational policy, the rural residents of Rutgers define formal civic institutions like education, employment and government as organized activities provided by urban-based controls (Fitchen, 1988; Maeroff, 1998).

Inferior achievement levels in Rutgers are said to be linked to a number of factors (Table 2). These factors include a large pool of teachers teaching outside of the school district, disproportionately high transportation expenses, high special education numbers, limited availability of specialized and advanced curricular coursework, low parental educational attainment and a sizable number of low-income students. The majority of participants in this study from the community had limited formal educational experience. All but one had graduated from high school. Two women had interrupted formal education, but resumed their studies after the teenage birth of their children.

Figure 13: Average of Educational Attainment



Note. Data from U.S. Census Bureau and the 2004 Cherry Report

The influence of the family on the perceptions of social institutions that locals view as entities from the "outside world" is great. Rural isolation, homogeneity, a lack of experiences outside of the community and poverty, all contributors to perceptions, is furthered by the nested social system made up of kin that pushes for class solidarity. Thus, those that are different than "us" may be perceived as a threat to the social group. That threat is in the form of educational indicatives designed to encourage students to pursue advanced education. Education, as a form of social mobility, is seen as a threat to kin, community and survival.

In this section, I detail such educational values, behaviors and experiences of the locals in Rutgers. The themes emerge along several lines. First, I explore the clash over the purposes of schooling. Second, I explore the influence of family on educational aspirations and behaviors in the following section who see schools as vehicles for social mobility, and third, the family resistance to social mobility in the form of social reproduction. Fourth, distrust for outsiders and education as a threat to the family and community in the areas of schools, governance structures and educational policy. Finally, I present the underlying threat that schools impose on rural identity and survival in Rutgers.

Table 2: Demographic Comparison Data

	Michigan	National	Rutgers
Percentage of rural students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch	33.7%	43%	52%
Rural per capita income	$30,439	$43.317	$11,973
Educational Attainment Level			

Some College	22.1%	66 %	6.7%
Bachelor's degree	21.8%	31%	3.2%
Median household income	$49,350	$44,350	$31,923
Cost of Living	88%	100%	79%
Unemployment	7%	5%	7%
Violent Crime	2	3	3

Note. Data from Rural Matters 2003 and NCES

The Purposes of Schooling

For many adults in Rutgers, education is limited. The majority made it through high school but may not have obtain skills commensurate with their final year in school. This is perhaps because of a resistance by locals to accept the curricular objectives pressed by the state and imposed by school administration and faculty. Although the school resides within the community, people in Rutgers refer to the school as something from "the outside world." This is a term that indicates an attitude that reflects a set of behaviors, and one that reflects their personal identity. Locals report a suspicion of teachers and educational objectives. A minister comment:

> The attitudes of the community about the school negatively impact the student's ability to learn. There is a lack of pushing. Pushing is not the word. Lack of support in doing homework. A neutral or negative view of the school. Social relationships with the school can be tenuous. Yeah, people don't, aren't able to communicate or interact with the school. ... They get mad. They blow people off, then they blame, you know, we don't need that superintendent? What does she do up there? They become angry with the system because of their own losses.

Locals and faculty members expressed a disconnect between the values and educational goals pressed by the school and those of the community. The Superintendent explains that the school can sometimes be seen as a threat to local ways:

> One of the things that I have faced here at Rutgers is the gap between what our predominantly middle class background faculty view as important and valued versus what our predominantly lower middle to upper low class working poor in Rutgers want for their children. It's hard to get to those folks to open up to you and to tell you what they are thinking. But when they do, they say to me "Sandy, what the hell are you teaching my children?" So when you ask me what the values of the community are about schooling, I think that that the schooling separates them from their family.

A teacher in the district makes a similar observation:

> The family is extremely important in Rutgers. I think that's part of the thing with keeping their kids close and not encouraging them to go out. If they go to college and get more education, they might find a job someplace else and then that separates them from their family. But family is very important here.

A faculty member suggests that many local parents expect schools to encourage a local focus in their curriculum and in educational expectations.

> What, what do parents want for the children in regard to education? ... The higher the people, the kids who are going to college, their parents want them to get as much as they can out of school, so that when they get to college, they'll be able to compete and have a fair shot at things. But a lot of them just want their kids to have enough education so that they can go out into the community and be productive members and make a living, raise a family. Just the basics.

The Superintendent makes a similar observation:

> What role does schooling play in the lives of real folks? I think for some of them, it shows them opportunity but, but I think the attitude of the community would be

more of schooling separates them from the value systems of their household or home.

Residents are pragmatic in their focus and expressed frustration that the educational system did not reflect community local values and community need. When asked about the functionality of education to this region one rural farmer, a Korean war veteran with a 6th grade education, explained dryly that education was a luxury he could not afford. According to him:

> In rural America we are focusing on putting food on the table and being able to stay warm, have a place to live.

Some families expressed frustration over the focus of the curriculum. A high rate of unemployment contributes to local perceptions about educational objectives. Because local jobs in the community are sparse and labor unskilled, some perceive that educational objectives do not reflect local needs. According to them, the school should focus on providing the skills necessary to build the community and gain local employment. One father explains:

> The biggest issue in the education system is it's not meeting the local needs. You know, the MEAP tests a couple years ago, it was environmental something, was the MEAP stuff. Well, what in the world value did that have to a bunch of kids, you know, at third grade level. It had no value.

Another parent explained the schools should focus on training the community's children for jobs within the community. According to this parent, schools failed the

community by not providing training necessary to survive within the community and be attractive to potential employers:

> How do I get that training? The school, if I wanta work in a trade, if I wanta be an automotive mechanic, you know what I gotta do? I gotta get somebody to invest in me. I've gotta get a private employer to believe in me and invest in me cuz I have nothing to offer. On the other hand, if I was in high school and I was able to get a couple years of shop and mechanic, and auto mechanics, basic stuff, you know that'd give me a real leg up with the employer. Might say you're worth investing. But the school has changed our priorities.

Another parent makes a similar statement:

> I think the more emphasis should be put on trade schools, building trades. Functional jobs. When kids are out of school, they should be able to be trained to do something.

A grandparent suggests that the community's children be educated towards specific skilled jobs:

> I think the armed forces should be utilized more. Right now, right now, they only want the top, the people that, which is probably good for them. Highly-educated. ... a lot of people aren't in the trenches like they used to be but ... there's a lot of training that could go on there with kids that are in between, they don't know what they wanta do. So put them in the service jobs. They don't need to go to college to learn how to drink and smoke more. They need to, they need to be functional. A lot of kids don't wanta do that either.

According to another parent, the school fails the community by encouraging students to seek advanced education and acquire more debt. This overwhelmed parents already living below the poverty line. One parent in the district also worked in a food pantry observed:

> The majority of the people we work with are working poor so first of all, they have very limited timeframes. We have people who simply cannot handle their money. ... They can't do the simple math. A lot of these people can't balance a checkbook. ... Many of the parents wanted education, they wanted their kids to do better, but their kids weren't doing better and they didn't know what to do about it. Most of them are not educated themselves. ... They feel very intimidated by the school system. So usually they just become angry with the school.

According to these parents, the world of education fails them in tangible ways: education does not translate into income or into local jobs.

> I think school should be one of the main focuses of life for every child and teenager. Every effort should be made to keep teens in school for the basic living standards needed to function in their own local environment. City life is not a priority for a small country community as country life isn't for an urban community. For the rural community school, classes in building trades, farming methods, nursing, etc. should be stressed instead of being pushed to the rear or dropped from the curriculum.

But teachers as a group disagree with the observation a parent makes on the value of schooling in Rutgers. School faculty report a lack of experience with educational systems and a lack of exposure to higher levels of education.

> The biggest challenge that I have is that the parents don't really value education. It's reflected through their children, the motivation and the desire to achieve just is really low.

Because schools encourage advanced education, something viewed as frivolous, they are seen as distrustful. This tension creates friction between the school and the local people. A mother states:

> All these kids are coming out of high school, expecting to go to Michigan State for the higher education is so much big business, it stinks. And there are some

> jobs that definitely need the higher ... education but there's a lot of average folks out there that need to learn how to make a living and start it when they're out of school. Not when they're 24 or 25. There's a ... big gap in there where people are accumulating a whole lot of debt and they don't even know what they want to do. Schools shouldn't push it.

Thus, many of the locals indicated that the school did not prepare students to live locally, nor were they responsive to local need. There were observations that the bottom line for a lack of educational receptivity to regional needs was financial. Distrust for the school system and the push for state curricular objectives were the result.

> If someone died and made me king, I would split the education system. ... When I was going to school, we had the college track, you had the skilled trades track; that doesn't exist anymore. And I've talked to administrators and the bottom line is it's money. It's much cheaper to educate a kid in math and physics and chemistry than it is to educate a kid in workshop or automotive mechanic or any of those. It's a lot cheaper to have a classroom where you just come in and sit down at a desk and work out of the book, than have all that expensive equipment and all the space it takes for the expensive equipment, the maintenance for that expensive equipment. So by and large, those things, they're gone because the state has changed our priorities.

The perception of being victimized by the schools was counterbalanced by suspicion, distrust and a rejection of educational influences. Locals shared a sense of struggle and a rejection of educational initiatives that pressed for goals that they viewed were unreasonable and unobtainable.

> The point I'm trying to make is that so much is in excess about higher education. So much wasted time, high cost, basic curriculum class requirements that mean nothing to be functional in a given field.

There is a clear feeling of protectiveness to the social order in Rutgers, which translates into actions within the social group against the forces, such as education, that threaten the family.

> So we have all those issues but it boils back to that, that whole thing. People want relationships. In the end, the education, you know, the diploma, if you get one, is a pretty, pretty cold companion.

The Influence of Kin on the Perceptions of Schooling

As noted, kin have a tremendous influence on educational aspirations, values and behaviors in Rutgers. The evidence described by participants that supported the research on influence of this social group on educational behaviors, values and aspirations was overwhelming. A striking fact about this community is the dense and overlapping kinship ties, the secondary relationships and the limited social pool that influences virtually all behaviors.

Educational aspirations seem to reflect local economic demand and the educational attainment levels of parents. People are bound together by a common experience and common social problems. Families share an awareness of struggle and of rejection by "the outside world." They saw that a commitment to each other and to maintaining common elements as symbols of solidarity bound them together against outside influences that threatened their ways of being.

