



This is to certify that the

dissertation entitled

**FAMILY CONTINUITY AND CHANGE
IN A RESTRUCTURED ECONOMY:
A CASE STUDY FROM RURAL MICHIGAN**

presented by

Barbara A. Wells

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in **Sociology**

Maxine Bazzinn
Major professor

Date July 12, 1999

LIBRARY

Michigan State University

PLACE IN RETURN BOX to remove this checkout from your record.

TO AVOID FINES return on or before date due.

MAY BE RECALLED with earlier due date if requested.

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE
	04 13 2004	
MAY 23 2001	SEP 04 2001	JUN 04 2002
	08 15 01	03 18 02
	09 11 01	
1002 4 3 01	JAN 25 2002	MAR 18 2003
	09 17 02	04 03 03
JUL 12 2001	MAR 09 2002	OCT 09 2003
04 16 01	09 17 02	01 12 04
		JAN 19 2005
MAY 02 2001	MAY 22 2002	OCT 29 2005
07 18 01	09 17 02	07 28 05
MAY 18 2001	NOV 13 2006	
05 03 01		

**FAMILY CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN A RESTRUCTURED ECONOMY:
A CASE STUDY FROM RURAL MICHIGAN**

VOLUME I

By

Barbara A. Wells

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Sociology

1999

ABSTRACT

FAMILY CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN A RESTRUCTURED ECONOMY: A CASE STUDY FROM RURAL MICHIGAN

By

Barbara A. Wells

An important body of scholarship has documented the effects of economic restructuring on poor, working class and middle class urban families. Scholars have connected such family trends as increasing nonmarital births, cohabitation, extended-family households, and marital disruption to a restructured economy. This research brings a sample of White rural families into the scholarly conversation that links economic context, family structure, and household strategies.

This research is a case study of families with young children in a nonmetropolitan Michigan county that has experienced economic decline. It uses data from the Family Interview phase of the multi-method, multi-phase Strategies for Rural Children and Families Project (Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station Project #3337). These data were gathered between October 1995 and January 1996. The sample was selected through systematic stratified sampling procedures. The study is based on surveys and interviews with thirty families in a small rural school district that had a poverty rate of nearly twenty percent in 1990. The sample is nonfarm; all sample families are White.

This study focuses on three central issues: patterns of continuity and change in family structure and household arrangements, strategies for the construction and maintenance of family households, and sample mothers' perceptions regarding and explanations for their own family lives. First, this research finds that a large proportion of sample families (77%) are married couple families. However closer

analysis finds substantial fluidity in the form of unconventional first marriages and divorce followed by remarriage. Only 37% of sample families may be characterized as “typical” nuclear families.

Second, the household strategies used by sample families are differentiated by social class. Middle class families generally sustained themselves by dual earning and stable, local employment. Working class families used a combination of the following major strategies: dual earning, commuting to a metro center, living in a mobile home, and working overtime. Poor families experienced structural impediments to implementing many effective strategies for resource generation, but nearly all poor families (89%) had earnings. Middle class and high income working class parents have sufficient income to support their children comfortably, while lower income working class and poor families sometimes engage in elaborate survival strategies.

Third, this analysis finds that research participants placed a high value on economic self-sufficiency, but finds two sets of assumptions about family life. Middle class women assumed stability in their marital relationships but working class and poor women did not. In the latter groups, the nuclear family ideal of permanent marriage did not conform to either their own family experience or their observations in the wider community.

Rural residence has not insulated sample families from family trends identified in urban contexts. Yet family adaptations occur in particular social contexts. Unlike other research that has pointed to the declining significance of marriage among White women, marriage has remained central to family experience in this context. These results suggest that the economic transformation of rural space has constructed a set of conditions for family life that differ from the opportunities and constraints of urban places.

Copyright by

BARBARA ANNE WELLS

1999

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the twenty-nine women and two men who agreed to participate in a research project about family life in a rural setting. The willingness of these women and men to share their family histories, their household strategies, and their perspectives on community and family life made this dissertation possible. While these individuals remain anonymous, I thank each one for his or her participation.

I acknowledge the guidance and support of my dissertation committee: Maxine Baca Zinn, Janet Bokemeier, Clifford Broman, and Thomas Conner. I am particularly indebted to my co-chairs, Maxine Baca Zinn and Janet Bokemeier. I am grateful to Maxine Baca Zinn for making sure that this work incorporated and addressed central concerns in the field of sociology of the family. Her direction was invaluable in keeping me focused and on track. Maxine inspired and challenged me intellectually throughout this project. I worked closely with Janet Bokemeier on the Strategies for Rural Children and Families Project. I am grateful for all that I learned from her about research design, interviewing, and data analysis. It was in working with Jan, that I came both to care about rural people and to appreciate the uniqueness of rural social space.

I wrote this dissertation over the course of employment at two institutions. I thank my colleagues at Hope College, Holland, Michigan, and Maryville College, Maryville, Tennessee, for their encouragement and support.

My final thanks go to my husband, Ronald Wells, whose companionship and care sustained me throughout this project. His commitment to supporting me in writing this dissertation has been unfailing. I have appreciated fully his encouragement and good advice, but I am most grateful to him for recognizing that what I really needed to complete this work was time. His willingness to take primary responsibility for household tasks has contributed significantly to the timely completion of this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	x
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	1
Chapter 2 THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Theoretical Context	7
Urban Restructuring and Family Life	10
Theoretical Context for the Study of Rural Families	12
Rural Economic Context	14
Rural Restructuring and Family Life	15
Rural Social Stratification	20
Social class in rural communities	20
Racial stratification	25
Gender stratification	26
Linking Economic Life and Family Relations	28
Household strategy	28
Economic distress	33
Research Questions	34
Definitions	37
Chapter 3 METHODOLOGY	42
The Broad Rural Children and Families Project Context	47
The Specific Family Interview Data Set Context	48

The Family Interview sample	48
Method/Data Collection	50
Analytic Strategies	51
Assessing continuity and change in household arrangements	52
Examining family life through the lens of social class	53
Women's perspectives on family and economy	54
Community Setting	57
County social and economic context	58
Chapter 4 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN HOUSEHOLD ARRANGEMENTS	64
Introduction	64
Marital Status, Marital History, and Family Arrangements	68
Family Continuity	74
Explaining Table 4	75
Results	86
Conclusions	92
Chapter 5 RELATING FAMILY CONTINUITY AND CHANGE TO SOCIAL CLASS	99
Introduction	99
Studying families through the lens of social class	99
Establishing Social Class Among Sample Families	102
Results	103
The Relationship between Social Class and Family Continuity	111

Conclusions	117
Chapter 6 HOUSEHOLD STRATEGIES	123
Providing for Children in Economic Strain: Parent-Identified Strategies for Household Survival	125
Data and analysis	126
Making Ends Meet: Strategies for Maintaining Households	138
Data and analysis	139
Household Strategies Differentiated by Social Class	161
Use of strategies for resource generation	162
Use of consumption-related strategies	173
Use of network-related strategies	174
Use of residential strategies	188
Overview and Conclusions	189
Chapter 7 WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILY AND ECONOMY	203
Introduction	205
Middle Class Women: Unquestioned Stability	210
Upper-Income Working Class Women: "A" for Effort at Work and Home	216
Lower-Income Working Class Women: Better Times and Hard Times	224
"These are better times"	225
Making sense of hard times	233
Poor Women: "We're Making the Best of It"	239
Single mothers	240

Married homemakers	245
Conclusions	252
Chapter 8 CONCLUSIONS	257
Rural Family Structure: Continuity and Change	258
Household Strategies	260
The Contribution of an Analysis of Rural Space	264
Place, class, and marriage	266
Implications	271
Limitations of the Research	279
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: A Survey of Children's Lives in Rural Michigan	284
Appendix B: Interview Schedule: Children's Lives in Rural Michigan	291
Appendix C: Additional Tables	301
Appendix D: Strategies for Rural Families and Children County-Wide Telephone Survey: Wording of Questions Cited in Chapter 7	310
REFERENCES	313

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	
County Business Patterns with U.S. Comparisons, 1994	
Private Sector, Non-Farm Industries	60
Table 2	
Average Hours, Earnings, and Weekly Earnings by Industry: U.S., 1995	62
Table 3	
Family Structure and Household Arrangements in Study Sample	71
Table 4	
Continuity Profile for Sample Families	76
Table 5	
Social Class Profile of Sample Families	104
Table 6	
Characteristics of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families	112
Table 7	
When you find it difficult to pay for child-related expenses, what do you do?	
Percentages of Parents Identifying Strategies in Class-Based Groups	127
Table 8	
Respondents' Assessments of Income Sufficiency	
Responses of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families	130
Table 9	
Household Strategies for Resource Generation	
Percentage of Parents Identifying Strategies in Class-Based Groups	140
Table 10	
Employment Status of Married Couples or Cohabiting Couples Sharing Income	142
Table 11	
Non-Economic Social Support: Family-Based and Non-Family Based	
Percentage of Parents Identifying Kinds of Support in Class-Based Groups	179

Table 12	
In the lifetime of your child, have major events occurred that really changed your family?	
Responses of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families	192
Table 13	
Respondent-Identified Stressors (both individual and family)	
Distribution in Class-Based Groups of Sample Families	195
Table A	
When you find it difficult to pay for child-related expenses, what do you do?	
Parent-Identified Strategies by Class-Based Groups of Sample Families	301
Table B	
Household Strategies for Resource Generation	
Characteristics of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families	303
Table C	
Non-Economic Social Support: Family-Based and Non-Family Based	
Distribution in Class-Based Groups of Sample Families	305
Table D	
In the years it has taken you to raise your (child's name), what would you say has been the hardest decision you have had to make regarding (child's name)?	
Responses of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families	307

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Macrostructural change has transformed the U.S. economy in recent decades. The same forces that have devastated many central cities--globalization of the economy, capital flight and technological advances--have changed rural areas as well. An important body of scholarship considers how this restructuring affects families. Scholars have found that urban Blacks have adapted their family structures and household arrangements in response to a changed economic context (Wilson 1987, 1996, Billingsley 1992, Jarrett 1994). The effects of economic restructuring on working class and middle class families have been well documented by Stacey (1991), Newman (1988, 1993), and Rubin (1994); these family scholars, in general, find that the postindustrial economy has ushered in a new era of restricted opportunity and financial insecurity which has destabilized many nuclear families. The existing literature connecting the structure of the economy to family processes and household composition is mostly urban-based. Rural families are a population that has been largely invisible in the conversation that links economic transformation and family structure. The research begins to fill in this gap in the literature.

Research that considers family adaptation to new economic realities occurs in the context of considerable popular and disciplinary tension. While "family" is a set of relationships, it is also an ideological construct. Family has a normative meaning, that is, mainstream society expects families to be structured in particular ways and to fulfill specific social functions. Therefore, the meaning of family change and family diversity in this society is contested. This society had for many decades embraced the modern nuclear family as its monolithic ideal (Thorne 1992). A modern nuclear family may be characterized as a husband and wife in a life-long marriage who live with their dependent children in a private household. Central to the modern nuclear ideal is the

assumption that these are stable households with fixed boundaries. But now, as fewer families embody this ideal, some members of society point to a crisis of commitment among individuals and the moral decline of society as a whole. Conservative family scholars with a structural functionalist orientation have contended that the modern nuclear family was necessary for the maintenance of modern society.¹ In sharp contrast, the perspectives of progressive family scholars conflict with those of conservative family scholars. Many progressive family scholars view families as socially constructed in particular historical, economic, and political contexts. These scholars expect family diversity and anticipate that families will adapt in circumstances of rapid social change. Judith Stacey finds that accompanying the economic insecurities of postmodern society is a type of family organization she calls “the postmodern family” (1991). Among postmodern families, household composition expands and contracts in response to economic necessities. Family and household arrangements are characterized by a state of flux rather than by highly continuous arrangements.

The question of changing rural family structure may seem incompatible with idealized assumptions regarding rural life. Nostalgic pictures of rural family life are appealing to the American public. Television reruns of “Little House on the Prairie” continue to bring courageous and tenacious nineteenth century rural families into American living rooms. Ann Tickamyer refers us back to a 1950s image of rural life; she contends that “[o]ne of the more agreeable images that surrounds rural America is the Mayberry image of small town life, with strong families, strong community solidarity and support, and strong spiritual values” (1996b:9).

Not all representations of idealized rural families look backward to another historical period. The conservative-leaning periodical, *The American Enterprise*, includes a feature called “In Real Life.” A recent contributor describes her family’s

¹The contrast between conservative and progressive family scholars is drawn from Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton (1998:6-8).

urban-to-rural transition as follows:

A few years ago, our family left the center of a major city for a small town in the midwest. We left behind racial hostility, political corruption, dangerous public housing projects, economic parasitism, vile street language, and a plague of drug use and crime. . . . Our new community had what our previous one lacked -- friendliness, *whole families*, sidewalks where children safely frolicked, a sense of peace and security, and neighborhood gatherings in which to celebrate these riches. [emphasis added] (Celine 1996:65)

National Public Radio brings us Garrison Keillor's popular program, "A Prairie Home Companion," in which Keillor tells inimitable stories of the events of the week in Lake Wobegon, a fictitious rural community populated by sensible Minnesotans with solid families and traditional values. Romanticized representations of contemporary rural life offer a sharp contrast to the complexities and disappointments of contemporary urban life. To generalize, media representations depict White rural families--from the nineteenth century to the 1990s--as resilient and resourceful nuclear families situated in inclusive and supportive communities.

It is in this cultural context that I undertake a study of rural families. I consider how contemporary rural families construct and maintain family life in the context of a restructured rural economy. I explore the family structure histories and household arrangements of this rural sample to find how many of these families conform to the nuclear ideal. I also consider the degree to which family arrangements in my sample resemble what Judith Stacey has called "the postmodern family" (1991). Placing "rural" and "postmodern" in the same sentence may seem incongruous. Some observers of the rural landscape may still be questioning whether rural areas are typically traditional or modern in structure. The suggestion of "postmodern" may seem a step too far. In this case, "the postmodern family" refers to family arrangements that have been documented as associated with the shift to the postindustrial era. To the degree that factors such as globalization, capital flight, and the growth of the service economy affect rural areas, the question of the postmodern family is relevant.

This research is a case study that explores contemporary family life and household structure in a rural setting.² [See page 37 for clarification regarding use of “rural” and “nonmetropolitan.”] I believe, as Nancy Naples contends, that “[a] case-study approach allows exploration of social responses to, and experiences of, the patchwork quilt of economic and demographic changes from the point of view of those whose lives are affected by social and economic restructuring” (1994:110-111). I begin with the assumption that macro economic circumstances shape family structure and family processes. A primary concern of this study will be to ask how social class variation creates various contexts for family life. I assume that social class shapes the relationship of individual families to the restructured rural economy. I explore the strategies household members use to survive economically and how social class shapes their access to or propensity to use various strategies. Analysis on the household level is valuable because households represent the “nexus of livelihood practices and experiences of individuals, and changes in the wider relations of consumption and production structuring rural localities” (Redclift and Whatmore 1990:183). I explore the relationship between household structure and social class. In addition, I analyze how a sample of rural women account for their family lives and economic circumstances.