> A high school education was good enough for me. I've worked in a factory and I've kept a roof over your head and I've gotten this and I've gotten that for all of us and, you know, we live comfortably. ... If it was good enough for me, it should be good enough for you.

A local pastor makes a strong point that familial influences act to counterbalance the influence or pressures that schools impose:

> Let's say that you have Sally over here and Sally's not married and she has three kids and ... she's trying to raise those kids and grandma and grandpa are involved... there's a good chance grandma and grandpa didn't finish high school. So in their mind education ... is not that big a deal--look at us, we're surviving and we didn't go to school. And so they're more interested in helping Sally and her kids ... have a place to live, food on the table, get a job. ... In their mind education is not that big of an issue. It doesn't matter.

> On the other hand, they want them to have a good education so that they can learn to do something so that they can be something, not just to have a degree so that they can say "we are so smart." They want there children to be something and to have a usable skill.

Local's educational experiences are reflected in their attitudes about schooling. A lack of educational attainment coupled with high poverty and a depressed job market feed existing attitudes. Social ties, built on kinship and solidarity risk severing if mutually built resistance is discarded.

> None of these people went to school and graduated. It may be some of the changes, you know, there's just a lot more required and the paperwork requirements for schools to do. The society's faster paced life is not as simple as it was 30 years ago, 15 years ago, when they were in school. Now they're trying to raise kids. It's a whole different ballgame and the school is not what it once was. They don't like it and won't buy into it.

Social ties, built on kinship and solidarity, risk severing if mutually-built resistance is discarded. Social connections by jobs, kin, residence, and friends and the expectations they hold influence education related behaviors. One school official comments:

> Our kids generally don't do real well when they leave here, when they've been isolated but they do very well within the university center at Elk Creek. What's part of the reason for that? They don't lose their family support system. They don't go away to the larger, four year entity. Now, after a few years, for instance, getting their ___ done, but they can do their whole program now through the university center, but after a few years, they seem to be more successful if they go away to say Central or to MSU. But at first, our kids have a real hard time leaving home. And part of that is just there's that family pull, that family draw.

The family plays an important role in educational outcomes in Rutgers. Despite ability, strong preference for living locally with kin often takes precedence over educational goals.

Leveling

Mechanisms of leveling educational aspirations exist and more or less help maintain a uniform existence, maintain solidarity and ensure mutual reciprocity. A limited social field and a lack of social participation in the broader culture greatly contribute to this social process. There are no clear social designations but very clear limitations on educational aspirations and attainment in Rutgers.

Social status within the community is often based on longevity, heredity and the ability to fit in. Such cultural adaptions are described as leveling by those within the community. One of the most shocking findings was that locals acknowledged this phenomenon as an internal form of governance and a way to maintain community.

Leveling was reported to occur from three sources. First, the parents leveled the educational aspirations of their children. Parents ensured their families' place within the community and furthering generational ties, which furthered their position or social status within the community. Second, leveling is imposed by the community, as a whole.

Third, leveling is a social process that students employ with each other, and especially new transfer students. The Principal describes a situation that demonstrates parental leveling:

> We make an effort to show them how their kids shine by displaying student work. They love to see it you know, but it's kinda weird because they don't necessarily want their children to be super successful. ... They're like any other parent, they're proud of them. ... Just don't get too good because I don't want you to move away.

The Superintendent describes leveling imposed by parents and the community, as a whole. These efforts were more or less similar in helping maintain a uniformity of value systems, of educational behaviors and of educational aspirations. Locals highlighted the importance of kin and community, of fitting in and maintaining solidarity. This was especially important because there was no other social field in which to participate. The small community of Rutgers is all important in the social realm.

> Leveling that takes place doesn't seem to depend on a socio-economic status. ... And I don't think it differs whether or not they're churched or not. The value is family. And there seems to be a value for the average. That being above average is not something you really shoot for. You know, because that is kinda like, you know, it's almost like that Japanese notion of the nail that sticks up above the others needs to be pounded down. But it's not quite that. It's not that the group is the important. It's... you know, we don't wanta stick up or stick out or be singled out.

The third leveling mechanism was initiated by youth aimed at new students whose aspirations were too high. Students, keenly aware of the regional social order, resent over-ambitious "newbies" whose actions violate community standards and change the playing field for existing students. The Principal notes:

> They're very hard, these kids, and I believe the parents as well, are very difficult on newcomers. They again don't trust outsiders when they first come in. ... They won't really pick on that student if they're passive. But if they're, you know, a go-getter or a little bit more aggressive in nature, the students will quickly shut them down. If you come in being aggressive, they're gonna resent you and they will shut you down. They will almost gang up on you. They will just pick and pick and pick. There is a lot of peer pressure.

These leveling mechanisms establish a social pecking order and maintain the dominant reference group. Students aggressively counterbalance social acts and educational aspirations to match parental expectations and bond the existing group.

> If they're too aggressive ... whether that be academically, people are gonna put peer pressure on them to say hey, listen, you know, you might be an A student there and you might, you know, be this whiz kid but here we don't want that. You better back off ... it's not cool to get As.

The social process of leveling is not without its consequences in Rutgers. School teachers were reluctant to discuss leveling but school administration confided that "class" and "leveling" deterred them from moving into the district and raising families here. According to the Superintendent:

> One of the problems in our district is that every single one of our faculty members and our principal live outside of the district boundaries and their children have all attended different schools. None of their children have attended Rutger School. One of the brand new teachers had her son here for kindergarten and then placed him in St. Mary's in Elk Creek the following year. But you know, what message has that sent the community? We've got people that drive in and drive out. You know, and the community is really distrusting of them as people because number one, there's that fundamental distrust of outsiders. Number two, the teachers are all from a different socio-economic background. And the teachers themselves will tell you I don't want my child going to school here. Not because it's bad teachers. The teachers are fabulous. It's just because of the kids they're sitting next to. I don't want them to have those values. I want them to have middle class or upper middle class values.

These various leveling mechanisms help maintain the community culture in Rutgers. Residents know that they must conform to the cultural norms, values and that guide behavior in this small town. Being successful at fitting in translates into survival within the community. Those that are shunned are caught in a bind, unable to make ends meet without the help of their neighbors. So families work diligently to conform to social expectations and maintain the paradoxical, lest they become too successful and leave the community; they weed out those that do not choose to conform. This threat of social mobility for generational families is great and structures social interactions and aspirations.

Schools as Vehicles for Social Mobility

A major reason for the frustration that undermines the relationship between the school and the community lies in the difficult circumstances that local community members live. Many of the locals are burdened with problems they see as imposed on them from institutions and policies outside the community and struggle to make ends meet by trade, barter, self-sacrifice and a mutual interdependence. Education, as a vehicle for social mobility, is seen as a threat to an already tenuous way of life. The Superintendent comments:

> But what I hear like when I'm down at the bar ... they say things like, yes, but you know, Sandy, if our children do what you and those teachers at that damn school ... want my children to do, my children will go away to school somewhere and they're going to learn to disrespect our family and our ways and they're going to get a job somewhere other than here and we'll never see our grandchildren. And so then when I ask them ... if the school could do one thing for you, and for

> your children, what would you like? Well, we want them to be good people and we want them to have, you know, enough to get by and we want them to choose, you know, their single wide trailer on our family property and we want, we want them to be able to keep a job like at Haggins, which is one of our local manufacturing places here.

Kin gage educational attainment levels and direct aspirations locally. They encounter frustration with the outside world and try to protect their families against further difficult circumstances. They seek to keep their children within the social group where they are safe and can be a productive part of the community. Many participants remarked that the social pressure to stay within the community keeps families intact and solidifies the group, providing the mutual assistance necessary for survival in Rutgers. As one parent said:

> People who have been born here and live here and this is the only life they've ever known, they've watched their parents struggle, they struggle, you know, to them, that's just the way life is and, you know, for them, they don't know any different. ... They're afraid of their children getting a better education and moving away.

A teacher makes a similar observation:

> I think just as people go out and try to get jobs and find a good paying job in the community and try to raise families and stuff there, and they end up going back and living with mom and dad in a while because they can't afford it and then they're seeing that the base entry level positions don't pay enough ... people are beginning to say okay, maybe we do need to encourage our kids to do something so they can start at a higher paying job, like truck driving, mechanic, skilled trades.

A parent describes the generational aspect of leveling:

> They value honesty; you won't find more honest people. They value family--they grub out a living to raise their family. They want their kids to be able to find jobs here when they finish school. To be able to watch their grandkids grow up. To be part of their lives. In turn, when it comes to being the ones to be cared for that's when families step up again--generations taking care of generations locally.

A rural Pastor observes the importance of family:

> I think the crux of the whole issue is this: the family structure has the potential to completely disintegrate. Extended family has to stay here. I hate to say this because I am from here, but the other factor in this is, is the people who are left in rural communities, young people, probably their IQ rate is lower because the kids who can get out of the community go.

School faculty makes similar observations. Teachers and administrators described the conflict that exists between the schools and parents as being one of conflicting values. On the one hand, teachers were implementers of curriculum for a universal job market. According to teachers, faculty and school board members, parents equated educational aspirations with mobility. A teacher comments:

> One of the biggest challenges in this community is how to get the kids and parents to see schooling as necessary training; necessary opportunities for them that will help them find good jobs. This, and still be able to have their children close enough to them. Because that is part of what is valued by the culture here. A lot of parents want their children to stay here. A lot of them are in conflict because they see that their children need to leave to get better paying jobs, more opportunities. But they don't want them to.

A second grade teacher makes a similar observation:

> I think they do value the school. They are working very hard. There are a lot of them that have two jobs and they don't have the time to donate extra hours and things like that to the school. I think a lot of them want their children to be able to

> go out and find a job real close here so that they have close contact with their kids and their grandchildren.

A high school teacher discusses the results of an informal survey conduct by teachers:

> A few years ago, they kinda did a survey, a study about why we were losing students, especially in high school and one of the comments that came out of that was a parent said I don't want my children to do better than I did and move away from me. And I found that to be very revealing. And just a sad, strange comment. But I think that some of the community feels that way. They really want to come here and just be left alone and not have to face changes. The thought of college is pretty scary for them

Despite the difficulties, people do not seem to move away. Ancestral roots and generational ties are the reason people stay and "grub out a living." Although relationships with kin may be at times difficult, the fear and distrust of things from outside of the community provide further reasons to foster social compatibility. Insecurity about dealing with unknown social situations, unfamiliar civic institutions and a lack of social networks to buffer these unknowns further a reluctance to move to a new location.