Burawoy's (1991b) discussion of the extended case study method guides how I conceptualize this research. This method connects macro level processes with micro level social situations. One of the goals of this method is to refine existing understandings of social phenomena by extending research to new or relatively unexplored contexts. Exploring the macro effects of a particular social phenomenon in new populations or settings enriches and clarifies our understandings of broad social processes. According to this line of thinking, a study exploring contemporary family

²Rural and nonmetropolitan (or nonmetro) are used interchangeably in this research.

household structure and family life in a rural setting extends the study of economic transformation and families beyond its typical urban focus. Such a study illumines family life in a particular rural community. In addition, such research enables us to further specify how the broad social process of economic transformation affects families.

This research uses a data set from the Family Interview phase of the Strategies for Rural Children and Families Project (Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station Project #3337). I worked as a research assistant for this project from its inception in 1993 through 1996. [I describe my involvement in this research project on page 48.] This data set consists of transcripts from semi-structured interviews of approximately 1.5 to 2.5 hours and responses to self-administered pre-interview surveys. The surveys provide demographic and family history data and assess household composition, residential mobility, parenting practices, the family economy, and community satisfaction. Interview data of greatest interest to me are those that explore employment and economic strategies, social support, family change and perceptions of rural life.

The overarching goal of this study is to understand better how recent economic transformations shape family life. A substantial body of literature documents that race, class, gender, and labor market context influence how families respond to macro economic change. I study family life in a rural setting to explore how this unique social and economic context creates family outcomes that are particular to this situation. The specific goals of this study are the following:

first, to explore the household arrangements in a sample of rural families. This study analyzes patterns of continuity and change in the family lives of sample households.

second, to examine the relationship between social class, household structure, and family life. Here I will compare families at a range of levels of economic well-being to answer these questions:

What characterizes the rural families with higher economic status?

What characterizes the families with limited economic resources?

third, to analyze how these rural mothers perceive and explain their family lives. This data set captures the viewpoints of rural women in diverse social locations and a variety of family configurations. It allows us to raise the following questions:

How do these women explain their families' economic circumstances?

How do they account for continuity and change in their family lives?

Chapter 2

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This review brings together several streams of scholarship. A central component of this review is a discussion of the existing literature connecting restructuring and family life. This literature focuses on urban families, and finds that race, class, and gender are significant structural variables that shape family and individual experience with the restructured economy. My study begins with that literature and then asks how our understandings of family experience in a restructured economy are revised by examining the phenomenon in a rural, overwhelmingly White context. While the rural literature in this area is sparse, it does demonstrate that there is no typical rural family experience. Yet overall, research indicates that rural populations are more like central city than suburban populations with respect to the incidence of poverty, high school dropouts, public assistance reciepience, and male underemployment (O'Hare 1994, O'Hare and Curry-White 1992). This chapter is organized as follows: first, a brief theoretical contextualization; second, a review of the urban-based literature; third, a review of the rural literature that provides a theoretical context, introduces the rural economic context, discusses rural restructuring and family life, and describes rural social stratification; fourth, a review of the discourse that links economic context to household decisions and practices. Finally I delineate my research questions and provide definitions.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The three decades since the late 1960s have been a period of significant change in the organization of U.S. families. Trends such as increasing marital instability, maternal employment, and nonmarital childbearing have reshaped families. This

dissertation uses for its theoretical underpinnings the literature that views families as socially constructed. According to this perspective, households and families are created in the context of a particular social location, and adapt in response to changes in political, material, and economic circumstances (Rapp 1992 [1978], Baca Zinn 1994). Changes such as those mentioned above may be anticipated in circumstances of broad structural change.

The past thirty years have also signaled a major restructuring of the U.S. economy. To summarize briefly, the globalization of the economy was the crisis that began to transform economic opportunity in the 1970s. Globalization was accompanied by three corporate strategies: capital flight, union-busting, and the restructuring of the workforce (Amott 1993). As a result, both central cities and rural areas have experienced declining opportunity structures (Duncan and Tickamyer 1988, Tickamyer and Duncan 1990, Wilson 1987, Broman et al. 1990, Amott 1993). Since 1970 the workforce has become increasingly female, with low wage women workers substituted for high wage unionized male workers (Amott 1993). The transformation from a manufacturing based to a service based economy has resulted in the proliferation of secondary sector jobs. These jobs tend to be low wage, without benefits, and part-time employment.

An important body of scholarship connects recent and current changes in household and family patterns to this structural transformation of the economy. Researchers who study the contemporary family and the post-industrial economy are indebted to the historical work of Friederich Engels [1972 (1942)] and Eli Zaretsky (1976). Engels was the first theorist to link changes in the organization of the family to stages of economic development. More recently Zaretsky traced major transformations in the configuration of families in response to developing capitalism. He contends that in a capitalist system, the economy “to a great extent determines the imperatives of society as a whole”; the family has changed as the needs of the system have changed

(1976:10).

A brief historical sketch of the rise of the modern family in the U.S. and its connection to developing capitalism illustrates Zaretsky's thesis well. Further, such a sketch provides relevant context for the contemporary situation in which we observe the decline of the modern family form. Colonial families were characterized by a "family-based" economy in which the household was the basic economic unit (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1996). The family was an economic enterprise in which all members contributed to the subsistence of the family. Massive industrialization occurred during the nineteenth century, and a wage economy developed as part of that economic change. As a result, men increasingly worked for wages at sites removed from their residences. Women were increasingly limited to nonproductive work in the home (Smith 1987, Glenn 1992). This change signaled the emergence of the modern family form, a nuclear household unit consisting of a breadwinner husband, a homemaker wife, and their dependent children (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1996:452). This modern nuclear family was an ideal form. In practice, only families of the middle class or higher could achieve this ideal. Post-World War II prosperity provided an economic base for the nuclear family boom of the 1950s (Cherlin 1992). But in every decade, family experience was differentiated by social class. Working class and lower class men were not paid the family wage that would enable their wives to confine their labor to the domestic sphere. People of color have experienced tremendous obstacles to achieving the ideal of the modern family. The U.S. is a racially stratified society which has historically devalued racial ethnic families and has systematically denied people of color access to structures of economic opportunity (Baca Zinn 1990, Glenn 1992, Dill 1994). As a result, most families of color remained in the working class or lower class, in which case men did not receive the family wage necessary to implement the modern family form. We see by this sketch that industrialization transplanted individuals and families from rural areas to growing urban centers. Later in this

chapter, I make the point that the continuities of rural family life--where farming continued to predominate--have been considered too little in the scholarship that traces the development of modern family arrangements.

URBAN RESTRUCTURING AND FAMILY LIFE

Large-scale economic changes were occurring by the 1970s that would later be seen as the beginning of the transition to the postindustrial economy. A substantial body of literature links changing family structure to the macrostructural transformation of the economy. The work of William Julius Wilson (1987, 1996) and Andrew Billingsley (1992) focuses on urban African Americans. Without question, economic restructuring has had a devastating effect on central city employment. Wilson (1987) illustrates how structural transformation has led to a massive loss of jobs in central cities and the economic marginalization of Blacks. Wilson connects marriageability to employment status. Thus, male joblessness is a key factor in the increase in female-headed families among African Americans in central cities. Billingsley (1992) contends that the sharp decline in manufacturing that has occurred since the 1960s has hit Black families much harder than White families, because so few Black men had risen above the ranks of blue-collar employment. Millions of factory workers lost their jobs, with those job losses going disproportionately to the Black central city population. Billingsley (1992) explains:

The impact of this transition on African-American families has been devastating, beginning in the decade after the end of World War II. This has been the major cause of expanding black joblessness, expanding single-parent black families and an expanding sense of hopelessness. (pp. 134-145)

The impact of this transition on African-American families has been devastating, beginning in the decade after the end of World War II. By this perspective the African

American family is viewed as an institution adapting to changed economic and social circumstances. Families less able to resist the pressures of changing society adapt their structures, in this case by increasingly taking a female-headed form; the disadvantageous social location of African Americans in this society required this adaptation (Billingsley 1992).

Studies by Lillian Rubin (1994), Judith Stacey (1991), and Katherine Newman (1988, 1993) illumine how economic transformation affects families at a multiplicity of social locations. Taken together, this body of scholarship shows clearly that the effects of restructuring have spread beyond disadvantaged Blacks. Rubin (1994) studies working class families, both White and racial ethnic, and finds that working class life today is characterized by job insecurity, a declining standard of living, time scarcity, fragile marriage, and grave concerns about children. Newman's (1988, 1993) work clearly shows that middle class families are not immune to the effects of economic restructuring. Her study shows that the transformation of the economy has transformed the life chances of young adults (1993). And downwardly mobile middle class families experienced negative consequences such as alcoholism, depression, and abusive relationships (1988).

Stacey's (1991) study of the White working class in Silicon Valley finds that along with the emergence of postindustrial society has come a new family form--the postmodern family. Her methodology engaged her in extensive case studies of two women and their extended family networks. She concludes that the new economy has destabilized many modern working class families, forcing them to reorganize and adapt. These new families--now postmodern families--adapt their household arrangements as circumstances dictate and continue to adapt as contingencies require. Postmodern families are characterized by unconventional household arrangements, including extended-family households, single parent families, and divorce-extended families. The postmodern family breaks all the rules of the modern family, that is, it is

not a privatized nuclear family with a gender-specific division of labor and fixed boundaries.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY OF RURAL FAMILIES

As the literature review above demonstrates, scholarship that links economic transformation and families clearly has had an urban focus. From its beginnings in the progressive era, family studies has examined the negative effects of urbanization on families (Doherty et al. 1993). Rural areas represented a positive environment for family life. The transition of families from rural to urban life was seen to increase vulnerability to poverty, disease, and family breakdown. More recently, family historians have documented the rise of the modern family form, that is, a privatized nuclear household in which men engage in productive wage labor and women are confined to reproductive labor (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999). The rise of that family form is closely tied to economic transformations that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, transformations which, in fact, did not characterize rural areas until much later.

Although currently less than one-fifth of nonmetro counties are farm-dependent, this is a recent change (Buttel et al. 1993). Family farming dominated the nonmetro economy until the mid-twentieth century. Industrialization was the structural change that transformed families in urban areas in the mid-nineteenth century. The division of family labor on family farms continued to resemble the pre-industrial model in which all family members contributed to family subsistence. As Bokemeier and Garkovich contend, "The family farm is a unique unit in modern industrial society because the family enterprise is the focus of both *production* and *reproduction*" (1987:15). Women remained involved in the productive aspects of family farming until the mechanization of farming after 1945 (Jensen 1991:14). It was not a small minority of rural women

who were so involved, but rather the majority of households in nonmetro areas were active in family farming until the 1940s. It was after World War II that U.S. agricultural policy encouraged large-scale mechanized farming (Buttel et al. 1993). Mechanization and bio-technological advances changed the organization of farming. In the gendered division of labor that occurred (to varying degrees) on farms, the work that men did became more central to a farm's success. At this point women's labor became less central for farm success and many farm women became consumers and some took off-farm employment (Flora 1988, Jensen 1991). Further, at this point numerous farm families were unable to capitalize a larger, mechanized operation and left farming for nonfarm employment.

It is significant that the shift from family farming to nonfarm employment in nonmetro areas has been a recent phenomenon. The social forces that reshaped urban family households in the nineteenth century were experienced differently in rural areas. The modern family form emerged both unevenly and later in nonmetropolitan areas. As I examine how economic transformations since approximately 1970 have affected rural families, recognizing the particularity of the socio-historical context for rural family life is important.

One of the assumptions of this study is that spatial context is a dimension of structural inequality. Much of the literature reviewed in the section above contends that racial and social class locations shape family experience and family structure. I argue that, in similar fashion, a family's location in geographical space shapes its experience and structure. Rural areas never developed the differentiated industrial base that was characteristic of urban areas. The opportunity structure in rural areas has continued to be more limited than in urban areas. Social opportunities and constraints are distributed systematically and unequally to metropolitan and nonmetropolitan families. Spatial context, then, is an additional structural variable to consider when analyzing the effects of macro economic restructuring.

RURAL ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Poverty in rural America is both widespread and persistent. While the greater visibility of urban poverty leads many to assume that poverty is predominately an urban problem, a greater proportion of the nonmetro population has been and continues to be poor. In the 1950s about one-third of rural residents were poor while fifteen percent of the urban population were poor (Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). In the 1960s a presidential commission brought rural poverty to the attention of the nation. This commission reported,

Rural poverty is so widespread, and so acute, as to be a national disgrace. . . This Nation has been largely oblivious to . . . 14 million people left behind in rural America. Our programs for rural America are woefully out of date. (U.S. President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty 1967:ix, cited in Deavers and Hoppe 1992:3)

Out-migration and economic expansion nationwide were responsible for a decline in rural poverty in the 1960s (Tickamyer and Duncan 1990:70). In 1973, the U.S. poverty rate was 11.1%, with metro areas at 9.7% and nonmetro areas at 14% (Deavers and Hoppe 1992). In 1990, the poverty rate stood at 13.5% for the total U.S., with 12.7% for metro areas and 16.3% for nonmetro areas (Hoppe 1993). By 1996, the U.S. poverty rate had risen slightly to 13.7%, with 13.2% for metro areas and 15.9% for nonmetro areas (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1997).

Explanations for rural poverty have tended to focus on the failure of rural labor markets to provide sufficient employment (Deavers and Hoppe 1992). These explanations do not comport with data showing that the rural poor are likely to be employed (Hoppe 1993). The problem is not so much the lack of jobs, but the lack of jobs that pay wages above poverty level. Rural industrialization was the primary economic revitalization strategy of rural development authorities in the 1960s and

1970s. Tickamyer and Duncan (1990) note that the relocation of industry to rural areas has influenced poverty levels in those places only minimally. Relevant here is Brown's and Warner's (1991) distinction between growth and development. Economic growth suggests increased production and efficiency, while development infers, in addition to growth, the structural and institutional change which results in a more even distribution of jobs and income in a community. The industrialization of rural areas has typically resulted in growth, but not development (Brown and Warner 1991).

RURAL RESTRUCTURING AND FAMILY LIFE

A substantial body of scholarship analyzes the restructuring of the rural economy (see, for example, Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Poverty 1993, Tickamyer and Duncan 1990, Fitchen 1991, Lobao, 1996, Duncan 1996). This literature does not, however, systematically focus on the ways in which macro economic change is shaping and reshaping rural families. This failure to link economic transformation to its effects on families is symptomatic of a more generalized invisibility of families in rural sociology. Janet Bokemeier, in her 1996 Presidential Address to the Rural Sociological Society, is critical of studies of restructuring that focus on "workplace, workers, their changing work experiences and stratification," but ignore families and households (1996:5). She encourages rural sociologists to rediscover families and households because "families and households are the critical and strategic social organization through which individuals shape and adapt to social transformations" (1996:5). Continued inattention to the effects of social transformations on families diminishes the both the credibility and viability of rural sociology (Bokemeier 1996).

Given the gap in the rural literature connecting family change and a restructured rural economy, this section of the literature review briefly outlines the rural

restructuring phenomenon and then considers relevant scholarship that documents recent social dislocations experienced by rural families. As stated above, rural industrialization was the primary strategy to improve the economic well-being of rural communities during the 1960s and 1970s. While rural industry generally paid lower wages and offered a more restrictive opportunity structure than did metropolitan plants, nevertheless, substantial new industrial employment was provided (Sachs 1996). Much of this new employment was short lived, with the economic restructuring of the 1980s closing many factories and driving up unemployment and poverty rates in local communities (Tickamyer and Duncan 1990).

Although the transformation of the U.S. economy from a manufacturing base to a service base has resulted in growth in the service sector in rural places, higher wage “producer services” have located in urban areas while the growth in rural areas has occurred in the areas of “low wage consumer and personal services” (Tickamyer and Duncan 1990:78). In addition to low pay, service sector jobs in nonmetro areas are characteristically part-time and temporary (Sachs 1996). The dead-end, secondary sector jobs have characterized recent job growth in most rural communities are not expected to raise the economic status of the rural population (Lyson et al. 1993:118).

Economic restructuring has meant a restructuring of the rural population as well. Populations changes reflect a pattern of selective out-migration in which many individuals with the most human capital have left rural areas, while individuals with the least human capital have remained. Many rural areas have experienced the out-migration of their middle class populations (Duncan and Tickamyer 1988). Lichter and his colleagues (1993) refer to a rural “brain drain” as more educated individuals have moved to metro areas with a broader range of opportunities.

Remote and isolated pockets of poverty have always been part of the rural landscape. But now, with restructuring, the face of rural poverty has changed.

Tickamyer and Duncan find that restructuring created “substantial numbers of ‘new

poor' [who] joined the chronically poor in remote, depressed areas. These 'new poor' made it clear that rural poverty would persist as long as there were few job opportunities, and existing employment was unstable and poorly paid" (1990:78). Several scholars find reason to compare the restructured rural context to central cities and the deprivation that their populations have experienced. Duncan and Tickamyer speculate that "the isolation, alienation, and limited expectations experienced by those in an urban ghetto are very similar to the experiences of those growing up poor in rural areas" (1989:246). Davidson (1990) describes the "ghettoization" of the American Heartland. O'Hare and Curry-White believe that economic restructuring may be contributing to the growth of a rural underclass (1992:4).

William O'Hare, in his recent examination of poverty in the U.S., writes the following about the underclass, "The term is generally applied to the poor living in urban areas, although many people with underclass characteristics live in economically depressed rural areas as well" (1996:28). O'Hare and Curry-White include as the "underclass" individuals that exhibit each of the following three traits: high school dropout; receiving public assistance; and, if female, a never married mother, if male, long term unemployed (1992:1). Using this criterion of multiple disadvantages, 2.4% of the rural population had underclass characteristics, as compared to 3.4% of central-city and 1.1% of suburban populations (O'Hare and Curry-White 1992:12). They find that 55% of the rural underclass population is White, compared with 17% of the central city underclass (1992:1).

Rural families increasingly "get by" in the informal economy or by industrial homework. Christina Gringeri's (1994) study of industrial homework in Midwestern agricultural communities illustrates the declining quality of work in rural communities. Community development authorities sought to bring homework jobs into their communities despite their paying a piece work rate that came to approximately the minimum wage. Rural homework is clearly associated with the global restructuring of

the economy, as “part of an international pattern of fragmented, deskilled, and mobile jobs across many industrial sectors” (Gringeri 1994:17). Homeworking--done primarily by women--is especially appealing in rural areas where women's roles are more narrowly defined and more strictly enforced than in urban areas (Davidson 1990:143).

Janet Fitchen's (1991, 1992) research describes economic restructuring and documents how it has substantially reshaped rural life and rural communities in upstate New York. Fitchen's work brings together the macro and micro levels to show how large scale economic processes “touch and alter” the lives of rural people (1991:3). She finds that while in the 1970s marriages were sometimes violent and contentious, they generally endured. By the late 1980s, however, family relationships had become increasingly unstable. Fitchen found low income rural women whose relationships were temporary and whose families were characterized by “instability and flux and by risk of sudden dissolution” (1992:195). School records reveal changes in family structure. In one poor school district, by the end of the 1980s only 45% of the children lived in two parent homes. Fitchen's accounts reveal broad macro economic transformation and family structure change occurring concurrently.

The rural restructuring literature and the agrarian political economy literature overlap very little (Lobao and Schulman 1991). The restructuring literature centers almost exclusively on the nonfarm economy while the agrarian political economy literature is largely restricted to the structure of agriculture and farming practices (Lobao and Schulman 1991). My research does not focus on transformations in agricultural structure and practices, but it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the farm crisis of the 1980s as a significant shaper of the rural economic landscape. The farm crisis was precipitated by high interest rates, eroding foreign markets for farm products, and sharp declines in the price of farmland on the heels of steep increases (Bultena et al. 1986:437). The effects of the farm crisis were widespread. The *Wall Street Journal* reported in 1988, “The U.S. has been suffering more than a farm crisis

. . . . It is in the midst of a coast-to-coast, border-to-border collapse of much of its rural economy" [cited in Barlett (1993)]. The restructuring literature documents the decline of higher wage employment in the nonfarm structure since the 1970s.

Accompanying that decline has been the loss of good jobs in the farm sector as thousands of family farmers lost their farms and their means of livelihood in the 1980s. Several studies have considered the effects of the farm crisis on families (see, for example, Rosenblatt 1990, Johnson and Booth 1990, Barlett 1993). To generalize, these studies find the farm crisis generated financial instability and economic deprivation which were associated with increased marital strain, depression, and thoughts of divorce.

Bokemeier and Garkovich (1991) contend that family instability in rural areas is generated by chronic stressors characteristic of the current rural environment. These stressors, "financial instability, inadequate housing, and inadequate, inaccessible, and inappropriate social services," make long-term relationships difficult to sustain and contribute to higher divorce rates (1991:115). These scholars assert that "[w]hile all families experience stresses, on the average rural families more continuously face a greater variety of stresses, and with fewer coping resources or supporting services than urban families" (1991:114-115).

Recent research on rural Midwest families explores how economic distress affects family life. Conger and his colleagues (1990) examine the relationship of economic hardship to marital quality and instability in the rural Midwest. They believe the effects of economic hardship are largely mediated by the experience of economic strain. Economic strain is a subjective factor that reflects an individual's financial concerns or worries. Their analysis shows that economic strain increases hostile behavior and decreases warm and supportive interactions between partners. This, in turn, decreased marital quality and increased marital instability. This study provides an empirical link between economic hardship and thoughts or actions related to divorce.

Conger and Elder (1994) use data from the Iowa Youth and Families Project to study the processes by which economic hardship affected family relationships in rural Iowa during the farm crisis. They identify four dimensions of economic hardship: low family income, unstable work, debt-to-assets ratio, and income loss (1994:10). Families experience economic pressure as they live with the day-to-day strains of financial hardship. Such economic stress increases the risk of hostility between partners which leads to dissatisfaction with the marriage. Conger and Elder find particularly noteworthy their finding that both women and men responded to economic stress with feelings of depression and hopelessness. Their analysis shows dysphoric mood to be the principal path between economic strain and marital hostility. They suggest that feelings of dysphoria and hopelessness are more common responses to economic stress than are the hostility and irritability identified by earlier studies (Conger and Elder, 1994:261, Liker and Elder, 1983, Elder and Caspi, 1988).

RURAL SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social class in rural communities

A single rural class structure does not exist. Rural communities are relatively more and less stratified, depending on the particularities of historic economic and social structures. Some rural communities have been rigidly stratified by class and race for generations. In places like Appalachia and the Mississippi Delta there tend to be two social classes: "those who have control and those who are vulnerable to that control, the haves and the have-nots" (Duncan 1992:xx, 1994, 1996, Dill and Williams 1992). [See pages 39-41 in the definition section for a discussion of neo-Marxian and Weberian models of social class.]

The social class configuration of other rural places is more complex. Mooney's (1983) neo-Marxist class analysis of Midwestern agriculture finds three "pure" class

locations: capitalist, proletariat, and the "new petty bourgeoisie" (1983:577). He argues against a model that posits a linear progression from simple commodity production to a capitalist mode of production. While a capitalist mode of production has dominated agriculture since World War II, simple commodity production remains a secondary mode of production (1983:565). Mooney also contends that agricultural class structure runs counter to the Marxist assumption of an eventual bipolar class structure. Rather, he finds in the five social relations of agricultural production--tenancy, indebtedness, contract production, off-farm work, and hired labor--a multiplicity of contradictory class locations. So, for example, farmers with substantial indebtedness have the appearance of being their "own boss," but in fact, the control that financial institutions exert over such farmers places them in a contradictory class position between petty bourgeoisie and proletariat (1983:572).

Flora (1992) examines the class structure of Midwestern farming communities (using a Weberian income and occupation-based conception of social class). She contends that the rural ideology of "we're all just folks" obscures class differences (1992:202). Further, norms against conspicuous consumption mask wealth and income differentials. Rural elites have substantial income and investments and are quite unsympathetic with the needs of wage laborers. Flora notes, "There is still a strong low-wage, low-tax ideology in rural areas that assumes that anyone earning over \$2.50 an hour (especially if not doing heavy physical work) is overpaid" (1992:202). New employers, even large corporations with company-wide wage scales, are often pressured by existing employers to adopt low pay scales (Flora 1992:210).

The sentiments and actions above have contributed to the creation of economic contexts in which increasing numbers of working poor struggle to make ends meet, often holding multiple low-wage, part-time jobs. In many rural communities, the working poor constitute a peripheral segment of the population. Transient families, who work in the lowest paying jobs and then move on to other places, have always

been a part of rural communities. Flora contends, however, that these families now remain in communities longer due to limited opportunities in urban areas. While wages are low, many families are attracted to rural areas by low cost housing (Fitchen 1992, 1995, Flora 1992). These families remain isolated, tending not to be involved in broader community activities or institutions.

Naples' (1994) study helps explain the isolation of the poor or near poor in rural communities. She points out that implied in the romanticized idea of *gemeinschaft* is a social homogeneity that does not exist in many rural areas. The transformation of rural space that includes the in-migration of low income families, both White and racial-ethnic, exposes the myth of *gemeinschaft* as a central characteristic of rural life. In her study, low-income rural residents did not believe they could count on community assistance during a crisis (1994:118). The values of neighborliness and self-sufficiency were found to be incompatible in a community context of socioeconomic and racial diversity. The growing numbers of Mexican-origin families in one town and the resentment their presence engendered revealed the conditionality of supportive relations in rural communities (1994:127).

Fitchen's extensive research on declining rural communities in upstate New York leads her to conclude that rural families are increasingly impoverished (Fitchen, 1981, 1991, 1992, 1995). Fitchen writes,

The depressed villages spiraling downward, as well as the cycling of rural depressed neighborhoods into another generation of poverty and the growing trailer parks and clusters, are all part of the general worsening of rural poverty that local county officials, caseworkers, educators, and human-service workers refer to, deal with, and are frustrated about because the poverty problem seems to be getting worse despite their efforts to cope with it. (1992:188)

She attributes increased poverty to four related causes: inadequate employment, housing issues, family structure changes, and residential mobility (Fitchen 1992:188). The loss of manufacturing jobs and the dominance of low wage, unstable secondary sector work

leave families without a secure economic base. Much rural housing is substandard, but in many communities it is becoming increasingly expensive and beyond the reach of low wage earners. Marital and partner relationships are increasingly fragile and extended families seem to be a declining source of social support. The above factors combine to create a high rate of residential mobility for the rural poor. Some families move within the same community, around the county or to adjacent counties. Fitchen finds that residential mobility often reflects both a lack of financial resources and unstable personal relationships (1992:196).

Fitchen's analysis illustrates the complexity of the interrelationship between rural community decline, rental housing and rural poverty. Property owners in declining communities often turn empty storefronts and single-family dwellings into rental housing. The availability of rental housing draws displaced low income residents from nearby rural and urban-fringe communities. Such in-migration often increases the rate of family poverty in declining communities. Fitchen's research demonstrates that rural poverty increases both by the impoverishment of community residents and by the in-migration of poor individuals and families (1992, 1995).

Cynthia Duncan's (1996) comparative work illustrates why community social class context is significant. She makes the important connection between community social class context and economic opportunity for individuals and families. In her comparison of remote rural communities, she presents two models in which degree of social stratification is predictive of economic opportunity:

When there is a large middle class that invests in public, community-wide institutions, social relations and social institutions are more inclusive and cross class boundaries. The poor are not isolated from other classes. They have access to informal networks for work (Duncan 1996:114)

In such communities the poor participate in a broad network of social relations.

Local social and economic contexts characterized by inclusion, as was the New

England mill town she studied, provide at least some opportunity for upward mobility.

When, on the other hand, the middle class is small or inconsequential and the poor, lower class is large, the well-to-do separate themselves from the poor and expect deference from them. The poor do not have contacts to obtain legitimate work (Duncan 1996:115)

Duncan describes social relations in a Mississippi Delta and a Appalachian community as characterized by “patron-client” relations and “caste-like” stratification systems (1996:115). Such systems of social organization offer little hope for mobility and tend to perpetuate themselves over time.

Duncan contends that the structure of inequality varies from place to place. It is this structure of inequality that “determines social interaction and the allocation of opportunities in rural communities” (Duncan 1996:103). Family members living in communities with class relations resembling Duncan’s first model are more likely to accumulate high quality social capital. I use the term “social capital” as does Bourdieu to refer to the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1988:248). While the poor in both contexts above may have considerable social capital, it is individuals in the former case that have opportunity to accumulate social capital that will be convertible into economic capital in the form of adequate employment (Bourdieu 1988). This research illustrates broad diversity among rural communities, which, in fact, represents significant opportunity and mobility differentials.

Racial stratification

Snipp and his colleagues contend that "without exception racial and ethnic minorities bear the brunt of economic hardship in rural areas" (1993:175). In 1990, the poverty rate for nonmetro Blacks was 40.8%, and for nonmetro Hispanics was 32% (compared to metro rates of 30.1% for Blacks and 27.8% for Hispanics) [Hoppe 1993]. Jensen and Tienda's (1989) study of nonmetro Black, Mexican, and Native American families supports Snipp's contention. They studied family poverty rates from 1959 to 1986 and found that nonmetro minority rates were always higher than metro minority rates. They explain the vulnerable economic status of nonmetro minorities by conceptualizing the "labor force as a queue of workers ranked according to their desirability to employers" (1989:511). Because of human capital deficiencies and discrimination, minorities are at the end of the job line and are the last to be brought into service. The employment of people at the end of the queue is much more sensitive to macroeconomic conditions than for more advantaged workers. Thus rural minority workers are the last to experience the benefit of an economic upswing and the first to feel the effects of a downturn.

Nonmetro Blacks are concentrated in the South and so, by extension, is nonmetro Black poverty. Ninety-five percent of all nonmetro Blacks live in the South; ninety-seven percent of the nonmetro Black poor live in the South. Dill and Williams (1992), in their study of African American single mothers in the rural South, find that these women experience the triple disadvantage of poverty, racial discrimination, and gender discrimination. They conclude that patriarchy, capitalism, and racism are implicated as they are mediated through the church, Southern culture, economic development initiatives and the state. Lichter (1989) likewise finds that historic patterns of economic disadvantage have continued for nonmetro Southern Blacks. Employment opportunity has not changed substantially for this group since 1970. Black females are particularly disadvantaged.

Gender stratification

Tickamyer and her colleagues (1993) contend that most rural scholarship has not incorporated gender as an analytic category. Little research has considered how inequalities of gender distribute opportunities and constraints in rural places. Women have typically been invisible as scholarship focuses on men as economic actors (Tickamyer et al. 1993). We find in nonmetro areas the same results as for metro areas, that is, that women in all age groups are more likely than men to be poor. In 1990, the poverty rate for nonmetro adults under the age of 65 was 15.6% for women and 11.1% for men (compared to 12.1% for metro women and 7.8% for metro men) [Tickamyer et al. 1993].