Distrust

A common theme in the findings was distrust for things outside of the community. A real bind occurs for local people that lack the experience or the tools to interact with the outside world. They "feel scorned by it, and at the same time are forced to interact with it because the broader society is an inextricable part of culture" (Fitchen,

1988, pp. 181). Outside culture is carried in on the backs of schools who officiatte matters involving their most precious commodity--their children.

People in Rutgers sometimes refer to their more affluent neighbors, the urban world or the broader society as "the outside world." Nearly all of the participants in the community described a general distrust for things outside of their social field. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the polarity between "us" and "them" is rooted in inexperience. These factors coupled with geographic isolation and a limited income limits spheres of participation for rural people in Rutgers. Locals who lack structural opportunities for integration are further disadvantaged by the attitudinal and psychological barriers that result.

For many rural residents, educational experiences are difficult and poverty is often a central theme. Yet they are tied to school because it is one civic institution that links them together and does in fact offer them more family time. A faculty member comments on the social value of family and its substantive impacts on isolationism and solidarity against disdainful outsiders:

> What's important here? Family loyalty is what matters here. You listen to some of the oral histories of the families and it's pretty amazing. The old timers will tell you about when they used to have pride in the village and pride in their family groups, and that pride doesn't exist now. I think that leads to further isolationism. You know, because we can't hold ourselves out there with pride, we need to put a wall up between ourselves and others. So that, you know, we're not subject to that continual wounding. We can't trust them (outsiders) and we have to wall up.

The "wall" that one faculty member described served the social purpose of solidifying the existing community while keeping potentially "bad people" out. Residents spoke of a concern over a growing population of "down-staters" moving into

the area and changing traditional ways. Within the community, this attitude serves the purpose of weeding people out to determine trustworthiness, which is based on longevity in the community or kinship ties.

> In the local region, in the families that are local, they have generational roots here. We also have a growing population of rural poor who are people who are leaving the cities. Taking the chance, I'm going to a place where I know nobody but I want to get my kids out of the mess I'm in. And that's a visibly growing segment of our population. And they've got strikes against them because they're not locals, they're not trusted. You know, the locals are afraid their kids will bring in more bad things into the community. And plus when they get in trouble, you know they need help, they're not sure where to turn and they're not used to the idea of a family structure. You know…if you're not local and you come up here and you're having problems, you're really in trouble because chances are you won't be able to survive unless you buy into the culture.

Figure 14: Rental Property

We have had people move in the past who didn't stay very long. They didn't fit in and they move on. We have a lot of people moving into our community that are in the welfare system and it seems like they're trying to stay a step ahead, you know, of the, of the court system, things with their kids and things. But I don't, I think as adults, I have the impression that they're accepted okay in the

> community. The kids here at school, they do have a hard time. Sometimes our kids take pride in chasing them off, too. They think that's cool that somebody didn't stay long.

School faculty reported that the pride in rejecting students who transferred in allowed their marginal positions in the social order to be reversed. It shows an intense sociological awareness of their social position.

Distrust of Teachers as Outsiders

The residents of Rutgers described a distrust for the teachers. All but one lived outside of the community. All of the school administration also lived outside of the community in wealthier communities and commuted in for work. With a lack of roots within the community, residents view teachers and administrators with distrust. The Superintendent comments:

> One of the things that I have faced here at Rutgers is the gap between what are predominantly middle class background faculty view as important and valued versus what our predominantly lower middle to upper low class working poor in Rutgers want for their children.

Parents are aware of a social distancing that occurs by community members towards educational faculty. Rather than subject themselves to educational relationships that create difficult feelings, some locals reject teachers and administrators. The bottom line is that because they reside outside of the community, they are outsiders and therefore suspect. One school board member comments:

> I guess our community doesn't realize that just because outsiders are teaching our kids, that it's a good... You know, they don't appreciate that. It's because they're outsiders that they're not appreciated.

This gap is described as one that impacts how community members receive teachers and school initiatives. Administrators observed that teachers' attitudes toward the community also lacked what could be interpreted as a rootedness or solidarity. Teachers observed that they were viewed as public authorities and administrators of outside policies. They are conduits of educational initiatives and enforcers of state policy. They attend to numerous educational tasks such as testing and reporting, comfortable in their role and the state accountability. Parents are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with these levels of accountability and with outside institutions. Moreover, faculty reported that locals resented the salary and benefits of teaching faculty.

> I think parents in our community think that the teachers feel that they're better than they are because they know things that other parents don't know. Because I test their students. Cuz I've got a college education. Cuz I have a job. Because I can make twice the money they're making. And they will take a defensive posture. Even though I don't think that. I don't, you know, I don't care. They probably feel uncomfortable. I think your question was why are they a little nervous in coming, talking.

Other teachers described social and attitudinal barriers that limited interaction in the school and in the community. Some of it was a result of local attitudes, while others identified it as a phenomenon driven from within the community. All acknowledged a cultural barrier between faculty and the local community. A teacher comments:

> I'm really an outsider. Even though I taught here all these years, I'm not a member of the community and that is really how people look at us. I think quite a few people see the teachers here as more, we take money out, we don't spend it here. ... And so what sometimes happens is that they feel that we are, you know,

> trying to impose our standards, our morals, our values on their children. And that can create some resentment.

A school board member makes a similar observation:

> My thing is faculty are educated people who have furthered their education to a level where they are in a profession and you know, they deserve to have some appreciation for that. And you don't get that in our district.

The social distancing that is characteristic of this community is also a quality observed in the school faculty. Some of the teachers explain that social participation is limited to school related functions. An elementary teacher explains:

> I don't know much about the parents because I just work here. You know, until 4:30. Most days I'm here at 7:30 most mornings. When I'm done here, I like to go home. No, I don't stop at the community haunts and talk with parents. But I see them at the conferences and I see them at other functions.

These comments and many others like them were spoken with softened voices, confusion and bitterness. The perceptions of the faculty and the locals aligned, and limited their ability to participate in voluntary activities in productive ways.

Distrust of Government

Kinship and generational ties in the community impact local politics in Rutgers. In many rural regions politics are often a family affair. In high poverty rural regions, the political dynamics are sometimes quite different. The politics are often characterized by longevity, stability and community ties. Locals describe the challenges of working within the system:

> Well, when there's complaints and stuff, people go to the village meetings once a month. And even that is so... it's, I don't know, just so slow as far as the progress of what you were looking for. My father-in-law had a complaint about the, the speed that people were driving, they just put in that street by his house that never used to be there, they put in a whole new street and it wasn't paved and he had a complaint and it just takes forever. You don't, you don't seem to get the answers from the village council. Yeah, because the village, the hours for the township clerk is like Tuesday from 9 to 1, one day a week. Well, come on here, you know. I want some answers now. Well, you can't. They're only available on Tuesdays. So how are they supposed to help me?

In Rutgers, the political environment is also characterized by distrust; this is especially true for systems governed by the county or state. Locals, both lifelong residents and school personnel, describe a deep distrust of government structures and organizations because they view them as something as imposed upon them from outside of the community. They described ways in which housing laws imposed fees and regulations that governed their household structures and the ways in which families communed.

> The state tries to impose a middle class, affluent lifestyle and expectations on somebody, you know... who doesn't... At one conference where I was speaking, you know, I said, look, I know people who live on dirt floors. And one worker said, well, who are they? I said I'm not gonna tell you because in your mind, that's neglect. You know, and I said I don't live on dirt floors and I really would never want to have to do that but Abraham Lincoln made it on dirt floors. I said, it's not like, it's not like these children are being neglected. Their parents are doing the best they can. And you know, we work with people who feel that electricity is not the biggest necessity in life. They get by. They have outdoor plumbing, that's okay. So I think part of the problem is we try to impose something on people that they don't necessarily want. In rural America we are focusing on putting food on the table and being able to stay warm, having a place to live.

> Families are being forced out by government, by economics, by regulation by the state. I don't wanta come across as, you know, anti-government, militia thing. But we have too much regulation.

This lack of governmental participation and support is reflective of the distrust for the dominant culture; those with more money and more power and influence. Locals describe ways in which government is influenced by "high class people" and marginalizes the poor.

> I believe the community values families free from a lot of regulations from big government. Free from the influence of a few "high class" people who come into the area and impart their ordinances on the simple life that is here; noise laws, how many cars you can have in the yard or property. Some people have several "parts" cars to keep one running. When one car goes to hell you can't trade it in because a lot of times it's not paid for yet. You keep it and use parts from it to get another one going. It costs to have the junk cars hauled away.

Some locals reported that schools were seen as "Big Government." This phrase is used to describe the extent of the gap between the people who reside in Rutgers and those that implement what they view as urban-based policy.

> By and large, most of these families can give you a negative story (about schools and government) and if they don't have a personal negative story, they can give you a dozen from their friends. You know, so they view them as the enemy and to a certain degree, the school because it's government funded, it's also viewed as the enemy.

> I think the community at large here, they're threatened by the government and they see the school a big government. It's hard for them to give up their social security number for our records. ... They don't want to fill out forms for free and reduced lunch. I thought in the beginning it might be partly embarrassment, they don't want to fill that out. But I think sometimes people are afraid that they don't want the

> government to know how much money they make, that type of thing. So they're very protective of that.

Rural Education and Survival in Rutgers

A dominant and emerging theme in this study has been identified: the will to survive underpins all behaviors related to education. For Rutgers, surviving economically and socially, local will and determination are critical. It requires ingenuity, creativity and a commitment to community. Broad scale political forces are seen as a threat to kin, community and survival. Education, a tool often seen as a vehicle to lift social groups out of poverty, is viewed as something that endangers this community. One parent comments that:

> Everything is about survival. Family in the lives of the people that you work with because they help in the survival mode. Does family help with educational goals? I don't think so because education is not that big of an issue. What matters here is surviving. You know, having a place to live, food on the table and a job.

> Here is my point about the education system. If you're in the rural area and you get done, the diploma on the wall doesn't mean anything because it doesn't mean self-sufficiency. You know, it doesn't mean, it doesn't mean food on the table. It doesn't make my truck payment. You know, it doesn't put gas in the tank, unless, you know, unless I have a job where those skills do that for me. Then it's a whole different ballgame. What matters around here is relationships and survival. Relationships mean survival. Because in the end, the education, you know, the diploma, if you get one, is a pretty, pretty cold companion.

Surviving in rural northern Michigan can be difficult. The depressed economy and a dying tourist trade, geographic isolation, limited access to social institutions and weakened educational funding, declining enrollments and redistricted boundaries, low

wage and low skilled employment all interact with each other; and they affect individuals and community members in Rutgers. Despite the combined efforts of the local people, they will not remain insulated from the effects and changes imposed by the dominant culture.

The social processes that underscore educational aspirations, values and behaviors in Rutgers are constructed to wage a war against the outside world. And despite local ingenuity, creativity and solidarity the broader society is seeping in. Seen as a threat to rural families and lifestyles, political reforms are changing traditional life in Rutgers. Local wisdom aside, current educational reforms that press for increasing accountability and sanctions for "failing schools" threaten local norms.

Chapter Summary

The research was presented and analyzed the data regarding the educational aspirations, values and experiences of community members and the social processes that underpin them. School personnel also participated for a total of twenty-eight semi-structured interviews, sixteen secondary interviews and four individual educational life histories. Unstructured interviews and participant observation supplemented the transcribed interviews. The data was broken down into four sections. The first section described the setting and reintroduced the participants. The second section introduced the family values that included three themes: traditions, connections and reciprocity,

household support, economic support and finally, rural identity and isolation. The second category presented and analyzed data regarding education. The subcategories included family perspectives on the purposes of schooling, the influence of kin over the purposes of schooling, leveling, social mobility, distrust and survival.

It was found that rural families in this community value education on their own terms. In local belief and practice, locals resisted educational initiatives pressed by the state and implemented by the teachers and administrators. Locals, in conflict with teachers over the purposes of schooling, observed that schools failed them as a community and as families by offering educational and social entry points of social mobility. The school, seen as a carrier of the broader culture, is resented for an education focusing on a global economy and a universal job market. Teachers, all of whom lived outside of the district, were seen as outsiders pushing outsider policy: something that threatened the survival of this community.

CHAPTER IV

GENERALIZATION, IMPLICATIONS, REVIEW OF LITERATURE, CONTRIBUTION, CONCLUSION

Central Focus of the Study

This chapter will synthesize the educational, social, economic and familial aspects that are the foundation of this study. This synthesis revolves around three research questions: (1) how do rural poor experience education, and how does their experience become reflected in their aspirations and beliefs about education? (2) What is the community values regarding education and in what ways do community social networks enable or disable social movement? (3) What is the social process or "internal logic" that supports and sustains these behaviors? These questions were answered and analyzed in chapter three. They naturally led to another basic question: What are the basic contributors to educational aspirations, values and behaviors in Rutgers? I argue that there are four likely contributors to educational aspirations, values and behaviors. These are not all inclusive but provide a basis for understanding the educational aspirations, values and behaviors in one Michigan community, generation after generation. These contributions will be discussed in this chapter. First however, the four principles of this study originally introduced in Chapter II should be restated.

1. The first principle is that educational aspirations and related behaviors originate as a socio-structural component of rural communities. In other words, local

economic demands and community need serve as a barometer of educational aspirations.

2. The second principle is that tightly nested social networks are a major part of the critical social structure that enables or disables educational aspirations and therefore, social movement. Individuals from the same community are bound by reciprocal obligations upon which new generations continually enter and establish social roots (MacLoed, 1987). The bracketing of the individual to generational social structures reproduces educational aspirations and in turn, social mobility.

3. The third principle is the social pressure described as "leveling" is one powerful mechanism by which social class is defined and reproduced over generations (MacLoed, 1987). This is one element of the socially and structurally constructed entity of social reproduction in Rutgers. It influences educational aspirations and has independent effects on class structure.

4. The fourth principle is that conforming to this social pressure to "level" educational aspirations serves the functional purposes of both sustaining the community and ensuring survival within the community. Individuals in the social order come to accept their own position and the inequalities therein, as legitimate.

Key Findings

Educational Aspirations, Values and Behaviors in Rutgers

The analysis of the data consistently supported the conclusion that the educational values and aspirations of the people in the Rutgers community are balanced by two factors: they are reflective of (1) their perceptions of regional economic demand and, (2) familial expectations. Familial educational expectations followed generational patterns. The youth of Rutgers were expected to follow in a similar path. The most powerful conclusion is that the family culture transmits an instrumental view as a mediator of adult educational status (Oakey, 1993). The socio cultural characteristics and educational aspirations of the community conflicted with those of the schools. The conclusion is that kin play a critical role in educational experiences, aspirations and values, in social mobility and in creating the "internal logic" that sustains them.

To the rural poor of Rutgers, education serves multiple functions. From a structural standpoint, the school is the newest and certainly the most official building in the city. It provides a sense of pride and citizen identity. The community gathers and holds important events at the school, which are announced in the small local paper. It is a place of venison dinners, sporting events and fundraisers. People living in Rutgers use the school for functions one might not expect to see in a more metropolitan area. For example, the community recently experienced a great loss when a beloved student suddenly passed away. The funeral took place in the school gymnasium during school hours. Participants described the important role the school played during this time of community loss. The school, as a structural entity, is at the town center and supports the community in many ways.

From an educational standpoint, the school touches the lives of most of the citizens of Rutgers. It is a fact of life that most everyone living in Rutgers attended Rutgers schools. An extremely homogeneous group, most people have resided here for generations. Rural poverty in Rutgers influences educational experiences and aspirations. Parents with lower educational attainment working in low wage jobs cannot afford to take the financial risks with their limited incomes. The (educational) goals are too distant and unfamiliar and the financial needs are immediate (Fitchen, 1981). The school offers opportunities that the rural poor cannot afford to try. So the rural poor of Rutgers withholds psychological support in the educational arena. Some consciously attempt to keep educational aspirations and values in check by restricting them. The school Principal provides an example:

> We make an effort to show them how their kids shine by displaying student work. They love to see it you know, but it's kind of weird because they don't necessarily want their children to be super successful. But they really love to see what their kids can do. They're like any other parent, they're proud of them. So it's like they're proud of what their students or children are doing. Just don't get too good because I don't want you to move away.

The restrictions placed on educational aspirations and attainment in Rutgers is warranted by overwhelming immediate needs, limited incomes and a way of life that demands a communal investment. Janet Fitchen's 1981 anthropological case study of rural poverty illuminated barriers to upward mobility for the rural poor. Among the barriers described are they ways social systems perpetuate and reinforce poverty in rural areas. Rural poor lack opportunity to practice the necessary skills for educational advancement, they lack opportunity to define themselves within the broader culture and they are aware of how they are perceived by the dominant culture. They justify their life conditions and distance themselves from the dominant culture, further perpetuating social distancing through "attitudinal separation" (Fitchen, 1981, p. 188). Similarly, the rural poor of Rutgers try to reduce their worries about low educational aspirations by stressing the value of what is important to them, rather than what they don't have. A grandparent states:

> What will more school get you but more stuff. I see the world as a material world and everybody tries to keep up with everyone else. And advertising is all about me, me, me, with it's just put in your head that you have to have everything that everyone else has, bigger and better. And you have to have it now. You can't, you can't wait, save, or earn it. You have to have everything right now and that's not how it should work. We should have some, some sort of value and know there's limits. I don't see where that's gonna ever change, or how it will change. Cuz you don't have to have a lot of stuff to have a quality.

> What matters to me? Love, grounded love. Knowing that I belong with my partner, with my family, with my church. That I'm appreciated for who I am and not what I can give someone else in their eyes. I don't like to think that someone's gonna buy me. And they like me for me.

Outside observers might interpret local strategies of modifying goals to meet regional demands as a lack of motivation. The restriction of educational aspirations might be interpreted as being a consequence of apathy, due to "laziness" or a "lack of ambition." The strategies that mold educational aspirations and achievement are in fact, meant to preserve the individual and the community. The underlying internal logic is this: conforming to this social pressure which essentially levels educational aspirations serves the functional purposes of both sustaining the community and ensuring individual survival within the community. Poor rural people cannot afford to take economic or social risks with their restricted incomes to commit to a distant goal (Fitchen, 1981). When asked about educational aspirations, one parent in the community summed it up by adding "Everything is about survival."

Managing the difficult balance to survive in Rutgers is made easier by solidifying factors that distance outside pressures to achieve. One solidifying factor was a pattern of distrust for all things outside of the community. Educational reforms were suspect because they were initiated outside of the community and generally did not reflect local need. Teachers, all (but one) of whom lived outside of the district were seen as both outsiders *and* conduits of educational policy and were therefore, untrustworthy. Finally, civic institutions such as schools were seen as untrustworthy because they were seen as "big government." The Principal adds:

> They don't like government. They want to be free of it. They're afraid of big government and they see the school as big government.

It is a fact that the educational aspirations of people in Rutgers are offset by regional economic conditions. Kin play a conscious influential role regulating education aspirations and values. The data consistently supported the conclusion that the educational aspirations in Rutgers are balanced by regional economic demand and familial influences which are in turn, tempered by spatial influences. According to the school Superintendent:

> Our kids generally don't do real well when they leave here, when they've been isolated but they do very well within the university center. What's part of the reason for that? They don't lose their family support system. They don't go away to the larger, four year entity. Our kids have a real hard time leaving home. And part of that is just there's that family pull, that family draw.

Educational aspirations, values and behaviors are aimed at attainable goals targeting regional jobs. Regional, social and familial factors play important roles in restricting and regulating educational aspirations, values and behaviors for the people of Rutgers. The people who participated in this study see educational outmigration as a threat to individual and community survival. Education as it is presented by the formal organization is seen as a vehicle for social mobility, a phenomenon that threatens their way of life. Their attitudes are warranted. They often experience limited incomes, limited resources and immediate needs. These needs are often met by kin. The conclusion is that community social networks made up mostly of kin enable or disable social movement and mitigate the internal logic that sustains those related behaviors.