Rural women's economic disadvantage is linked to a particular historical context. Women's economic concerns have been largely ignored in rural social policy. Historically economic issues in nonmetro areas have been addressed through rural development policy (Buttel et al. 1993). Rural development policies and programs have advanced male-dominated economic activities, especially through the promotion of large-scale commercial farming. Little attention has been given to how such actions affect rural families and women (Tickamyer et al. 1993:217). Such neglect both reflects and reinforces longstanding stereotypes about women's and men's appropriate roles.

Sachs observes that the global economy has incorporated rural workers on less favorable terms than urban workers; and further, she contends that rural women are the most disadvantaged group overall (1996:141). Rural women receive lower wages than urban women for several reasons. While in general, rural women have lower educational attainments and limited work skills, this does not comprise the principal explanation for lower earnings than in urban areas. McLaughlin and Perman's (1991) study finds that the primary reason for rural women's lower wages is not human capital differences, but lower returns to human capital. Rural wages are substantially lower

than urban wages. In addition, rural women are limited by inferior labor markets that offer low quality employment (Lichter and McLaughlin 1995). Bokemeier and Tickamyer (1985) find most rural women employed in low-wage, unstable, secondary sector work.

Given rural women's low-earning potential, marital status is highly significant in shaping the life chances of women and their children. The 1990 poverty rate for nonmetro female-headed family households is 43.2% while the rate for nonmetro married-couple family households is 9.9% (Hoppe 1993). McLaughlin and her co-authors observe that rural women's low incomes increase their dependence on men (1993:829). Rural women marry at younger ages than urban women (Heaton et al. 1989, McLaughlin et al. 1993). The implications of this pattern are reduced career and other life options for women and increased likelihood of divorce (Heaton et al. 1989:13). Alternatively, this pattern may reflect a context of few employment or other life-style options for rural women (Heaton et al. 1989:13).

McLaughlin et al. (1993) study first marriages of rural and urban women. They find a higher rate of available men to women in rural areas than urban, but they find that the "quality" of the pool of men is higher in urban areas. Nonmetro women broaden the definition of marriageable men to include men who are less than acceptable to urban women. The authors conclude,

The availability of suitable mates may be more important in women's marriage decisions when economic opportunities for women decrease the economic benefits of marriage (e.g., in metro areas). However in an area where women's economic options are more limited (nonmetro areas), marriage may be more attractive so the availability of suitable men may be less important in affecting the marriage decision. (McLaughlin et al. 1993:836)

These studies indicate that women's restricted economic opportunity in rural areas shapes expectations and decisions regarding first marriage. Research does not specifically consider the relationship between economic constraints and remarriage.

LINKING ECONOMIC LIFE AND FAMILY RELATIONS

This chapter has thus far focused on the areas of macro structural context and family life, and then, contemporary family life in rural places. Next I describe the theoretical base used to link economic life and family relations. I use the concept of household strategies to mediate between the macro level of social structure and the micro level of household practices and responses. Second, I review key pieces from the economic distress literature that I use to frame analytic categories for my analysis.

Household strategy

I use the term household strategy to refer to the decisions family and household members make and the actions they take to sustain themselves economically. These decisions and actions are referred to variously in the literature as economic strategies, household strategies, family strategies, and survival strategies. Such strategies occur with respect to both production and consumption. I use the concept of household strategies to explore what it is that household members do to patch together their economic subsistence or to promote economic well-being. The concept is valuable for this research because it "links individuals as social actors with broader structures and institutions" (Wolf 1992:13). I use the concept "strategies" as do Clay and Schwarzweller, who explain as follows:

[M]ost patterned behavior of households is not preceded by formalized decision-making. Consequently, "household strategies," we believe, is best regarded in its broader sense--as a general rubric or umbrella concept that refers to both deliberate action relative to goals as well as to normatively guided "unplanned" responses by the household group and its members (Clay and Schwarzweller 1991:6)

The central point to be made is that household members respond to conditions in their immediate environments as they maintain family life.

Diane Wolf (1992) explains that "[t]he concept of 'household strategies' appeal[s] to a considerable number of researchers using diverse theoretical approaches in great part because it mediates between micro and macro levels of analysis" (1992:13). Researchers who analyze household strategies avoid some of the pitfalls of other analyses. Louise Tilly contends that an analysis of household strategies avoids both the tendency toward structural determinism in studies of macro-level social processes as well the possibility of tautological thinking in analyses of "mentality and attitude" (Tilly 1978:3).

Household strategies provide a link between the macro level of social change and the micro level of household adjustment to change. Household strategies are contingent on the structure of economic, political and social resources in the immediate environment. Literature that focuses on diverse subjects supports this contention. Edin and Lein find that the survival strategies of urban low-income women differ by the social-structural characteristics of the cities in which they reside (1996:253). Tilly and Scott's (1978) study documents how industrialization in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Europe affected family relations of economic production and social reproduction. They find women's work and family strategies to be responsive to economic opportunities and demographic pressures (1978:6). Importantly, these scholars find household strategies to be context-specific. Factors such as uneven economic development, the quality of men's work and the availability of children's employment shaped differently dominant family strategies in particular communities with respect to marriage, fertility, education, and labor force participation (Tilly 1979:139). How a household is situated in the broad socioeconomic context affects the strategies household members can and do adopt (Davidson 1991:12). Davidson describes the particularity of the adoption of household strategies as follows: "the household, in effect, filters the opportunities and constraints presented by the wider society, but always in conjunction with the needs, aspirations, and power of its

respective members" (1991:12).

Household strategies are shaped by social class placement. For example, two strategies identified by Tamara Haraven (1987)--residing nearby to one's kin and saving for the college education of one's children--are not equally feasible for all families. Several scholars, including Stack (1974, 1996), Dill and Williams (1992), Schein (1994), Edin and Lein (1996) and Jarrett (1992, 1994) document survival strategies of the poor. Common findings among these studies are first, that the range of strategies available to the poor or near-poor is limited; and second, that poor households depend on social networks to survive economically. For example, Stack's (1974) classic study describes how poor, urban Blacks in "the Flats" used networks of kin and non-kin for the exchange and distribution of resources, possessions, and services. Dill and Williams find that the survival strategies of poor African American single mothers in the rural South include depending on extended family networks where resources from work and welfare are pooled and redistributed (1992:108). Edin and Lein's (1996) research documents that urban poor and low-income single mothers used work-based and network-based strategies to supplement welfare or low-wages in order to make ends meet.

Saraceno contends that demographic variables combine with contextual variables to "establish the framework of possible resources for family and individual well-being and strategies for achieving it" (1989:11-12). She names household composition, life cycle phase, and absence or presence of extended kin network as demographic factors that combine with contextual factors such as income, market resources, and public resources to shape the range and attractiveness of available options (1989:11). Saraceno refers to "obligatory choice," that is, choices made in the absence of viable alternatives (1989:16).

Much of the discussion of household strategies focuses on the work-family nexus. Work-related strategies are comprised of "the work involved in patching

together, coordinating, supplementing and adjusting available resources" (Saraceno 1989:9). In addition, Saraceno also directs her readers to the work involved in the cultural and symbolic production of family. For example, households in which women are housewives reflect a specific household strategy that is related to producing a particular cultural representation of family. Thus, in some families, "[i]n order to maximize the well-being of the family, one person dedicates herself full time during the entire adult life span to serving the family," while another family member produces income (Saraceno 1989:9). This author notes that the ability to choose this household strategy is dependent on the level of available household resources.

Hochschild's (1989) discussion of gender strategies, as they relate to how women and men divide work and family responsibilities, illustrates that strategies to maintain households are shaped by gender stratification. She documents how men's and women's unequal power and status in broader society influenced what men and women were willing to do to sustain marriages and maintain households. Hochschild does not use the term "household strategies," but her research clearly shows that decisions and actions undertaken by individual household members occur in the context of a society-wide system of gender inequality.

I use the concept of household strategies carefully because it is somewhat problematic both conceptually and methodologically (Moen and Wethington 1992). Some scholars object to the term "strategy." Wolf contends that the term implies long-term planning and conscious decision making despite the fact that behavior of household members may often be passive and nonstrategic (1992:17). Wolf describes one household's practices as the following, "we find not strategies, but motley and assorted decisions and behaviors to which others respond by resisting, desisting, withdrawing, or accommodating--or some combination thereof" (1992:5).

Garrett and Lennox contend that analyses of survival strategies "generally reflect the theoretical predilections of researchers" (1993:239). The main issue is how a

researcher would know a strategy if she or he found one. In most cases, householders do not label their own actions as strategies, but rather, they are labeled as such by researchers. Further, implied in "strategy" is a wider range of options than many families find in their day to day experience. Garrett and Lennox suggest that researchers avoid the pitfalls of such analyses "only if researchers identify structural factors that limit choice and favor certain patterns" (1993:239). Saraceno warns similarly about the use of the term "household strategy." Her concern is that a focus on micro-level strategies may obscure institutional and social factors. So, for example, persistent poverty may be blamed on the ineffectiveness of individual strategies (Saraceno 1989:12).

A second important critique of this concept centers on the implicit assumption that the household is a unitary whole whose members' "best interest" is equally served or equally disserved by various strategies. This assumption connects to popular myths about family life that do not hold up to scholarly scrutiny. Instead, family members frequently have varying and competing interests (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:17). As a result of structured inequalities of gender and generation, decisions are not made democratically or unanimously within families nor do decisions benefit all family members equally (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Wolf 1992). As Redclift and Whatmore state, "the household is rarely an equitable, harmonious and utility-maximizing unit" (1990:190).

The critiques above shape how I have conceptualized household strategies for this research. Clearly this review demonstrates variation in how researchers use the concept of household strategies. Several of the objections raised above are diffused by adopting the Clay and Schwarzweller conceptualization of household strategies that includes both "deliberate" and "unplanned" actions (1991:6). In my use of the concept, I assume the following: first, the level of consciousness among social actors varies; second, household strategies reflect social inequalities of gender and generation; and

third, household strategies do not necessarily meet the needs of all household members. I use the concept in this research because it enables me to link individual action with broader social structures and institutions (Wolf 1992:13).

Economic distress

Economic distress is clearly associated with lower levels of marital and family satisfaction (Voydanoff and Donnelly 1988). A substantial body of scholarship considers how financial hardship affects family relationships. Research documents that financial hardship has important consequences for family relationships, including increased marital conflict, diminished marital cohesion, less supportive family relationships, less effective parenting, and more family violence (see, for example, Liem and Liem, 1988, Perrucci and Targ 1988, Broman et al.1990, Ross and Huber 1985, Voydanoff 1990, Conger et al. 1994).

Voydanoff and Donnelly find economic distress to be associated with the use of the following coping behaviors: financial management efforts, informal economy involvement, do-it-yourself substitutions for market goods and services, increased family work effort, and financial overextension using credit or spending savings (1988:103). They find, however, that these behaviors do not, however, generally moderate the negative effects of economic distress on family and marital satisfaction. Family pride and accord are two coping resources associated with higher marital satisfaction (1988:107). These partially moderate the negative effects of economic distress on family relations.

Moen and her colleagues (1983) describe three family responses to economic hardship. Families respond to economic pressure by restructuring the family economy, altering family relationships and by increasing individual tensions and strains (1983:225). The family economy may be restructured in such ways as using alternative sources of income, reducing expenditures, and adding earners. Family relationship

changes range from changes in the distribution of decision making power to permanent disruption through divorce. Economic change affects both family relations and individual adjustment. Unemployed men are particularly vulnerable to adverse individual outcomes.

Much of this literature focuses on adaptations to fluctuations in families' economic status rather than chronic poverty. This emphasis reflects research finding that the disruptions caused by income loss may create greater family stress than the actual level of living itself (Elder and Caspi, 1988). Analysis of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data reveals that most cases of income instability can be characterized as "spells" of poverty rather than chronic poverty (Gottschalk, McLanahan, and Sandefur 1994). Workers at greatest risk for economic setbacks are secondary sector workers and workers with low seniority (Amott, 1993, Moen et al., 1983).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The problem statement in chapter one and the literature review above bring me to explore the following specific questions in this research.

1. First, how are the family households in this rural sample configured? Do we find that current household arrangements are longstanding or do we observe considerable fluidity in household structure?

I discussed two contrasting family arrangements in the theory and literature review above, modern nuclear families and postmodern families. Modern families are characterized by stability, by which I mean continuity and permanence; postmodern families are characterized by instability and fluidity, by which I mean discontinuity, unpredictability and change. These contrasting arrangements represent ideal types. I conceptualize family arrangements as a continuous rather than dichotomous variable;

family arrangements encompass a range of possibilities along the continuum between modern families and postmodern families. As I analyze the family lives of this rural sample for evidence of stability and fluidity, I do not assume that continuity is necessarily positive and that change is necessarily negative. But central to the idea of the postmodern family is the understanding that change in family arrangements is often an adaptation or adjustment to difficult individual or family circumstances.

2. *Second, what are the relationships between social class, household structure, and family life? I examine how households strategies are differentiated by social class.*

The research cited above demonstrates the significance of the material base on which family life is constructed. The most economically vulnerable households are found to be those least able to establish and maintain normative family patterns and conventional household arrangements. I examine how family continuity is distributed by social class among these rural families.

The literature above demonstrates that the strategies families use to sustain themselves economically are also differentiated by social class. I explore how sample families sustain themselves in this restructured economy. Families in different social classes will experience the constraints and opportunities of the local economic context differently. Beech observes that rural families faced with low-paying, part-time, often seasonal employment opportunities “patch together an array of diverse work options” (1988:35). Alternatively, the rural economy does support a middle class. I systematically examine the difference social class makes as sample families adapt to the economic necessities of this community. In addition, I explore the contextual factors that influence the adaptive choices families make as they sustain themselves economically.

3. *Third, how does this sample of rural women explain their own family lives? Specifically, how do these women account for their families' economic circumstances? And, how do they account for continuity and change in their family lives?*

This part of my research centers on women's perspectives on their family arrangements and their economic circumstances. The focus shifts from the families whose histories they recount and patterns they describe, to the women research participants themselves. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to actively involve their respondents in constructing data about their own lives (Reinharz 1992:18). The goal in this part of my research is to give voice to the women who have spoken about their individual and family lives. Sachs contends that in the U.S., "agrarian ideologies romanticize and celebrate rural life and families, often covering or veiling women's situations in these communities and families (1996:7). I consider what it means to be a rural woman in a particular spatial location.

I explore whether rural women experience some contradiction between their own circumstances and two prevailing ideals: economic self-sufficiency and the permanent nuclear family. The scholarly work on welfare and rural populations suggests that rural people will blame themselves for their economic difficulties. Welfare users in urban areas have been found to view poverty as related to larger structural forces, while rural welfare users saw poverty as related to personal deficiencies (Rank and Hirschl 1988). Studies of the rural poor have found this population to be less likely than the urban poor to use the programs for which they are eligible and are more likely to discontinue using it while remaining eligible (Rank and Hirschl 1988, 1994); the rural poor often hide their use of welfare from disapproving family and friends (Naples 1994).

With respect to family structure, I am interested in exploring how women account for their family circumstances. How do women explain their own experiences, whether they be deviations from the stable nuclear family ideal or family relationships

that typify that ideal? Existing rural literature gives little indication of the perspectives of rural women. Many scholars, in their consideration of changing rural family structure have not connected it to macro level forces, but rather to changing family values and micro level factors. Lichter and Eggebeen find a willful retreat from marriage, pointing to “normative changes in family formation and structure” (1992:169). Fitchen’s (1991) work contains a similar theme of declining family norms. She finds that while in the 1970s marriages that were contentious and sometimes violent generally endured, by the late 1980s longstanding difficult marriages were more likely to end in divorce. She attributes higher rates of marital disruption to changed attitudes regarding the permanence of marriage. Schein’s (1995) study of urban and rural single mothers focuses on micro-level factors and finds that family disruption is primarily caused by men’s “betrayal” of women. On the other hand, numerous studies by Conger, Elder, and their colleagues (1994) connect marital and family dissatisfaction back to large scale economic shifts.

DEFINITIONS

Rural-Nonmetropolitan

While the terms rural and nonmetropolitan (or nonmetro) are used interchangeably in this study, it is nonmetropolitan areas, as defined by the U.S. Census, that are the focus of this study. Nonmetropolitan areas are those areas outside Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) or Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Areas (CSMAs), and are designated on a county by county basis. Nonmetropolitan areas are of primary interest because they are typically isolated from economic and educational opportunities available in more populous locations. Rural places [population less than 2,500 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996a:4)] may exist within MSAs, sometimes as exurbs of central cities from which residents commute to jobs in the urban center.

Residents of such places would not be likely to experience the same opportunity constants that nonmetropolitan residents encounter.

Social location

Social location refers to one's position in society based on race, class, and gender hierarchies, as well as other relevant social characteristics (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999). The discussion of this concept is based on ideas developed by Baca Zinn (1990). The concept of social location takes into account multiple stratification systems in society that distribute opportunity and privilege unequally. A social constructionist perspective finds families to be created in the context of a particular social location. A family's social location will affect the way it is influenced by material, political, and economic circumstances. Differing social locations produce families configured in different ways. So, for example, because middle class African American families have a different social location than do poor African American families, we expect to find significant differences between these families.

The concept of social location can be extended beyond race, class, and gender hierarchies to include other relevant characteristics. For example, religion (Protestant or Catholic) could be included as an aspect of social location in Northern Ireland. The concept of social location can also be extended to include a spatial dimension. Social opportunities are distributed systematically and unequally by race, class, and gender, and by spatial context as well. Rural residence, like urban residence, creates distinctive patterns of opportunities and constraints for families. Spatial context can be seen as one of the factors that affects how families will be influenced by various social circumstances.

Social class

The dominant models for understanding social class in the U.S. are the neo-Marxian relational model and the Weberian distributional model (Lucal 1994). The neo-Marxian model is relational in that it is based on relationships among people. It attributes class on the basis of money, power, and role in the capitalist economy, and usually distinguished five classes: the ruling class, the professional-managerial class [or middle class], small business owners, the working class, and the poor (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1998:253). The Weberian model is distributional in that it is a gradational scheme based on the relative possession of a set of attributes (Lucal 1994:141). What Lucal calls the “Americanized Weberian model” is based on income, wealth, occupational prestige, and educational attainment (1994:141).

This analysis uses a neo-Marxian model of social class to divide sample families into social class categories (Vanneman and Cannon 1987, Wright et al. 1982, Higginbotham and Weber 1992). This model captures well how social class creates distinctive contexts for family life. The way in which this model conceptualizes the differences between the middle class and the working class is theoretically important for this research. Higginbotham and Weber explain that “[t]he middle class, or professional-managerial class, is set off from the working class by the power and control it exerts over workers in three realms: economic (power through ownership), political (power through direct supervisory authority), and ideological (power to plan and organize work)” (1992:421). Key to understanding the ideological realm is the division between the manual labor of the working class and the mental labor of professionals and managers (Vanneman and Cannon 1989:57). Social class divisions are made on the basis of the nature of one’s work, with middle class work characterized by “giving orders” and working class employment characterized by “taking orders” (Collins 1988). It follows from this way of framing class divisions that the middle class has greater control not only over their work lives, but also over the economic aspects of

their family lives. An important theoretical insight relevant to this research is that it is this greater control over the economic aspects of one's life that allows the middle class to construct family lives characterized by greater continuity than the working class or the poor.

The neo-Weberian model of social class distinguishes between the middle class and the working class on the basis of blue-collar or white-collar employment. With this model, white-collar workers such as salespeople and clerical workers are included in the lower-middle class (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1998:252). I believe that the context for family life among these categories of the white-collar work force is much more similar to that of blue-collar workers than to other white-collar workers who have more responsibility on the job, higher pay, and greater economic security. My contention is that if the goal is to understand class-based differences in family life, that the neo-Marxian framework does better in creating analytic categories of families with similar resources and supports.

The neo-Marxian conception of social class illumines well the relative economic vulnerability of individual earners and the families they support in the restructured economy. The globalization of the economy and the high mobility of capital has left the rural working class relatively powerless, as evidenced by abandoned factories and the presence of manufacturing jobs that pay \$5.00 an hour. This study considers middle class families (following Higginbotham and Weber's example) to be those in which one earner--either male or female--is employed as an administrator, professional or manager. Families of lower than middle class are divided into the working class and the poor. Middle class employment includes -- in addition to higher pay -- benefits that enhance families' economic security. These families have primary sector employment characterized by job security, pensions, health insurance, and sick pay. Working class and working poor employment -- in addition to offering lower pay -- frequently lacks these supports. Families who are subject to layoffs, lose wages due to illness, and have

limited or no health insurance clearly construct family life on a more tenuous base than do middle class families.

Economic status

By economic status, I refer to a family's economic position in society, using the criterion of income. Economic status is related to social class, but is something different. A family improves its economic status, that is raises its income, when the primary earner moves from a factory job paying \$8.00 an hour to a similar job paying \$12.50 an hour. The family's class position remains unchanged, however, because the nature of the work remains the same. Likewise, a family enhances its economic status when additional family members join the labor force. But adding earners is not likely to change a family's social class, because new earners are not likely to have better employment credentials than the worker already employed.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Given the paucity of research on family life in a restructured rural economy, my objective is to provide an exploratory analysis of that subject. I have chosen the case study method as compatible with my research questions. First, this method allows me to take into account the particularities of local context, what Naples, in her discussion of the method, calls the "locally expressed manifestations of social and economic change" (1994:111). Second, this approach allows me to explore the perceptions and the lived experience of individuals whose lives have been affected by recent social and economic transformations (Naples 1994). Third, case studies illumine the diversity and complexity of family life. Chodorow claims the following for case studies:

[C]ases enable us to see multiple levels of information, give us some access to the richness and depth that form any family structure and process and any individual life history . . . Cases destabilize, and I would say, thereby enrich, any conclusions we wish to draw about the family now or in the future, and they point us, in their labyrinthine complexity, to new ways of seeing and understanding families. (1993:462)

My conceptualization of "case study" follows the conventional understanding that a case study is an analysis of "social phenomena specific to time and place" (Ragin 1992:2); or similarly, an examination of "a single social phenomenon or unit of analysis--for example, a particular community, organization, or small informal group" (Singleton et al. 1993:317). Social scientists have tended to dichotomize social research into quantitative variable analysis research and qualitative case study research. Methodologists find this division to be problematic as researchers increasingly adopt triangulated methods (Ragin 1992).

This research uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. Triangulation is a highly regarded research strategy in which qualitative and quantitative data inform and

complement each other (Cook and Fonow 1990). The reciprocity between qualitative and quantitative data produce a more comprehensive understanding of specific social phenomena than can be arrived at by single method research. More importantly, triangulated methods are believed to increase the validity of the data produced.

Reinharz (1992) contends as follows:

The multimethod approach increases the likelihood that these researchers will understand what they are studying, and that they will be able to persuade others of the veracity of their findings. Multiple methods work to enhance understanding both by adding layers of information and by using one type of data to validate or refine another. (p. 201)

Rural research has traditionally relied on survey methodology. Bokemeier and Yount point out that rural sociology's reliance on quantitative methodology to answer any and all research questions has "inhibit[ed] the ability of sociologists to comprehend social complexity and change" (1993:187). They advocate a triangulated research design in which qualitative methods are used to assess perspectives, values and assumptions of rural community members. Such a strategy reduces the possibility that researchers will impose external categories and frameworks on rural issues that are best understood from the perspective of local social actors.

This research uses qualitative data in the form of interviews and quantitative data in the form of questionnaires and government documents. The interplay between these data sources is important. Interviews provide women's retrospective accounts of family, household, and personal events over the course of the lifetime of a second or third grade child. These accounts contain important understandings of and perspectives on family life and rural residence, but interviewees are frequently nonspecific about the timing of events. Questionnaire data especially valuable to me are the specific demographic, economic, and life course data necessary for documenting family continuity and change. Information such as dates of family moves and children's dates of birth enable me to fill in the gaps in women's interview accounts of their family

transitions.

Qualitative interviews are the major research tool of this study, nevertheless, quantitative data are vital to addressing the central issues of this research. The approach taken in this case study follows from Burawoy's (1991 a, b) discussion of the extended case study method. Burawoy, in discussing how the extended case study differs from grounded theory, makes several points relevant to this research. Grounded theory focuses on the general as it seeks to discover generalizable theory from the ground up (1991a:8). Burawoy critiques this method, contending that grounded theory "represses the specificity of each situation" (1991b:275). The extended case study method, on the other hand, focuses on the particularities of each situation. This method "constitutes the social situation in terms of the *particular* external forces that shape it" (1991b:274). The assumptions behind the extended case study approach are compatible with how I frame this exploratory study, first because I seek to extend the study of family life in a restructured economy beyond its current urban focus; second because this method tries, as I do, to "understand how micro situations are shaped by wider structures" (Burawoy 1991b:282). Employing the Burawoy approach, then, requires triangulated methods. This research depends on quantitative data, generally in the form of government documents, that specify the particularities of the research context.

Reliance on qualitative data is appropriate to this exploration of family structure and household arrangements in a rural context. Qualitative methodology is appropriate both for investigating dynamic social situations and for analyzing situations in which the research participants' interpretations of events and activities are focal to the study (Bokemeier and Yount 1993). An exploratory qualitative analysis of rural family and household structure is particularly relevant given recent critiques of existing conceptualizations of family households. Tickamyer (1996a) in her discussions of the challenges presently confronting rural sociology contends that reliance on the U.S. Census for data regarding household and family structure is problematic. Categorizing

family households as married-couple, female-headed, or male-headed oversimplifies the range of typical household arrangements in contemporary U.S. society. Census data provide a static snapshot of family life in an era when alteration and change may more accurately describe the experience of many families. Fitchen finds that many rural women have temporary relationships with boyfriends "whose major instrumental and emotional participation in the lives of women and children, as lovers and as fathers, is virtually ignored in most definitions and enumerations" (1992:195). Fitchen's (1991, 1992) observations point to the shortcomings of our current categories. She contends that the terms "female-headed household" and "single mother" homogenize the vastly different life experiences of, for example, a sixteen year old new mother and a much older divorced mother (Fitchen 1991:143). Further, the term "two-parent family" misleads by suggesting a stability that does not necessarily exist (Fitchen 1991:143).

Harris and her colleagues (1995) believe that the research subject of social change in rural places is compatible with what they call the "alternative" theories and methodologies of postmodernism, feminism, and narrative analysis. My research is indebted to insights from each of these. In this discussion that follows I do not mean to homogenize within-group differences among postmodernists, feminists or narrative analysts. Rather I focus on what I believe are the essential insights of these perspectives that can most readily be appropriated by a variety of social researchers. Harris et al. write that "less skeptical" postmodernists explore the personal experiences, conflicts and contradictions, and subjective judgments (and more) of those whose life-worlds they wish to understand (1995:589). Narrative theory and methodology is based on the premise that narrative analysis is valuable because stories construct, explain, and maintain social organization (1995:590). Much of feminist methodology proceeds from the goal of understanding women's daily lives. Feminists most often use semi-structured or unstructured interviews in which interviewer and interviewee interact freely, thus allowing for clarification and expansion that other methods do not generally

allow (1995:596).³ Harris and her colleagues conclude, first, that postmodernism reveals the limitations of conventional frameworks for understanding complex social processes; and second, that narrative and feminist frameworks when used by alone or combined with more conventional approaches, provide the means for an enriched understanding of those processes. My research questions, method, and analytic strategies reflect insights from these perspectives.

The case study has been a relatively unexamined method, but recently several scholars have begun to grapple with methodological issues surrounding case study research (Ragin and Becker 1992). An important question concerns generalizing from case studies. Implied in many case studies is the generalizability of results. Walton writes that while “[a]t bottom, the logic of the case study is to demonstrate a causal argument about how general social forces take shape and produce results in specific settings,” yet only rarely do researchers claim that their research pertains to only a particular setting or circumstance (1992:122). Walton recommends that case studies make “modest claims,” and that researchers only “gingerly” extend the argument of their research from the particular to the broader universe (1992:122). I carefully specify that my research explores a particular setting and do not mean to imply that findings are generalizable to “all families” or “all rural families.”

This research is a case study of thirty families with young children in a rural Michigan community. This study uses the Family Interview data set from the Strategies for Rural Children and Families Research Project. These data are comprised of a set of thirty semi-structured interviews and self-administered pre-interview surveys; they were gathered between October, 1995 and January, 1996.

³Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that feminist methodologies vary and include feminist empiricism (Harding 1991).

THE BROAD RURAL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PROJECT CONTEXT

The Family Interview data set is part of a larger body of data generated by this four year interdisciplinary project. The Strategies for Rural Children and Families Project, which began in 1993, has a multi-methodological design that involves three phases of study. Phase One involved an assessment of the macro environment (community) using secondary data analysis, interviews, and focus groups. Phase Two involved an assessment of the micro environment (families) using in-depth, in-home family interviews and a county-wide telephone survey. Phase Three drew together data from the previous phases to identify barriers to community, institutional, and family strategies to moderate the impact of poverty on children. This research project was funded through the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station. Co-Principal Investigators were Janet Bokemeier and David Imig. I worked as a research assistant for this project from its beginning in 1993 through 1996. To give some examples of my participation this research team, over the course of this research I administered student assessments, analyzed assessment data using SPSS, and presented results to school officials; I recruited focus group participants, led focus groups, coded and analyzed results using Ethnograph; I presented project progress reports to a community human services committee.

The research site of this project is a rural Michigan county that has experienced economic decline and has a substantial poverty population. This county was chosen as the research site, in part, because community leaders had identified children, youth and family concerns as a priority issue. Community leaders encouraged the cooperation of county social service agencies and school districts.

Community leaders' concern centered around the issue of school readiness. School officials were alarmed that increasing numbers of county children were arriving at school ill-prepared to begin kindergarten. Children who were seen to be "not ready"

for school were believed to be primarily poor children. As part of our collaboration with community leaders in Phase One, project researchers and research assistants administered reading assessments to measure emerging literacy in first graders in several county schools. These reading assessments were administered in the school district located in the county seat and also in a small, more rural district. The families of the first graders in the small rural district became the population from which the sample was drawn for the Family Interviews. Project researchers assessed the emerging literacy of 129 of 131 first graders in the small rural district in May, 1994. These children were in second and third grade at the time of the family interviews.