Meanwhile, the gap between educational aspirations, behaviors and achievement continue to perpetuate poverty because of the long term damage it does to family relationships, educational goals and outcomes and long term day to day living. The community's values, the reliance on family, kin and the focus on day to day survival is such that it limits educational aspirations.

Contributors

Primary Contributors of Low Educational Aspirations

The primary causes of low educational aspirations and values in Rutgers are conditions "embedded in the economic and social structure of the community" (Fitchen, 1981, p.185). Specifically, there are economic and structural elements in the Rutgers society that lead to low educational aspirations. Rural isolation coupled with a lack of access to public institutions such as universities, libraries and civic centers limit opportunities to learn skills that can be seen as valuable capital in the broader culture. These are conditions that work systematically and purposefully, perpetuating poverty, class, community and educational culture in Rutgers. Using the same example, a lack of opportunity to access skills seen as valuable in the broader culture translates into limitations in transferable social and cultural capital. Moreover, with fewer opportunities to learn the skills base of the dominant culture, the primary relationships within the rural community will likely suffer.

Historical and Socio-structural Contributors

An important recapitulation of both the historical literature review and of the study culminates in two observations. First, state directed educational policies send the message that communities, such as Rutgers are inferior. As an example, educational reform policies such as the Cherry Report make it an "economic imperative" to change educational aspirations and achievement levels, metaphorically alluding to the achievement lag in rural places. It suggests that:

> Michigan residents, businesses and governments can either move **forward** to a future of prosperity and growth fueled by the knowledge and skills of the nation's best-educated population or they can drift **backward** to a future characterized by ever diminishing economic opportunity, decaying cities and population flight- a stagnant backwater in a dynamic world economy (Cherry Report, 2004, p. 3).

The implication is that rural communities, as stagnant backwaters of educational reform, should become more like enlightened industrialist and show willingness towards educational transformations. One participant of the study, a grandparent, comments on the disconnect between policy makers and their rural poor constituents:

> In the introduction it states that "Michigan's economic position has changed, and the state will have to travel new roads to reach a brighter economic future." The state will have to travel the *back roads* first to find how the economic position has and is affecting the extreme poor of this state.

The sublimation of rural educational communities through increased powers of the state invariably has sent a strong message; rural communities are inadequate, inferior to more industrialized societies, as indicated by distribution of funds and by attention from policy makers. These inadequacies have placed them on a lower rung on the social ladder. They are destined to be controlled by bureaucracies using policies developed outside the community.

Second, poor rural communities lack organized regional social connections and structural bridges that connect them to people in the broader more industrialized culture (Fitchen, 1981). Specifically, due to place, rural isolation, social class and other structural factors the rural poor have limited experience or access to outside social, organizational and structural entities that develop cultural capital. Cultural capital is the knowledge and skills that award participants with some value or advantage (Bourdieu, 1973; Howley, 2005). Bourdieu argues that the educational system reproduces the structure of power relationships between classes and the symbolic relationships between classes. In other words, schools reproduce class because they award academic success because it mirrors the ideals of the dominant elite. Moreover, he suggests that social mobility is, in essence, controlled by the structural dynamics of class relations. Schools then, are part of the social structure that awards power and privileges. They contribute to the reproduction of the structure of class relations by awarding value to cultural goods or symbolic goods that represent wealth. According to Bourdieu, theatre, concerts and museums are examples of cultural capital or symbolic wealth valued by educational systems.

The majority of research indicates that rural people have fewer opportunities to participate in activities that award cultural capital (Fitchen, 1981; Howley, 2005). According to these scholars, urban and suburban people, by virtue of locality, have greater access to universities, theater, libraries and other social systems through which the currency of cultural capital is exchanged. One implication is that due to rural isolation and factors related to place, the rural poor experience limited access to public libraries, ballet classes, and theater and other culturally rich opportunities that would allow them to

bank cultural capital. Moreover, they are less likely to accrue the social rewards associated with amassing cultural capital afforded those living in more metropolitan areas. This combination of factors limits opportunity for the people of Rutgers who live in rural poverty. According to Bourdieu (1973) cultural transmission for cultural capital valued by schools is reproduced as worthy of being sought and certainly a sign of higher positions within the social order. Alternatively, lower positions in the social order, often occupied by agricultural professions, "are excluded from participation in the 'high' culture" (Bourdieu, 1971, p. 73).

Another implication to the social and structural limitations of rural life means that the existing social groupings are more likely to be intimately interconnected. This is especially true in Rutgers where "almost every one here is related." The density of local ties spans generations. They have fewer social connections with outsiders because they have fewer opportunities to swim in alternative social pools. Therefore, they are more likely to have more contact with the same social group, which reinforce and inflate their effects.

Janet Fitchen (1991) suggests that there are four negative effects of what she calls inadequate social structures in high poverty regions. First, people living in rural areas have no opportunities for practicing and learning secondary social roles. Alternatively, people in urban areas have many opportunities to practice secondary social roles. They come into contact with a large variety of individuals each day, many whom they will not share a relationship with outside of the original social exchange. Because rural people lack these important practice- arenas, interactions with the broader culture suffer. Second, social relationships in the primary group are endangered. Relationships within

the community (most often with kin) are inflated because they fulfill multiple roles and provide social and economic supports often found in secondary social environments. Third and according to Fitchen, people living in rural poverty have difficulty defining themselves outside of the family structure. Fourth, a separation is maintained and reinforced by the dominant culture. The negative stereotypes held by outsiders feed this attitudinal separation, making it more difficult to existing bridge social barriers.

These processes serve to perpetuate the social structure in Rutgers. The structural inadequacies not only perpetuate poverty, but also perpetuate educational attitudes, values and aspirations. They restrict and reduce local's ability to function in the broader arena and limit important social connections necessary to bridge the urban/suburban/rural cultural differences. As a system, these forces facilitate low educational attainment and aspirations over generations. As a socio-structural component, regional economic demand, an existing inadequacy of resources and immediate needs reinforce a vicious cycle of poverty and low educational goals.

Economic Contributors

Everyday living can be challenging, in Rutgers. By most measures, many of the people that participated in this study are impoverished. They face challenges toward every day self-sufficiency. Their lives hang in a tenuous balance of social interdependence on kin, perpetually restricted incomes, multiple low-wage jobs and constant financial insufficiencies (Table 3). A lack of local employment opportunities translates into long commutes to work. A lack of housing sometimes translates into communal living on family land. A lack of economic stability translates into inflated

social relationships with kin, who provide limited social, economic and psychological supports essential for survival. For the rural poor:

> Existing is using all their energy. Every action is based on a reaction of something beyond their control. There usually isn't some other family member able to take care of these financial things. It is a bleak existence.

One effect of rural poverty is the inability to gain acceptance from the broader culture. Difficult local financial conditions further financial woes for poor districts because mileages, often used to offset minimal per pupil funding are rarely passed. Expenditures, already limited, are carefully budgeted to cover basic educational costs. For districts low achievement scores, the effects of poverty compound existing challenges of meeting successful educational outcomes. The Superintendent explains:

> We're fighting for our economic survival and we're not doing well. And every indicator that the state has for success is generally not one that we can meet.

The economic conditions impact many aspects of rural life and compound over time and generations. For the most part, people who stay in Rutgers do so because they view themselves as having limited options or the pull for a higher wage is eclipsed by the need to stay close to kin and community.

> The experience here is that if you become successful, the way the educated folks view success, then you leave. You might come back once you retire but for your working life, you leave the area. And so our little area here in Lake County has become this little pocket of poverty. We're the working class poor or those who are disabled and what I mean by that is, you know, the folks that are working minimum wage jobs. Some of them have more than one minimum wage job. Or it seems that we have a disproportionate number of people on disability incomes.

The socioeconomic capacity of rural school districts has lagged behind many urban and suburban ones. Few existing local jobs are often lower skilled, lower paying

production or service jobs while managerial or technical jobs often accumulate around urban or suburban areas (Jensen & McLaughlin, 1995). As a "low capacity" town, educational attainment, income levels and educational aspirations also lag (Table 2). Advanced education becomes unrealistic to rural poor because they observe a disconnect between educational attainment and local wage earnings. A parent comments on recent state initiatives linking higher education to economic gains:

> The state can't fund the elementary and secondary schools that are in existence now; how can it possibly suggest to offer higher education to all Michigan residents? I'm sure many poor residents would take full advantage of gaining training and education that served to bring them employment and a higher wage. I won't say salary because salary usually implies a career whereas a wage is earned or "grubbed out". If you don't work you don't get paid.

The schools, who are challenged to increase educational achievement and who face sanctions for failing to improve are expected to foster educational success with a population whose motivation reflects regional economic capacity. One parent suggested:

> The people who are left in rural communities, young people, probably their IQ rate is lower because the kids who can get out of the community go.

For those that stay, the economic condition is a part of living over generations. Children who grow up in economic poverty in rural areas like Rutgers are more likely to fall into a similar condition (Jensen, McLaughlin & Slack, 2003).

Contributors to Limited Mobility

Social mobility is a theme that emerged often in conversations with locals and school officials in Rutgers. Many parents with low educational attainment themselves

described the desire to "make a better life for our children," as long as "a better life" could be realized within the community.

> Parents that either dropped out of school are those that have not excelled themselves. They're staying within the community. They're not pushing their kids to look beyond the local job market. You know, beyond what is in the county.

The fact is there is very little social mobility, educational or otherwise. There are few instances available to serve as role models for others. Those that do move upward often do so by moving out of the area, therefore demonstrating that successful individuals become successful, in part, by relocating.

> People around here hang with the same people, talk to the same people all the time. They get opinions, become role models. Stay here, help each other out or don't help each other out. But it's the same relationship over generations.

People that live in Rutgers believe in the potential for upward mobility but do not believe that a traditional college education is a necessary to achieve that end. The mobility they seek is along a modest narrow margin aimed at reducing their current economic and social condition in tangible and immediate ways. Educational advancement is not necessarily a part of that strategy.

> The rural poor would be hard pressed to leave their communities to become a student of a higher education facility. There would still be the need to take care of things at home; putting food on the table, cutting wood for winter heating, and any number of family issues to take care of.