THE SPECIFIC FAMILY INTERVIEW DATA SET CONTEXT

The interview protocol and survey reflect the collaboration of the entire research team [See Appendix A for survey questions relevant to this research and Appendix B for a copy of the interview schedule.]. All team members contributed to producing research instruments that would generate data relevant to the diverse research interests represented in this group. At this point in time, the project had three research assistants. Each of us was responsible for ten interviews. In some cases we accompanied each other on interviews; in other cases, one of the principal investigators served as a co-interviewer. Research Assistant Cynthia Struthers and I had primary responsibility for the day to day administration of this phase of the research project. Interviews were transcribed by the Michigan State University transcription service; research assistants cleaned and coded data and created Ethnograph files.

The Family Interview sample

The thirty families interviewed in this study were selected through systematic stratified sampling procedures. The sample was stratified along two dimensions

relevant to project goals--child's reading accuracy in May, 1994, and family's use of Department of Social Service (now Family Independence Agency) programs, based on Fall, 1995, records. I describe our sampling procedures including the dimension of children's reading accuracy despite the fact that emerging literacy and academic achievement are not related to the central concerns of this study. Nevertheless, it is important to the integrity of this study that it be clear that a particular group of students was excluded from the sampling frame. Based on information furnished by the county DSS office, families were divided into current DSS use, former DSS use, and no record of DSS use. Students were divided into four groups of readers: high accuracy, medium-high accuracy, medium-low accuracy, and low accuracy. The medium-high group was dropped from the sampling frame. The medium-low and low accuracy readers were combined into one group.

Students were placed into one of six cells based on the three DSS assistance categories and either high or low reading accuracy. Students who had enrolled in the school system subsequent to our literacy testing and were in the third grade were used to replace students who had left the school system since the literacy assessment. New students were substituted on the basis of DSS use only as reading scores were not available. The low reading accuracy cells were twice as large as the high reading accuracy cells. We hoped to interview twice as many families with a low accuracy reader. We hoped to interview more low income than middle or higher income families. We used current DSS use as a proxy for low income. We assumed the group of previous users would have lower income than those with no record of DSS use; we also assumed that a segment of the previous use population would be families susceptible to spells of poverty. Names were systematically selected from each of the six cells. The achieved sample was made up of children in the following groups: eighteen low reading accuracy, ten high reading accuracy, and two new students with no reading accuracy record. According to our information from DSS, our achieved

sample was made up of six families on DSS, twelve families formerly on DSS, and twelve families with no record of DSS use.

The project goal had been to interview more DSS families than we actually did, but we encountered an obstacle to communicating with this group. The principal difficulty was the lack of telephones in this population. Our “no phone” protocol required contacting parents by mail and asking the parent to telephone us collect or to return mail a card in a self-addressed stamped envelope expressing interest in being interviewed or indicating no interest. We had little success in communicating with this segment of our sampling frame.

METHOD/DATA COLLECTION

Both field and survey methods were used in gathering these data. Parents willing to participate in this research agreed to both an interview and to completing a survey. While all school bulletin announcements, mailings, and telephone contacts expressed the desire to interview a parent, our Family Interview sample was made up of 28 mothers, one father, and one couple.

Semi-structured interviews were incorporated into the Family Strategies project as a primary means of assessing the micro-environment of poor and nonpoor children. Such interviews allowed researchers the opportunity to interact with parents in the context of individual homes. Interviews provided parent accounts of family change, family experience with community institutions, children's experience, economic strategies and personal assessments [See Appendix B for the interview schedule.]. Interviewees were given a good deal of latitude to speak to their individual concerns as parents, women (or men), partners (or ex-partners), and extended-family members. Therefore, while specific questions were asked, these questions did not place rigid limits on the data. Interviews varied substantially in length, reflecting the role of

interviewees in shaping the interview.

Interviewees were mailed the survey titled “A Survey of Children's Lives in Rural Michigan,” which the interviewer collected at the time of the survey [See Appendix A for survey questions used in this research]. Surveys provided specific information regarding household membership, marital status, income, community satisfaction, and parent and child interactions. Questions were both closed- and open-ended. While both the interview and survey data subsets are valuable and useful as independent sources of data, together they form an extraordinarily rich data set.

ANALYTIC STRATEGIES

This research differs from most qualitative studies in that the instruments were not designed exclusively by the researcher to specifically address a set of research questions. The interview schedule and questionnaire were written by six researchers with a diversity of interests around the theme of rural family life. As a result, the analytic task has been different than in a more conventional ethnographic study. I have imposed my research questions on an existing data set--a data set I had a significant hand in shaping--but data that were already gathered before my research proposal was finalized. As a result, this research is not primarily an analysis of interview responses to questions that assess the concerns of this research directly. For example, no interview or survey questions asked research participants to recount the household changes that have occurred over the target child's lifetime. Rather, household changes have been pieced together from numerous references, in locations predictable and unpredictable, in the survey and interview. Similarly, families who indicated that providing for children was “no problem” were not asked how they did manage to garner the resources to provide for their families. Again, evidence of household strategies were found throughout the interviews. This example points to the necessity

of considering what families **said** about maintaining their households economically, but also what they **did** to maintain them. C. Wright Mills made the important distinction between “talk and action,” that is, what research participants say and what they do (1940:329). I found that families usually did much more than they said they did to maintain households. Again, a good deal of detective work was necessary to find what were sometimes passing references in seemingly extraneous data to how they sustained themselves economically.

Assessing continuity and change in household arrangements

In Chapter 4, I systematically examine the household arrangements of these families over the lifetime of the second or third grade child who was the focus of the family interviews that constitute the data set on which this study is based. I begin with the assumption that conventional categorizations of families by household type do not capture the level of family continuity among sample families. Both Ann Tickamyer and Janet Fitchen have critiqued conventional analytical categorizations of families and households. Parent's (usually mother's) retrospective accounts are the source for these data. I consider the child (a second or third grader) and his or her parents as the family unit whose household arrangements over time will be analyzed. If the child has not lived continuously with both parents, I study the child and his or her custodial parent (usually the mother). I create a continuity profile of each family based on available data. I assess the following for each family: household composition changes, marital history, residential mobility and why, employment instability, and length of present marriage or relationship. These assessments allow me to document the relative continuity of each family's household arrangements. Many of the relevant data are found in the surveys and in direct responses to interview questions. The pre-interview survey includes questions about residential mobility and the reason for the moves, household composition, the relationships between household members, length of

marriage, and separation and cohabitation. The interview asks parents to identify the family change that has had the greatest effect on the child. Other necessary data are embedded in interviews. For example, questions about marital instability are not explicitly asked, but a mother may refer to her son's anxiety when she and her husband separated temporarily.

Examining family life through the lens of social class

My analysis surrounding the second research question may be broken down into three parts: first, exploring patterns of family continuity by social class; second, examining parent-identified household survival strategies; and third, exploring household strategies by social class. I consider household strategies in the context of patterns of social support, family stressors, and family changes.

A central goal for this part of my research is to make sense of the multiplicity of family experience found in this small community. I find that social class provides a useful framework for understanding family diversity in this sample of White families. Social class position shapes how families experience the advantages and disadvantages of rural places. I explore how this sample of rural families makes ends meet. I analyze what parents do when they experience economic strain. I consider how some families achieve a comfortable standard of living. I look for distinctive patterns of family life by social class.

In Chapter 5, I divide this sample of families into middle class, working class, and poor families. I use Higginbotham and Weber (1992) to operationalize social class. I consider middle class families to be those in which one earner--either male or female--is employed as an administrator, professional or manager. I divide families of lower than middle class into the working class and the poor. The working class is the largest class in this sample; I subdivide the working class into higher and lower income subgroups. I consider how the distribution of family continuity and change (as

categorized in the continuity profile from Chapter 4) is distributed by social class.

Chapter 6 focuses on household strategies. In assessing household strategies, I began this research with analytic categories adapted based on coping behaviors and adaptations identified in the economic distress literature (Voydanoff and Donnelly 1988, Moen et al. 1983). I focused primarily on three broad types of adaptations to the family economy: financial transactions, household operations, and residential and compositional changes. These categories guided my preliminary analysis. From these categories I developed categories that better fit the data set used in this study.

I analyze household strategies on two levels. In the first instance, I analyze parent's responses to the question of how they provide for their child's necessities when it is difficult to do so. This analysis considers how parents provide for children in circumstances of economic strain. Parent responses to this open-ended question divide into four main categories: parents who did not have a problem providing for children, parents with resource-generation strategies, parents with consumption-related strategies, and parents whose children had to "go without." Second, I analyze what all families do to provide for their families materially at a particular social location. In this section, household strategies are divided into four broad categories: strategies related to resource generation, strategies related to consumption, network-based strategies, and residential strategies. My goal in this part of the research is to illumine the range of opportunities and options available to sample families and the range of obstacles they experience.

Women's perspectives on family and economy

My objective for research question three is to analyze women's accounts of and explanations for their own family and household arrangements and for their own economic circumstances. I use women's responses as a source of data that illumines the values, expectations and assumptions that underlie their construction of family life in a

particular social context. In Chapter 7, I explore how women perceive their options, choices, and responsibilities as they maintain family life in this rural community. In so doing, I seek to illumine their personal theories about their family circumstances. Recent economic restructuring has brought changes that may require a number of adjustments, including the renegotiation of family boundaries, ideologies, and power relations. I am interested in exploring the degree to which women's perceptions of their own family lives are shaped by what are believed to be enduring values of rural America: the traditional family, economic self-sufficiency and hard work.

A guiding assumption of this chapter is the central tenet underlying feminist research: women's lives are important (Reinhartz 1992:241). I assume that women are competent actors in their own lives. My objective is to accurately represent their perspectives and their experiences. This chapter makes ample use of block quotations from the interviews in order to give women a platform from which to speak in their own voices. These passages allow the reader to listen directly to the speakers without the intrusion of or mediation by the researcher. Readers who "hear" the passion, resolve, or desperation in the voices of research participants are better able to understand women's actions within the broad context of their family lives.

This research assumes that families are socially constructed in the context of a particular social location. Theoretically then, while sample women live in a specific community with a particular set of labor market constraint, women of diverse social classes experience the opportunities and constraints of their community differently. This research considers how women in different social classes understand their own economic positions. I consider whether women share the same perceptions of the local economy. From the vantage point of women who are well-off economically, the structure of economic opportunity may be perceived positively, while women who are struggle economically would be expected to view it negatively. I explore what women assume and perceive about making a living in this rural context.

The poor are widely perceived by broad U.S. society to hold value systems at some distance from mainstream values that promote economic success. Welfare recipients are popularly believed to be lazy and unwilling to work. I consider whether poor women express less commitment to the ethic of hard work and self-sufficiency. I also analyze women's responses to interview questions regarding welfare reform to illumine their perceptions of why people in their community are poor. Interview questions especially relevant to examining how women understand their families' economic circumstances are those questions regarding employment history, making ends meet, obstacles to good jobs, attitudes and perceptions about welfare use in the community, and the advantages and disadvantages of living in a rural community.

In asking how women account for stability and change in their family lives, I explore what sample women expect from family life. I consider the degree to which women reference their family experience against the assumed permanence of the nuclear family ideal. Do women expect stability and permanence in family relationships or do they understand family relationships to be tenuous? In the cases of women who have experienced considerable family changes, I explore how they account for the changes. Do they, as did Schein's (1995) study sample, blame men who betrayed them? In the cases of women who present a stable and harmonious family life, I explore how they explain their experience. Do they view themselves as typical or atypical in this community? Specifically relevant interview questions are those in the following areas: women's accounts of family change, and women's self-assessments as workers, mothers, and partners.

I contextualize this part of my research with descriptive data from the county-wide random sample telephone survey ($n = 300$) that is part of the larger Strategies for Rural Children and Families Project. The telephone survey covers a range of family-related issues. Most relevant to this research are community perceptions regarding welfare, gender-specific family roles, the availability of divorce, and the well-being of

children in single-parent homes. This survey clarifies the broader community context in which the women in this study construct and make sense of their family lives.

COMMUNITY SETTING

The setting for this research is a small rural school district in a nonmetropolitan county in Michigan.⁴ The county is divided into several school districts, three of which do not cross county lines. The smallest school district, with 7,066 residents in 1990, is the research site. This district is also the most rural and the poorest district in the county. Median family income in the school district was \$25,405 in 1990; this compares to \$26,719 median family income in the county and \$36,613 statewide. Nearly twenty percent of this population was poor, compared to about thirteen percent in Michigan. The child poverty rate was 27.5% in this district in 1990; this compares to 24.9% in the county and 18% in Michigan. This county had the second highest child poverty rate in Michigan in 1990. In 1990, 12.3% of school district households had public assistance income, compared to 9.6% statewide. School district children are among the most economically disadvantaged in the state.

The district is comprised of two small villages with populations of approximately 200 and 500 residents and the surrounding open country. The two villages as well as the county seat are located on a two-lane state highway that transverses the entire state, south to north, from the Indiana border to the Mackinaw Bridge. The smaller village is located eight miles south of the county seat. The larger village is six miles south of the smaller village and approximately fourteen miles south

⁴Social and economic data for the school district, county, and state in this section are drawn from the following sources: Michigan State University Extension Bulletin n.d., McPherson 1997, Strategic Planners Alliance 1997, CACI Marketing Systems 1994, U.S. Bureau of the Census 1972, 1983a, 1994, 1996a, and web sites for the State of Michigan and the U.S. Census Bureau.

of the county seat. Vacationers travelling to the most popular tourist destinations in Northern Michigan historically have driven through these villages. Approximately twenty years ago a limited access, multi-lane divided highway was built to carry the traffic that sometimes congested this two lane road. Completing the section of the highway that bypasses these villages was a step toward achieving a perennial goal that has had wide political appeal in West Michigan, that is, completing a limited access, divided highway from the west side of the state to the Mackinaw Bridge. The divided highway passes a mile or two west of each village. Near each village is a highway exit that bears the village name. Forty miles south of the more southerly village is the center of the second-largest metropolitan area in Michigan.

The school district has three schools. An elementary school is located in each village; the high school is located in the larger village. This school district spent \$3,461 per student in 1990-1991, the lowest rate of expenditure in the county. Statewide educational expenditures range from \$2,651-\$8,539 per pupil. The research site is primarily non-farm; only 5.5% of the district population lives on farms. The median housing value is \$41,312. This low figure reflects a wide usage of mobile homes or trailers for housing.

Children in this district are more likely to live with two parents (or one parent and a step-parent) and less likely to live in a female-headed household than are children statewide. In this setting, 78.8% of children live with two parents or one parent and a step-parent (73.4% in Michigan), 15.8% of children live with their mother only (22.9% in Michigan), and 5.4% of children live with their father only (3.7% in Michigan).

County social and economic context

This research site is located in a nonmetropolitan county with a 1990 population of 37,308. This population is predominately White; in 1990, 95.8% of the population was White, 2.6% Black, less than 1% Asian or Native American, and 1% classified as

Hispanic. The county population increased 0.9% between 1980 and 1990. During that decade the population of the county seat declined by 12.2%, while many out-county areas experienced substantial growth. The population of the county seat has continued to decline since 1990, falling from 12,603 in 1990 to a U.S. Census estimated population of 10,471 in 1996 (Michigan Press 1997⁵). With this 16% decline, the county seat had the dubious distinction of having the fourth greatest percentage drop nationally.

Private sector employment in the county is strongly oriented toward the service sector. A U.S. Census report about county business patterns for 1994 found that 76.9% of non-farm private sector employment in this county was in the service sector, while 22% was in the goods-producing sector. [The remaining 1% of employment was unclassified or not sufficiently specified to classify.] Table 1 indicates the subcategories in each sector according to their Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code. This table compares county data to total U.S. data from 1994. U.S. data indicate that this county is somewhat more service-sector oriented than is the U.S. as a whole.

[Table 1 about here]

The greatest contrast between this county and U.S. totals is found in the mix of service-producing employment. This county has 63% more retail employment than does the U.S., along with 27% less transportation and public utilities employment, 66% less wholesale trade employment, 42% less FIRE (finance, insurance, and real estate) employment, and 7% less service employment. These differences are highly significant

⁵ This citation refers to an article that was published in 1997 by a newspaper serving a large metropolitan center in Michigan. I refer to this source as "Michigan Press 1997," withholding the specifics of the reference to maintain the anonymity of the research setting.

Table 1
County Business Patterns with U.S. Comparisons, 1994
Private Sector, Non-Farm Industries

	County	U.S.
Goods-producing		
SIC code		
10-- Mining	NA	.6%
15-- Construction	3.9%	5.3%
20-- Manufacturing	18.1%	19.4%
[Goods-producing sub-totals	22.0%	25.4%]
Service-producing		
SIC code		
40-- Transportation and public utilities	4.7%	6.4%
50-- Wholesale trade	2.2%	26.5%
52-- Retail trade	35.3%	21.7%
60-- Finance, insurance, and real estate	4.3%	27.4%
70-- Services	30.4%	32.7%
[Service-producing sub-totals	76.9%	74.6%]

NA: Not available, less than 0.3%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, Table 654; U.S. Census Bureau, *1994 County Business Patterns*. [Online] Available <http://www.census.gov/epcd/cbp/map/94data> (2 Aug. 1997).

to employees. On average, retail work has lower pay and offers fewer hours than any other category of non-farm employment. In 1995, average pay for nonsupervisory U.S. workers ranged from \$7.69 an hour for retail work, to \$12.33 for FIRE work, to \$15.08 for construction. Table 2 shows the U.S. averages for hourly earnings, weekly hours, and weekly earnings by industry.

[Table 2 about here]

Nonmetro wages are generally lower than U.S. averages. Therefore, the hourly earnings and weekly earnings paid in the research county are expected to be lower than U.S. averages found on Table 2. An important conclusion to be drawn from this table is that a county with over one-third of its employment in retail trade is a county with more part-time, low wage employment than the average U.S. county. The lowest average pay of all retail workers goes to those employed in what the U.S. Census calls "eating and drinking places." In this county, fully 13.8% of private sector non-farm employment is in these establishments (7.6% in U.S.)

This county has a relatively high rate of public sector employment. In 1994, 29% of county jobs were in the government sector; this compares to 17% of non-farm employment in the government sector nationwide. The high rate of government employment is largely explained by the presence of a regional university in the county seat. In 1995 when these research data were gathered, enrollment stood at around 9,000 students. The university has been a major employer in the county. However, in the four years prior to this research, enrollment had gone into a steep decline, falling by over 2,500 students by 1995 when these data were gathered (Michigan Press 1997). The enrollment dip has had a significant impact on the county economy. The University Board of Trustees has implemented program cuts and eliminated jobs. Government employment, as a percentage of total county employment, has declined in

Table 2**Average Hours, Earnings, and Weekly Earnings, by Industry: U.S., 1995**

	Hourly earnings	Weekly hours	Weekly earnings
<i>Service-producing</i>			
Transportation and public utilities	\$14.23	39.5	\$562
Wholesale trade	\$12.43	38.3	\$476
Retail trade	\$ 7.69	28.8	\$221
Finance, insurance, and real estate	\$12.33	35.9	\$443
Services	\$11.39	32.4	\$369
<i>Goods-producing</i>			
Mining	\$15.30	40.4	\$684
Construction	\$15.08	38.8	\$585
Manufacturing	\$12.37	41.6	\$515

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996*.
Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, Table 652.

recent years.

This county has continued to move away from an orientation toward agriculture. The number of farms has declined since the 1960s: from 792 farms in 1969, to 687 farms in 1978, to 639 farms in 1987, and 595 farms in 1992. The farm population is now less than 3% of the county population.

Nearly one-quarter of county workers are employed outside the county. The rate of commuting to jobs outside the county increased between 1980 and 1990. In 1980, 20.8% of county workers commuted to jobs outside the county; by 1990, 24.7% of county workers were commuting to jobs in other counties. In 1990, 9% of county workers reported a commute of 30 to 44 minutes to work, while 11% reported a commute of 45 minutes or more.

Chapter 4

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN HOUSEHOLD ARRANGEMENTS

This chapter explores the following questions: *How are the family households in this sample configured? Do we find that current household arrangements are longstanding or do we observe substantial fluidity in household structure?* In this chapter I analyze the range of continuity and change in the family lives of this rural sample. This chapter is divided into four main sections: a literature-based discussion of the research question and anticipated results; an analysis of the relationship between present marital status, marital history, and household arrangements; the development of a continuity profile that categorizes the family experience of each sample family; and conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

The question of continuity and change proceeds from the literature review which discussed two contrasting family arrangements: modern nuclear families and postmodern families.⁶ Modern families have continuous and permanent arrangements while postmodern families are characterized by fluidity and change. These contrasting arrangements represent ideal types, rather than dichotomous categories; family arrangements are expected to encompass a range of possibilities.

The literature demonstrates both that the transformation of the economy is associated with change in the configuration of families, and that nonmetro families are embedded in economic contexts characterized by secondary sector employment that is unstable and of poor quality. Research has documented the association of economic

⁶My central concern in this chapter is family and household structure. I do not focus on the gendered division of labor that is expected to accompany the modern family form.

insecurity and higher rates of divorce and nonmarital childbearing in many contexts, including nonmetropolitan (Lichter and Eggebeen 1992). Other contemporary family structure trends such as remarriage, cohabitation, and extended family households are less visible in conventional data sources. Family scholars have relied on marital status as a proxy measure for marital stability. Reliance on this traditional measure has been relatively unexamined both theoretically and methodologically. This research explores the household arrangements of this sample of rural families with young children. A universal or monolithic rural family surely does not exist. In a sample of thirty families, I expect to find diversity in the household arrangements of these rural families. This study explores the range of family continuity in the sample.

The literature suggests more than one plausible result in a study of this subject. Census data indicate that nonmetropolitan families are more likely than metro families to be married couples. In 1990, 82.1% of all U.S. nonmetro family households were married couple households; 77.6% of all U.S. metro family households were married couple households (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992).⁷ One line of argument could hold that families in rural areas may be less susceptible to macro-level forces that destabilize urban families. In the rural literature, spatial theories have traditionally argued that rural space and culture differ fundamentally from urban space and culture (Tickamyer et al. 1993). Spatial theories are used to explain the distinctive aspects of rural space. Such theories focus on the concept of uneven development, with rural areas (including rural people) less advanced on a continuum of modernization (Tickamyer et al. 1993). These theories have idealized rural space and rural people. Since the 1960s, however, the bi-polarity of the *gemeinschaft-gesselschaft* and rural-urban typologies have encountered broad empirical and theoretical challenges (Lobao 1996, Redclift and Whatmore 1990). Empirical research has found rural-urban

⁷These census data describe all family households. The research sample is limited to family households with at least one young child.

differences to be both small and decreasing (Lobao 1996, Tickamyer 1996b, Naples, 1994). Theoretical work has criticized the functionalist assumptions undergirding modernization theories and has also noted their failure to examine social inequalities and power relations (Tickamyer et al. 1993, Lobao 1996).

Recent scholarship from a structural perspective might, by another line of argument, also lead one to suppose that rural families are more stable than urban families. The rural context has not been, nor is yet, conducive to women's economic independence. Tickamyer and her colleagues (1993) conclude that rural development policies have "construct[ed] or deepen[ed] women's economic dependence" (1993:217). The structured gender inequalities in rural areas promote women's economic disadvantage in rural labor markets by discouraging human capital investment and perpetuating gender-based discrimination in the workplace (McLaughlin and Sachs 1988). Further, the stigmas of welfare receipt and single mother status operate as mechanisms of social control to restrict the options of rural populations more than those of urban populations (Bokemeier and Tickamyer 1985, Naples 1994, Rank and Hirschl 1988, 1994, Jensen and Eggebeen 1994). These structural constraints may impose limits on the range of diversity in rural family arrangements. One might conclude from this literature that rural families are likely to be marked by continuity more than fluidity and change. Perhaps rural areas could be constructed as the last bastion of modern nuclear family arrangements.

Albrecht and Albrecht's (1996) study of urban-rural family structure differences finds that rural-urban differences are largely explained by the very high rate of married-couple family households among the farm population. They contend that the current convergence in rural and urban family structure reflects the major decrease in the farming population in the recent past. While the Albrechts' study is not based on the metropolitan-nonmetropolitan county-based designations that guide this study, nevertheless their results are relevant to this research. They conclude that while small

but significant differences remain between urban and nonfarm rural family structure, the most significant family structure differences are found between rural farm families and both rural nonfarm and urban families.

An alternative framing of this question is to suggest that the higher rate of married couple households does not necessarily indicate a context of greater family stability. Restructuring has left an economic context in which family instability could be anticipated. Rural restructuring has lowered the quality of male employment. Work that is marginal, seasonal, and in the informal economy characterize not only women's employment, but men's as well (Fitchen 1991). Fitchen (1991) finds that substantial marital disruption occurred during the 1980s in the depressed rural New York community she studied. Lichter and McLaughlin, citing studies of urban families, contend that lack of economic opportunities indirectly undermines traditional two-parent families (1995:691). The decline in rural opportunity structures has created a large group of rural residents who may experience marital instability. Fernandez Kelly contends, "Nuclear households are destabilized by high levels of unemployment and underemployment or by public policy making it more advantageous for women with children to accept welfare payments than to remain dependent upon an irregularly employed man" (1990:185). Thus, high rates of divorce may characterize rural areas.

A high remarriage rate may be obscuring the extent of marital instability in rural areas. Factors specific to the rural context may well result in a situation in which rural women have greater incentives to remarry than do metropolitan women. Rural women are less economically viable than urban women and are more constrained by the social stigma attached to both welfare receipt and single mother status. Instead of finding rural areas to be places characterized by very stable marriages, an alternative thesis, taking into account the same contextual factors cited above (low earning potential, low welfare benefit levels, and the stigma of welfare and single motherhood), holds that rural women may pursue remarriage as their best social and economic option. This

would follow the suggestion of McLaughlin and her colleagues (1993) that first marriage represents for women an important economic opportunity in a rural context in which they have limited economic opportunity.

Theories that idealize rural space and rural people have ignored rural family diversity. Social processes are in place that lead us to expect to find a range in the experience of family stability and change in a small rural community. This research explores that diversity in a sample of families of young children.

MARITAL STATUS, MARITAL HISTORY, AND FAMILY ARRANGEMENTS

I begin by providing a general description of the study sample. This sample is made up of thirty families that live in households ranging from two to eleven members, with a median size of four persons. Mothers range in age from 25 to 48 years, with a median age of 33. Fourteen of twenty-nine (48%) of mothers work full-time, nine (31%) are full-time homemakers, four (14%) work part-time, one (3%) is unemployed, and one (3%) is a full-time student. Fathers, stepfathers, and cohabiting male partners range in age from 27 to 54 years, with a median age of 34 years. Twenty-three of twenty-seven men (85%) work full-time, and four (15%) work part-time (including two men who work part-time in informal self-employment). Annual family income is distributed as follows: ten of thirty families (33%) have incomes greater than \$35,000; ten (33%) have incomes between \$20,000 and \$35,000; and ten (33%) have incomes less than \$20,000. The majority of respondents self-identify as having grown up in a rural county: fourteen (47%) in the county in which the research site is located, three (10%) in another rural county, and thirteen (43%) in an urban county.

Data used in this analysis were derived from survey and interview data. The survey asked present marital status. If married, respondents were asked to indicate whether the marriage is their first marriage (and how many years married), or a

remarriage (and how many years in current marriage). The survey did not ask whether spouses had been married previously. Household arrangements were assessed primarily from responses to the survey question which asked, "Who lives in your household?" Respondents were asked to provide the sex, date of birth, and years of school completed for all persons living in the household, including self, spouse, children/stepchildren, and other adults or family members. Interview data and in some cases interviewer observations served as checks on these survey data. Marital histories were constructed from survey and interview data. Surveys provide a chronology of births, the length of current relationship, and a chronology of residential mobility and the reason for moving. Family transitions were frequently discussed when respondents were questioned about the hardest decision regarding their child, family changes, employment history and community and family support [See Appendix A for survey questions and Appendix B for interview schedule.].

I provide next an overview of sample families by categorizing them by present marital status, marital history, and household arrangements. This sample of families divides into marital status groups that approximate both other families in this nonmetro county and the population of U.S. nonmetro families; seventy-seven percent ($n=23$) of sample family households are married couple families, ten percent ($n=3$) are separated, ten percent ($n=3$) are divorced, and three percent ($n=1$) are widowed. In 1990, 82.5% of all families in the nonmetro county in which this research occurred were married couples (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1994); in 1990, 82.1% of all U.S. nonmetro family households were married couples (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992).

Earlier in this chapter, I asked whether a high rate of married couple households indicated the existence of a sample of stable modern families. I return to that point here to examine whether more than three-quarters of sample families do indeed fit the description of a modern family. I examine how taking into account marital history and household arrangements changes how families are categorized. Table 3 illustrates the

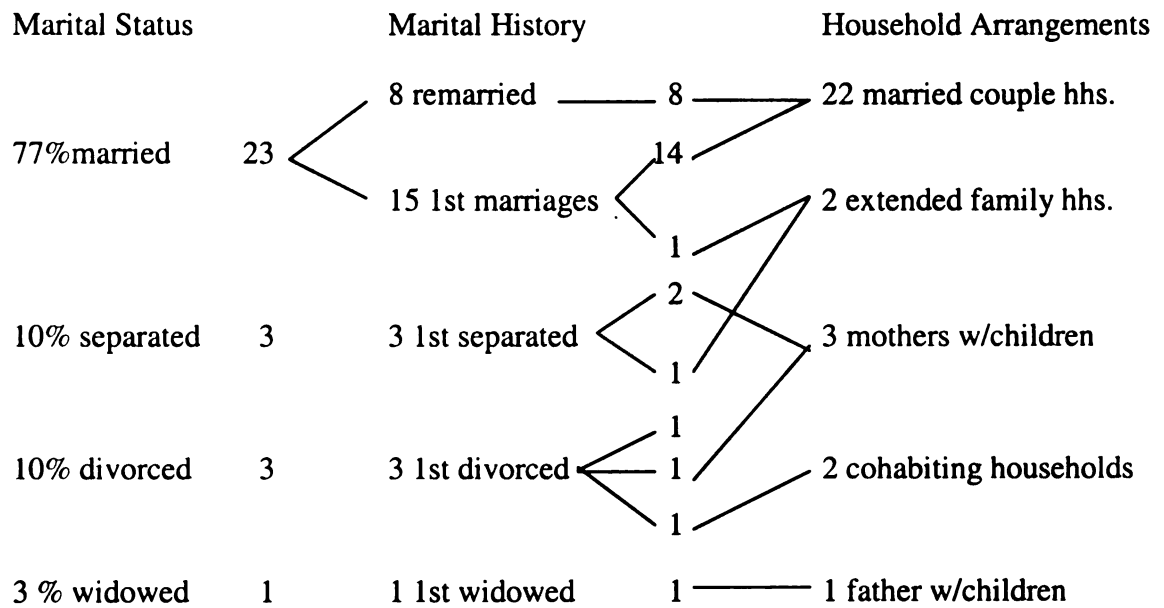
relationship between current marital status, marital history, and household arrangements in this sample. A modern family is considered to be a nuclear household made up of a breadwinning husband and caretaking wife who live with their dependent children together in a separate household. Modern families are stable households with fixed boundaries; permanence and stability are the hallmarks of modern families. Postmodern families represent a type of family structure that is quite different. Postmodern families are adaptive households that expand and contract as contingencies require; fluidity and change are the hallmarks of postmodern families.