It is important to note that people believe that education is desirable for their children, but not necessarily for social or economic advancement. It is seen as a way to create relationships and foster a sense of community. One example of this is the schools popular "reading buddies program." Older students are paired with younger ones, spending time during the day to help them in their reading. This is a highly valued educational program because it fosters relationships, a quality highly valued within the community. Moreover, it reflects the community priority of mutual assistance. In Rutgers, theses educational objectives take precedence over recent state mandates for increased curricular rigor with a global focus.

According to some scholars, public education at the local, state and federal level has done a poor job with helping intergenerational poor people out of poverty (Fitchen, 1991). Important gains being made in improving the quality of education by reducing tracking and increasing educational options such as distance-learning, advance placement classes and dual-enrollment. However, disparities still exist in equal access to educational opportunities, such as advance placement classes or a greater range of educational offerings. The stigma of poverty makes it less likely that children will access these classes in neighboring more affluent school districts. In the educational institutions themselves, structural discrimination occurs against lower class pupils in public education (Bourdieu, 1973; Wilson, 1987; Leacock, 1971). Among the barriers that community members face are the negative stereotypes and attitudinal separation held by others, including the faculty themselves.

In summary, the participants of this study provide evidence that the causes of educational aspirations, values and behaviors are complex and the social processes that

perpetuate them are complex. There are no clear-cut answers, no single cause or scapegoat. Nor is there a silver bullet that could be effectively charged to improve educational aspirations, values and behaviors. It involves a cluster of problems that result form a set of interacting variables.

The four causes of educational aspirations I have discussed work together in an interacting fashion. They provide an explanation for the fact that education in this poor rural community is a challenging process in Rutgers. They provide an explanation for the fact that rural poverty here is linked to low educational aspirations which has persisted over generations in this community. The socio-structural and social mobility contributors continue to have an exaggerated effect in part because of the inflating influences of the other factors (economic and historical). A self-fulfilling prophecy, they continue to reinforce each other with derivative effects.

Implications

Introduction

It is clear from the evidence of this study that rural educational aspirations in the Rutgers community are strongly influenced by kin and locale. Educational aspirations and outcomes in Rutgers lag behind their non rural peers (Graph 1). These findings are similar to other studies suggest that rural educational values and aspirations are weaker than non rural citizens (Breen 1989; McIntire & Pratt 1989; McGranahan, 1994; Howley, 2005). It is also clear from evidence of this study that a combination of social and

systems structures contribute to educational aspirations, values and behaviors. These include economic, educational, historical, socio-cultural and familial contributors.

Policy Implications

In 2004, Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm established the Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth under the leadership of Lt. Gov. John D. Cherry, Jr. As indicated in the policy brief itself, the goal of this commission is threefold; To build a highly skilled and a highly educated workforce so that it can compete in the 21st century workforce; To double the number of Michigan residents who obtain college degree's, linking them to successful and productive Michigan jobs, and; To successfully bolster Michigan's economy and job outlook by aligning Michigan's institutions of higher education with emerging employment opportunities within the state.

In light of this ambitious state directive and the results of this study, several implications can be drawn. First, if the data from this and other studies focusing rural educational aspirations can be generalized than it can be concluded that place, community and family appear to be important factors in the structure of educational aspirations and values, despite educational initiatives designed to alter such outcomes. The findings from the present study suggest that these findings operate in an integrated and mutually reinforcing way. This is counter to the argument made in the Cherry Report (2004) that such transformations in educational aspirations may be motivated solely by economic gain and post secondary educational opportunity.

Second, the Cherry Report suggests that a highly educated population has an immediate benefit: work can be located anywhere in the global village, economic growth and jobs can be created in regions that have those key ingredients. A theoretical implication of this investigation is that rural people are unlikely to see the benefit of higher education because it is not directly linked to local jobs currently available within the community. Moreover, according to some scholars (Bourdieu, 1971) they are less likely to have the cultural capital or advantage to link education to entrepreneurial jobs in a global market. The majority of rural people in this study, after all, reside in generations of rural poverty. Their aspirations are limited; a response to actual immediate living situations.

Third, this study suggests that one strategy that rural people use to mediate such tensions as unobtainable aspirations is the inflated engagement with kin and community. A limited social pool coupled with inexperience and distrust for outsiders limits the chances that their children will leave the area to achieve higher educational goals. Rural people in this study are not entirely trusting of outside ideals in the shape of educational policy.

Fourth, other research suggests that rural people face multiple challenges that necessitate an 'every hand on deck" approach to daily living. Household employment contributes to family economic survival in rural areas and strengthens family commitment (Howley, 2005). Some researchers (DeYoung, 1990; Elder & Conger 2000; Howley, 2005; Peskin 1983; Salamon & MacTavish 2003) suggests that as the economic conditions of rural communities decline, rural people may increasingly consider migrating to the city for employment. They face the difficult decision of

choosing between economic survival and leaving to pursue education or jobs in urban areas. Along a similar vein, the report by the Cherry Commission is aimed at increasing in post secondary participation, an act that will likely send rural students to the city pursuing educational opportunities. The results of this study and the others cited suggest that rural communities are unlikely to participate in such educational indicatives because of the increasing and immediate tension it places on family and survival within the community. Rural communities are places where youth are significantly involved in day-to-day living, participating in activities that contribute to their survival within the community (Howley, 2005). The self perpetuating factors of poverty in rural communities such as Rutgers cannot be underestimated (Fitchen, 1981).

Fifth, according to this and other studies, local place is a significant contributor to rural family's educational outcomes (Howley, 2005). According to researchers, rural families "are more likely to refuse jobs" (Howley, 2005, pp. 166) elsewhere and are less likely to create plans to move. Taken together, the findings suggest that rural people are less likely to seek educational opportunities outside of the community. Remaining within the community is important to rural families. The Cherry Reports proposal to facilitate growth of university centers and create new learning environments is likely to be met with some modest success if financial pathways are cleared for high poverty groups. As suggested, small schools and contextualized learning environments will likely be met with success if linked to jobs within the local job markets. Rural youth may adjust educational priorities to fit regional economic demand, especially if it means staying close to kin and community.

Another implication of this study is that rural places that might be interpreted as "backwoods," unsophisticated and without structure. I argue that they are in fact, very socially sophisticated places with a strong nested social system and internal governance structure. According to this and other studies, the social sphere that intensively sustains social units at the local level, while limiting access to the broader culture providing an arena for successful participation in a social group. For example, the intimate social units that currently provides minimal opportunity to learn outside the community force people to be incredibly hardworking and creative within the community. They can be interpreted as broad-scale social roles played in a small arena. The skills are transferable and highly valuable. This successful participation, however fragmented and nested, can be viewed as practice; a potential bridge into the broader culture. Problematic are the lack of social and cultural entry points linking them to the broader society. This dilemma presents challenges for actual policy implementation, such as the Cherry Report.

Theoretical Implication

Several theoretical implications from this study may be drawn. These findings suggest a theoretical implication about motivation. Howley (2005) suggests that economic motivators are being considered by schools as an acceptable educational motivator. According to Howley (2005), economic conditions play an influential role in the development of rural educational aspirations. She argues that as rural America continues to be faced with social and educational inequalities, people will continue to be motivated towards softening those differences (Falk & Laboa, 2003). Moreover, she suggests that rational choice theorists, for example, argue that most social decisions are

driven by fiscal considerations (Homans in Howley, 2005). Economic conditions such as those presented continue to play an influential role in the development of educational aspirations in Rutgers.

Recent educational policies such as the 2004 Cherry Report are built on these assertions. Similarly in high poverty rural communities, socioeconomic ability plays a leading role in educational aspirations and achievement (Cobb, McIntire & Pratt, 1989; Smith et al. 1995). Still, other researchers contend that rural children and adults may be motivated to remain close to families and maximize their economic options, therein (Howley, 2005). This study suggests that a lack of experience with outside institutions coupled with a lack of financial resources and inflated primary relationships motivates high poverty rural families to remain in their social situation. Thus, the theoretical contribution of this study is that it draws attention to the question of rural educational motivation and the roles that kin play in their development.

Another theoretical implication of this investigation is that rural people have strong social networks and relationships that shape opportunities from which they might accumulate into social capital (Flora, 2003). Researchers suggest that a range of social capital features of both the school and the community play important roles in educational aspirations and achievement (Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberley, 2003). They suggest that for rural people, the social capital of the school has modest effects on student performance while kin are the most important conduits of educational success. According to these researchers, kin play primary role in educational outcomes in the broader society. The present study supports these findings that kin play an influential role in rural educational aspirations.

A final theoretical implication of this study is that spatial features also play a prominent role in the ways high poverty rural people interact with schools. Residents living in the sparsely populated areas face more challenges in maintaining social networks, especially the weaker ties that can be characteristic of secondary relationships such as schools (Granovetter 1973; Fitchen 1981). Conversely, proximity increases opportunities for interaction and networks among individuals (Tigges, Brown and Green, 1998). These actions are necessary for building community bonds among community members (Wilkinson, 1991). Such bonds reduce divisions among marginalized populations (Blau, 1994) and increase solidarity against "powerful local elites" (Beaulieu, Isreal & Wimberley, 2003, p. 282). Still, others add that the spatial features of rural isolation contribute to the social and psychological distancing of outside influences (Fitchen 1991; Melbourne 2002). Taken together, these finding suggest that context continues to influence the ways the rural poor interact with schools. This studies contribution lies in the suggestion that the spatial features such as geographic isolation, density and locality magnify the effects of social interactions.

Summary

This community study presents the family and faculty perspectives on schooling, their educational attitudes, behaviors and aspirations and the social processes that under-pin them have been analyzed in terms of a conflict of cultures between the family and school. Kin play a critical role in the construction and restriction of educational aspirations. Consciously or unconsciously, they regulate familial aspirations and achievement levels to meet regional economic demand. The pressure to stay within the

community is great. Household labor contributes to family and community economic survival in rural communities. The educational goals of the school, whose state directive is to "instill in youth the "aspirations for education beyond high school, developing their ability to achieve postsecondary success, and providing them with access to a wide variety of learning institutions" (Cherry Report 2004, pp. 1) conflict with the goals of kin and community.

Limitations

The limitations of this study should be considered. There are several limitations to this study. First, this study does not directly assess educational values, aspirations and behaviors in a quantifiable way. Although the semi-structured interviews included items asking participants about their educational values, behaviors and the social processes that surround schooling and community, there are no items asking children about their educational plans. There are no items asking children about their plans to remain in the community. Instead, proxies were utilized from data obtained by adults within the community and themes categorized in order of their significance. This method was used in documenting all categories or themes, but was particularly true in the category of attachment to place and aspirations. The data are suggestive that rural place and community is very important to the people of Rutgers. The data also suggest that place influences educational aspirations. However, the measures used to obtain these data are not quantifiable or without flaw.

The second limitation is in construction of the participant sample. This study focuses on data from the adult community. No school age children were interviewed.

This limitation offers a one-sided view of community life in Rutgers. It doesn't take into account processes by which rural children develop educational aspirations. Although I would argue that these processes were provided by faculty, parents and community members the present study can only describe these aspirations, values, behaviors and processes as reported by adult participants.

Moreover, the qualitative focus of this study does not provide any concrete evidence of the educational, social and economic processes by which educational aspirations, values and behaviors are based. Although the qualitative analysis used in this study provides an ethnographic examination of these factors, it does not offer any quantifiable descriptive power that would allow researchers to generalize the findings. Thus, the data from this study offers the reader a descriptive qualitative study designed to show the processes by which community members experience and react to their educational contexts and environments, how they develop ideologies and how those ideologies are shared in their social environments.

One way to improve this study would be redesign it using a (1) multiple sites with similar demographic data and, (2) a mixed methods approach using some of the existing categorical tables. The mixed method would allow for the generalizability and quantitative rigor while maintaining the richness and descriptive power of ethnographic design. The combination of these methods and the addition of multiple sites remains a goal for future research.

This study contributes very little understanding of the variables contributing to rural educational aspirations, values and behaviors outside of the immediate community. While some of these variables associated with the broader society are addressed

conceptually, there influences are still unclear. This may be a function of sample size and the limits of censuring, the effects of social class, social reproduction and the ways that schools and other social institutions reproduce class remain unclear an are a goal for future research.

Theoretical Review

Ferdinand Tonnies (1955), a German sociologist, presented a fundamental distinction between two different kinds of communities. His distinction may be particularly relevant to this study in terms of understanding the fundamental differences between the people of Rutgers and "the outside world." These differences are made clear in definition:

- The term *gessellschaft* is based on the term that describes an association of people whose primary interests are grounded "in the members a rational pursuit of their own self-interests" (Conway, 1994, p. 4).
- The term *gemienshcaft* is based on the term that describes a community of people whose primary interests are founded in a sense of "shared purposes, personal loyalties and common sentiments" (Conway, 1994, p. 4).

The concepts Tonnies developed to understand the differences between social groups helps to provide a framework to understand (1) the primary interests of the people of Rutgers and (2) the relationship that exists between Rutgers and the broader society. The social and psychological distinctions that characterize the *gemienschaft* nature of the Rutgers community also separate them from the broader culture. And they are quite at

odds with the school that, despite their best efforts to connect with local people, represent the broader culture and are therefore "outsiders." The phrase "outsiders" is a term that helps local people distance themselves from *gessellshaft* agendas and institutions. It indicates the isolation and the solidarity of the people of Rutgers in terms of the fundamental differences in community priority. Moreover, it provides a social and psychological buffer that shields them from impositions that threaten their way of life.

Recent policies such as No Child Left Behind and Michigan's Cherry Commission on K-16 schooling reflect a *gesselschaft* way of thinking. These policies stress achievement for economic gains, upward mobility, a global job market; goals that are in conflict with the values of the Rutgers community because they are based primarily on a rational pursuit of individual self-interests. They do not reflect the sentiments or interests of community, family and quality of life. At the heart of the matter is that what matters locally is vastly different than what matters to policymakers. These are the problems at the interface between the people of Rutgers and the educational system. Tonnies' work provides a framework from which to deconstruct these intertwined, yet opposing goals.

Review of Literature

Through the review of literature detailed in the first chapter, I provided evidence that living can be difficult in poor rural places. The causes for rural poverty and the factors that perpetuate it are complex and far-reaching. The literature suggests that one of the causes of rural poverty lies in rural educational aspirations and attainment. Rural educational attainment levels lag behind their urban counterparts. Moreover, educational

behaviors and values of rural poor reflect generational patterns of educational ambivalence.

The first body of research presented in the literature review focused on the role that families play in rural communities. According to the literature, rural families fulfill multiple roles. Bound by reciprocal relationships and mutual assistance, they are the primary and most influential source of social interactions. Research highlights three salient factors underlying the dynamics of family. First, they are dependent on each other for social interaction and identity. Second, rural people are economically dependent on each other, in part due to factors of poverty, isolation and identity. Third, these factors result from a marginal integration into the broader culture. One of the consequences of this is that rural families have a tremendous influence on behaviors and aspirations.

The second body of literature focused on educational features of high poverty rural communities. The research suggests that poverty and family impact many areas of rural family life including educational outcomes. Rural poor children's educational trajectories are shaped by parental educational achievement and familial aspirations. Community culture also plays an important role in the shaping the educational trajectories of rural youth. Rural youth face structural inadequacies that challenge educational outcomes. Spatial features that distance them from learning opportunities such as limited course offerings, deteriorating buildings and high incidence of poverty affect educational outcomes. The research indicates that social capital features are a strong determinant of educational outcomes. The combined influences of poverty, place, community and kin all play a role in rural cognitive development, aspirations and academic attainment.

Contribution of this study

The purpose of this community study is to explore the educational attitudes, values and behaviors of rural poor community members and the social process that sustains them. Several themes emerged in this study that supported the research of other scholars.

Families played critical roles through reciprocal relationships and mutual assistance. When local labor markets fail them in tangible ways, families provide economic, psychological and social support. Because this rural area is extremely homogeneous, they receive support from kin, furthering reliance on the existing social structure. A lack of experience with outside agencies and institutions and a natural resistance and distrust of them as government institutions serves to reinforce the powers of the community and family social structure. This distrust for social institutions extends to the teachers and the school.

The people of Rutgers are rooted in long standing relationships with kin and community necessary for survival. Residents living in socially isolated rural communities experience local economic conditions that facilitate a greater reliance on each other for survival. Rural isolation inflates the importance of these relationships with kin because they make up the bulk of the social pool. One striking feature of this community is the fact that it is made up of overlapping and generational networks of kin. A second striking feature is the affect that this social pool has on its members.

Locals have a strong sense of identity that distinguishes them from "outsiders" and makes them recognizable within the community. These combined qualities solidify internal relationships and distance them from the outside world. This social distancing creates a disparity for the people of Rutgers. They lack experience with things from outside of the community. This results in distrust for outsiders and outside influences. The disparity occurs because they are bound to the outside world, yet they feel rejected by it (Ficthen, 1981) . Moreover, they are tied to social institutions that require their participation, such as the school; a place where they want their children to be successful, but in accordance with local standards and objectives. And what matters around here is family, traditions and survival. Local educational values are in conflict of the far-reaching educational goals of the school and the state.

The family and community influence educational outcomes and the ways that the people of Rutgers view education. I found that that the community and families have an important impact in the social processes that sustain and reproduce educational aspirations, values and behaviors. The people of Rutgers restrict educational aspirations and behaviors in accordance with local need and family priority. They distrust outside influences including the school, which encourages children to commit to a distant goal to obtain a costly degree at distant four-year university. They fear their children will move away, breaking social ties and risking survival. These tensions contribute to the educational aspirations, values and behaviors of the rural poor living in Rutgers.

In sum, I did a study in account with a body of work in the areas of educational aspirations, poverty and the social processes that sustain them. The contribution of this study to the existing body of literature lies in the rural voice. This study offers the reader

an opportunity to understand the working logic that sustains one rural poor educational community. From this perspective it seems evident that further consideration must be given to the cultural influences of educational aspirations, values and behaviors. At the heart of the issue is that the rural people of Rutgers have been invited to participate in "a in which they have no way of winning" (Lareau, 2003, p. 747). Submerged in an urbanized institution that lacks the social-structural links to give them access, they maintain a social distance and resist educational reform as "something developed by outsiders" To their way of thinking, schooling does not offer them any tangible advantage.

Conclusion

From this presentation of the data, two conclusions can be made. First, this is not a study of educational policy. But may I suggest in conclusion recent policies, No Child Left Behind, Michigan's Cherry Commission on K-16 schooling, and Michigan's new there new High School Graduation requirements, reflect a line of thinking that is at odds with Rutgers's line of thinking. That is, while the state and federal policies stress students' individual achievement for economic purposes, social upward mobility, international competition, and -- as always -- attention to equality -- the people of Rutgers prefer to think of education as contributing to family survival; improving one's "place" in the Rutgers community, and staying in Rutgers and helping one's kin and one's community. And whereas, those policies reflect education as more technical and internationally competitive, the people in Rutgers are more concerned with what they

define as a "quality of life" quite at odds with notions of individual economic and social upward mobility.

Second, the observed disparity between the people of Rutgers and the outside world appears in part, to be based on an awareness of their social status within the broader more urbanized culture. As marginal participants in a global world (Fitchen, 1981) the people of Rutgers are categorized, treated and acknowledged as the "rural poor" from "Rutgertucky." Skilled at social discernment, they are aware of how they are perceived. And so patterns of reciprocal social distancing between the educational community and the community at large create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because the community's educational attainment lags behind other more affluent districts, teachers "don't want my children going to school here." In turn, local people are confirmed in the belief that education, brought in on the backs of teachers and developed and delivered by outsiders, is of little help to them because it does not take into account local voice. More to the point, it is not "what matters around here." At the same time, teachers are confirmed in their belief that local people will not invest in the educational goals of the state. These are critical problems at the forefront experienced by the people of Rutgers and the educational system that perpetuate low educational aspirations.

In the end, the people of Rutgers marginally participate with the "outside world" and feel rejected by it. Not knowing how to break into the dominant culture, they withdraw into their own, and gain acceptance within the network of kin. The social distancing or detachment toward educational pressures is less a community preference than it is a fair response to a difficult social condition.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

UCRIHS MATERIALS

A.1 Informed Consent Letter

Informed Consent
A Community Study of Rural Education and Poverty

You are being asked to participate in a research study involving graduate research on the topic of rural education at Michigan State University. The results of this research will be used to explore and inform rural educators, policy makers and community members about issues related to rural education in regions experiencing similar economic decline.

The purpose of this study is to describe, analyze and assess strategies for understanding rural community's educational experiences and attitudes in rural regions of economic decline. Data collected for this study will include interviews of adult community members, audiotapes of interviews (with consent), participant observations, field notes, artifacts and surveys. Audiotapes will be transcribed for analysis. Some subjects will be asked to participate in one hour-long interview. You are asked to participate in one hour-long interview. If you volunteer for additional interview sessions, the secondary investigator will arrange to meet according to the scheduling needs of the participants involved.

If you do not consent to being audiotaped for this study but agree to be interviewed, the secondary investigator will script the interview. Consenting to be audiotaped is voluntary, and will not effect your ability to participate in the study.

All data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office at Michigan State University, and will be saved for three years. The principal investigator will keep the audiotapes after data has been collected and analyzed, and may use the tapes for future analysis and presentations.

As participants collectively study and document the work, all data results will be treated with strict confidence, and neither subject names or school names will be identified in any report of research findings. Participant's privacy will be protected to maximum extent allowable by law. The data collection period for this study will take place from April 2004 to May 11, 2007.

Participants in this study are voluntary and open to all community members provided they are over the age of 18. You are being asked to participate in one interview/survey that will last approximately one to one-half hour. After the interview/survey you may be asked if you would agree to be further interviewed. If you are willing, a time and place acceptable to you will be determined. You are under no obligation to agree to further interviews. There are no known risks to participating in this study. You will not benefit from participating in this study. Your participation in this study will contribute to the understanding of the rural sociology, rural education and educational policy.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please feel free to contact Dr. Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Head of Human Subjects Protection Programs at MSU, by phone (517)255-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503 or email ucrihs@msu.edu or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

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pacusick@msu.edu

General Agreement: Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

Print Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Your signature indicates your voluntary agreement to allow the researcher to audio tape the interviews.

Signature: _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROTOCOL

B.1 Research Questions for Semi-Structured Interview

A Community Study of Rural Poverty and Education
Research Questions for Summer Pilot Study

Principal Investigator: Dorothea Anagnostopoulos

Secondary Investigator: Angela M. Kirby

The purpose of this study is to investigate the educational attitudes and values of adults in a poor rural community, and to explore how rural environments (density, isolation and degree of poverty) impacts schemes about education, place and community. The research is guided by a series of questions:

1. How do rural poor experience education and how does their experience become reflected in their attitudes, values and beliefs about education?
2. What are the communities values regarding education?
3. What do rural community members do, in a behavioral sense, relative to education?

For the purposes of this summer pilot study, we will begin asking a series of interview questions related to our third question in our series of guiding questions, related to community behavior. Specifically, we want to learn "what place means" to rural community members residing in an impoverished region. Specifically, we want to know about what place means in relation to (1) their social interdependencies, (2) their relationships to the land, and (3) how these rural adults imagine how the school fits into their notions about them. The following questions will be asked of consenting participants:

Questions about social interactions and place:

1. How long have you lived in this town?
2. Who do you talk to?
3. What relationship do you have with the community?
4. Tell me about yourself.
5. Tell me a story about when you felt really connected to this community.
6. Tell me a story about when the community has overcome and obstacle.
7. What are some of the biggest challenges faced by this community?
8. What affect do they have on families and social relationships?
9. What affect do they have on school?
10. Describe how your community is different than other communities.
11. Tell me about your social relationships within the community.
12. How often do you meet with friends, family, work associates?
13. Where is the common meeting places and what do people do there?

14. What do you do for fun in this town?

Questions about schooling and place

1. Tell me about your experiences in school.
2. Did you go to school locally?
3. How long were you in school?
4. What did you think of the educational system when you were a student?
5. What did you hope to get from the school at that time?
6. Do you have children in the school system?
7. Do you have thoughts about this school system?
8. What do you think schools *should do?*
9. Have you seen any changes in schooling over the years?
10. What are the trends you are seeing?
11. What kinds of interactions do you have with the school?
12. Who do you talk to about school?
13. How often do you talk to people about the school?
14. How do you think school responds to what matters around here?
15. Tell me about some of the things that your school does really well.
16. Describe some things that would improve your community.
17. Tell me a story or give me an example of something unique to your school and/or community.
18. Tell me the ways in which your school, community or region is different than others.

B.2 ETHNOSURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

EthnoSurvey
What Matters Around Here:
A Community Study of Rural Education and Poverty

Date:_____

Survey ID Number:_____

Community:_____

Observations:

Table 1 Household Member Information

	Name	Fam. Role	sex	Household member	DOB	Place of Birth	Home	Marital status	Ed.	Job	Specification
1											
2											
3											
4											
5											
6											

7											
8											
9											
10											
11											

Table 2 Labor History of Household

Year	Age	Place	Occupation	Specification	Duration	Reason for Leaving	Other Jobs

Table 3 Household Experience of Family and Extended Family

Role in Family	How many have lived /live outside of community?	How many currently live within community?	Purpose
Uncles			
Aunts			
Cousins			
Nieces/Nephews			
Siblings			
Children			
Parent			

Table 4 Land Ownership

Land	Number of Acres	Type of Land	Number of Cultivated Acres	Tenancy	Family Land	Use	Shared Property	With Whom

Table 5: Household Services Check List

Service	
Water	Phone-Land Line
Electric	Phone-Cell
Sewer	Computer
Stove	Internet
Refrigerator	Television
Washing Machine	Radio
Sewing Machine	Cable

Table 6: Use of Public Services

Types of Services Accessed	Answers
Public or private schools	
Libraries (other than school)	
Civic institutions (Bussing, Sports-plex)	
Hospitals	
Sporting Events (types)	
Unemployment Compensation	
Welfare	
AFDC	
WIC	
SSI	
General	

Table: 7 Community Values List

Value	Why

Note: Ethnosurvey Design modeled after MMP household questionnaire

APPENDIX C

METHODOLOGY TABLES

C.1 INTERVIEW PROTOCAL

Table 1: Semi-Structured Interview Outline

Semi-Structured Interview	**Interview Focus**
Family Interview	Demographic data, life histories, educational aspirations and behaviors, social networks influencing reproduction and mobility, socioeconomic, social systems analysis
School Faculty Interview	Expectations, political, social and systems constructs, policy implications
Community Member Focus	Demographic data, life histories, educational aspirations and behaviors, social networks influencing reproduction and mobility, socioeconomic, social and systems analysis.

C.2 RESULTS TABLE

Table 2: Summary of Findings

Emerging Themes	Behaviors or Views	Social Process	Purpose or Effect
Category I: Family			
Traditions as Educational Tools	Extraction, production,	Taught by kin, defines role within family.	Supplement income, foster solidarity, skills for daily rural living
Connections and Reciprocity	Mutual inter-dependence, multiple obligations	Kin provide economic, social and psychological support,	Mutual interdependence, foster solidarity, strong extended family ties
Rural Identity and Isolation	Social distancing, highlighting distinguishing features,	Inflated primary relationships, multiplex roles heterogeneous groupings	Solidarity, companionship, strained primary relationships
Category II: Education			
Purpose of Schooling	Locals press for local need to be reflected in the curriculum, schools should attend to local immediate needs and educate to that end.	Resistance to educational objectives, rejection of educational objectives developed by outsiders,	Conflict between educational purposes at home and at the school
Influence of Kin on Educational Aspirations	Limit educational aspirations to regional economic demand.	Restrict through mutual need and reciprocal relations. Focus on family survival.	Leveled educational aspirations and attainment
Schools and Social Mobility	Criticisms and interventions on behalf of the youth over objectives	Limit educational aspirations to local economic demand	Leveled educational aspirations and attainment

Distrust of Outsiders	Social distancing, suspicion, of government and school, view influences as coming from "high class" outsiders	Inflated primary relationships, strong ties to kin and community, general acceptance of community views	Sense of powerlessness and frustration, solidarity against the "other"
Survival in Rutgers	Underpins all behaviors related to education.	Conflict between outside institutions that are viewed as threatening to community survival	Rejection of "outside" influences, dependence on current practices

C.3 DEMOGRAPHIC TABLE

Table 2: Demographic Comparison Data

	Michigan	National	Rutgers
Percentage of rural students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch	33.7%	43%	52%
Rural per capita income	$30,439	$43.317	$11,973
Educational Attainment Level			
Some College	22.1%	66 %	6.7%
Bachelor's degree	21.8%	31%	3.2%
Median household income	$49,350	$44,350	$31,923
Cost of Living	88%	100%	79%
Unemployment	7%	5%	7%
Violent Crime	2	3	3

Note. Data from Rural Matters 2003 and NCES

APPENDIX D

FIGURES

D.1 FIGURE 1

Figure 1: Fish Camp

D.2. FIGURE 2

Figure 2: Smoking Catfish

D.3 FIGURE 3

Figure 3: Extended Families Living on Family Land

D.4. FIGURE 4

Figure 4: Family Home in Rutgers School District

D.5. FIGURE 5

Figure 4: Extended Family Living Communally on Homestead

D.6. FIGURE 6

Figure 6: Ice Fishing

D.7 FIGURE 7

Figure 7: Local Employment

D.8 FIGURE 8

Figure 8: Downtown Rutgers

D.9 FIGURE 9

Figure 9: Family Living Year Round in Travel Trailer

D.10 FIGURE 10

Figure 10: Extended Family on Rural Homestead

D.11 FIGURE 11

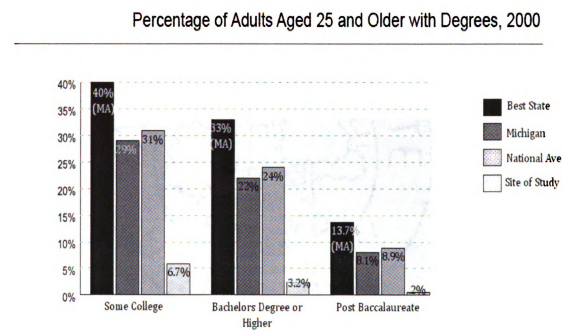
Figure 11: Home Bordering School Grounds

D.12: FIGURE 12

Figure 12: The School

D.13 FIGURE 13

Figure 12: Average of Educational Attainment



Note. Data from U.S. Census Bureau

D.14 FIGURE 14

Figure 14: Rental Property

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