[Table 3 about here]

For the purposes of this analysis I assume that family households formed by remarriage do not fit the modern family criteria of permanence and nuclear structure (Kingsbury and Scanzoni 1993:207). Interview and survey data reveal that of the twenty-three married couple households, fifteen are households formed by a respondent's first marriage and eight are households formed by a respondent's remarriage. Preliminarily, then, taking into account marital status history, fifteen of thirty families, or 50%, appear to be conventional nuclear families. A closer look at the family histories of these fifteen sample families reveals that two of the households formed by first marriages are, in fact, first marriage stepfamilies. In both cases, women had nonmarital births, and later entered first marriages with men who were not their children's biological fathers. This result leaves thirteen of thirty, or 43% of sample families as approximating modern family arrangements.

A further assumption guiding this research is that extended family households do not meet the criteria of bounded, nuclear structure. One of the married couple families in a first marriage is living in a four-generation extended family household. This family does not, therefore, fit the description of a modern family. This result leaves

Table 3
Family Structure and Household Arrangements in Study Sample



twelve of thirty, or 40% of sample families as typifying modern nuclear family structure.

Finally, I examined the chronologies of marriages and births for families in first marriages. In two cases, marriage to the child's father occurred some years subsequent to the birth. The family mentioned above as currently living in an extended family household married two years after the birth of a child. In another case, the marriage occurred five years after the birth of the child. These families do not embody the stability and permanence assumed in the definition of a conventional modern family. This result leaves eleven, or 37%, of sample families as conforming to the definition of modern family structure and household arrangements.

The following section describes the household arrangements of this sample of families, beginning first with the household arrangements of married couple families and then considering the arrangements of the seven single parent families in this sample. [Table 3 captures the relationship between marital status and household arrangements.] This description of household arrangements reveals a side of family organization that is not readily apparent from analyses of marital status. Twenty two of twenty three married couple families live in single family households. One family, noted above, lives as a sub-family in an extended family household. Three sample families are headed by women whose marital status is separated. Two of these mothers live with their children; the third has a cohabiting partner. Three sample families are headed by divorced women. One divorced mother lives with her children as a sub-family in her mother and stepfather's household. A second divorced mother lives in a cohabiting household with a partner and his children. The third divorced mother lives in a household with her children. The final household is made up of a widowed father who lives with his adopted daughter. A significant finding is that while six women are divorced or separated single mothers, only three live in households made up of only themselves and their children.

These data reveal a greater complexity to family life than is initially apparent. Marital status is not entirely predictive of family arrangements. Married couples do not necessarily live in single family households nor do single parents necessarily live in single adult households. Taking into account three factors--present marital status, marital history, and household arrangements--enables us to assess how many sample families conform to the modern family ideal.

This analysis also reveals the inadequacy of using present marital status as indicating the stability of families and permanence of marriage in a population. A high percentage of married couple families in a population is often presumed to indicate a high level of family stability. An increasing rate of female-headed families is used as a primary indicator of family instability and change. Present marital status provides a current snapshot of the marital status of household heads in a population. But it does not fully illumine family history events that have shaped the lives of children. In this sample, twenty-three (77%) families are married couple families, and seven (23%) are single parent families. We might conclude from these data that seven of thirty sample children do not live with both their parents. Such a conclusion is erroneous. We cannot know without taking into account marital history that, in fact, thirteen sample children (43%) do not live with both parents. If conclusions were drawn solely on the basis of present marital status, nearly half of these cases would go undetected. Such results would present an inaccurate picture of family life and seriously misrepresent children's experience. Marital status has limited validity as a measure of marital stability and permanence.

It is unwise to conclude that because U.S. nonmetro areas have a rate of married couple family households that is 4.5% higher than that of metro families, nonmetro families are significantly more stable than urban families. A higher rate of married family households indicates only the obvious--that a greater proportion of rural families live in married couple households, which is a different matter than indicating stability

and continuity in family life. A higher rate of married couple families may reflect a different set of structural and cultural constraints rather than greater family stability. As suggested above, remarriage may represent for rural women an economic strategy in a context of limited choices. On the other hand, I do not mean to suggest that the results presented here point to greater family fluidity in rural areas than in urban areas. [Such a contention could not be made on methodological grounds, in any case.] Rather, I contend that we cannot assume that present marital status tells us very much about the family structure history of any population. Using marital status as a primary measure of family stability may lead to false assumptions about the relative continuity and fluidity of family life in any sample.

FAMILY CONTINUITY

The question at stake is how much stability and fluidity is found in the family lives of this sample of rural families with young children. Exploring this question requires an in-depth analysis of family transitions and household arrangement among sample families. I created a continuity profile of each family to examine systematically several indicators of stability and change over the lifetime of the child who was the focus of the Family Interview data set (hereafter sometimes called the target child). Parents' (usually mothers') retrospective accounts were the source for these data. The child (a second or third grader) and his or her parents constitute the family unit whose household arrangements over time were analyzed. If the child did not lived continuously with both parents, the subjects of study were the child and his or her custodial parent (usually the mother). The following were assessed for each family: household composition changes, marital history, residential mobility (taking into account the reason for the move), employment instability, and length of present marriage or relationship. Conclusions about the continuity of each family's household

arrangements are based on these and other data. Family scholars will acknowledge an “ontological necessity” in the study of families, by which I mean that there are certain changes that are inherent in the nature of family life. Family households experience change as they expand and contract when a child is born, siblings are added, and adult children eventually leave their parents’ household. Expected life course events such as these are not the family changes upon which this study focuses.

Explaining Table 4

Table 4 presents the results of this analysis. Sample families are divided into three main categories: high continuity, moderate continuity, and low continuity. The low continuity category has a subcategory: low continuity-acute. The table presents data for each family on the indicators of family continuity and change listed above: number of moves, marital history, length of relationship in years, changes in household composition, and employment stability. In addition, the following contextual data are provided: household size, number of children in the household, annual household income, and occupation.

[Table 4 about here]

Residential moves

Surveys and interviews provide data regarding moves. The survey provides space for listing three moves and the reasons for moving. [See Appendix A, page 286.] In cases in which families had moved more than three times, additional moves were reconstructed from interview data. Reasons for moving are not included in the table, but were taken into account when categorizing families for stability and fluidity. Clearly the meaning of moving varies by life circumstances. In some cases, moving

Table 4
Continuity Profile for Sample Families

Family	Moves (residential)	Marital history	Length of current relationship (yrs.)	Hh composition changes	Employment stability	Household size (# children)	Annual income	Occupation (m/f)
<i>High continuity</i>								
Cole	1	1st	13		high	4(2)	> \$45,000	professor dietician-pt
Kennedy	0	1st	20		high	5(3)	> \$45,000	carpenter teacher
Williams	1	1st	12		moderate	4(2)	> \$45,000	contractor restaurant owner
Molloy	0	1st	13	took in subf-1mo	mod high	4(2)	> \$45,000	phone switchman nurs. home kitchen-pt
Collins	2	1st	11		moderate	5(3)	\$40-45,000	auto body repair school bus driver
Schram	0	1st	10		mod high	4(2)	\$35-40,000	transport. supervisor school bus driver-pt
Davis	3	1st	12		mod high	6(4)	\$30-35,000	diesel mechanic student
Mannelli	0	2nd,x	10		high	5(3)	\$40-45,000	printer homemaker
Cooper	2	1st	13		mod low	4(2)	\$20-25,000	service factory labor
Rogers	--	1st	12		mod low	4(2)	\$25-30,000	factory labor factory labor

Table 4 (cont'd.)
Moderate continuity

Campbell	0	2nd, x	12		low	4(2)	\$10-15,000	self empl./postal temp homemaker (disabled)
VanDyke	**	1st, adpt	14	fosterc	moderate	3(1)	\$20-25,000	factory-machinist homemaker (disabled)
Watson	0	1st, x, div			low	3(2)	\$10-15,000	hair stylist (self-empl.)
Davenport	1	nmb, 1st, x	9		mod low	6(4)	\$25-30,000	unemployed (informal work) factory labor
Griffin	1	2nd, x	11		mod high	5(3)	\$25-30,000	factory assembly homemaker (disabled)
Nichols	11	1st, x, div, 2nd	.5	stepf	moderate	3(1)	> \$45,000	masonry court reporter
Walsh	6	1st, x, sep, rec	12		mod low	4(2)	\$35-40,000	diesel mechanic clerical
Edwards	--	x-nmb, coh, sep, 1st	4		mod low	4(2)	\$20-25,000	mechanic school bus aide-pt
Roberts	2	adpt, wid			low	2(1)	\$10-15,000	retail scanner-pt
Smith	4	x nmb, 1st	6	ex-fhh(3)	mod low	11(5)	[\$15-20,000]	garbage route driver homemaker (disabled)

Table 4 (cont'd.)
Low continuity

Olsen	3	1st, x, sep, div, 1.5 2nd	m leaves, mgrh, ex- fhh, stepf, sib	moderate	6(4)	> \$45,000	computer drafting registered nurse-pt
Shoemaker	1	div, x-nmb, 2nd 6	stepf	mod high	4(2)	\$20-25,000	factory supervisor homemaker, factory temp
Newman	> 4	1st, x, div, 2.5 nmb, coh, 2nd	ex-fhh, add sib, stepf, step- sibs	low	6(4)	\$15-20,000	factory labor homemaker
McCullen	4	1st, x, div	ex-fhh, fhh, ex-fhh	low	5(2)	[\$10-15,000]	factory labor
Patterson	> 4	nmb, x-nmb, 1.5 coh, subf, nmb, 1st	nfh, stepf, stepsib	low	6(4)	\$15-20,000	excavation (self-emp) homemaker
Norris	6	1st, div, x- nmb, 2nd	subf(2), fhh, stepf, took in fhh(3mo)	mod low	4(2)	\$20-25,000	trencher waitress
Miller	2	1st, x, div, coh .5	partner, his children	moderate	6(4)	[\$10-15,000]	service-pt bank-clerical
<i>Low continuity - acute</i>							
Morgan	1	sep	took in subf (2mo), took in s-i-l	mod low	4(3)	\$10-15,000	factory labor
Turner	4	1st, x, sep, rec, sep			4(3)	\$10-15,000	unemployed (babysitting)
Phillips	> 5	x-nmb, nmb, < 1 1st, sep, coh	partner	low mod	6(4)	\$25-30,000	concrete construction homemaker

Table 4 (cont'd.)

Abbreviations:

1st	first marriage
2nd	second marriage
nmb	non-marital birth
coh	cohabiting
sep	separated
div	divorced
wid	widowed
rec	reconciled
adpt	adopted
m leaves	mother leaves
mgh	maternal grandparents household
ex-fhh	extended family household
subf	subfamily
nfhh	subfamily in nonfamily household
stepf	stepfather
sib	siblings
stepsib	step-siblings
fhh	female headed family
mhf	male headed family
fosterc	foster children taken into home
s-i-l	sister-in-law

- * marital history column refers to mother's marital history, except in the case of Family 3, in which the primary parent is a widowed father
- ** while adoptive family has not moved, child moved with her biological mother in and out of several relationships prior to going into foster care with adoptive family
- missing data
- pt part time employment
- full time = or > 35 hrs./wk

Under "Marital History," x indicates the placement of the birth of the child relative to these events.
Income is bracketed in subfamilies or cohabiting relationships in which total household income is not pooled.
Under "Occupation," for two-adult families, male's occupation is listed first, female's occupation is listed second.

indicates meeting life goals, such as “bought house” or “moved out of city.” Other moves were precipitated by difficult family events, such as “broke up with their dad” or “home burned.” No moves in the high continuity families were made in response to family crises. The Davis family⁸, which has the most moves in the high stability category, moved for “father’s work,” to be “closer to relatives,” and finally for “school district wanted.” For families characterized by more fluidity, moving was often related to economic circumstances or marital history events.

Marital history

The marital history column indicates marital status and summarizes family structure changes over time. Marital history data were derived from both surveys and interviews. Compiling complex marital histories was like putting together the pieces of a complicated puzzle. Survey data regarding moves, births, economic status, and employment from the survey were pieced together with interview data to construct a history of marital and family structure changes. Responses to specific interview questions as well as more open-ended personal narrative responses provided necessary details. In circumstances other than conventional, that is, marriage followed by (or at the approximate time as) the child’s birth, or in other potentially confusing family circumstances, the timing of the child’s birth is indicated by an “x”. The following examples illustrate how the marital history column entries are meant to be read. In the case of the Mannellis, the child was born in his mother’s second marriage. The more complex marital history for the Newmans reads as follows: first marriage, followed by the child’s birth, followed by divorce, followed by a non-marital birth, followed by a second marriage.

⁸The names of individuals and families have been changed to protect their privacy. All direct quotations are taken verbatim from transcriptions of tape-recorded interviews.

Household composition

The household composition change column is related to the marital history column. This column clarifies and specifies household composition change associated with marital history events. In addition, noted in this column are instances of “doubling-up,” that is, taking in as a sub-family, friends or relatives who have lost their housing or have problems with their partners. Household composition changes are presented from the perspective of the child, that is, adding a stepfather is listed (rather than from the mother’s perspective, adding a husband). The relationship between the marital history and household composition is illustrated by referring again to the Newmans. This family’s household compositional changes have included living as an extended family household (with their maternal grandparents when their parents were divorced), adding a sibling, adding a stepfather, and adding step-siblings (four children who join their household every weekend).

Length of relationship

This column lists the length of the current marriage, or in the case of cohabiting couples, how long they have lived together. Surveys were the source of data for married couples; interviews were the source of data for cohabiting couples. Data regarding household size and number of children in the household were drawn from the survey section, “Who lives in your household?” [See Appendix A, page 284.]

Employment stability

This category is conceptualized as a household status, except for the cases in which households do not pool their income. Employment stability takes into account the following factors, if known: sector of employment, level of employment,

occupational continuity, length of employment,⁹ capacity to work, and work history. Employment stability is conceptualized as a five-point range, consisting of high, moderately high, moderate, moderately low, and low. The labor market status of both adults is considered in married or cohabiting households (as long as income is pooled). Social assumptions regarding men's role as primary breadwinner influence the assignments of households to employment stability categories. Thus, a household in which a man has been unable to hold a steady job will be categorized as having lower employment stability than a household in which a woman has been in and out of the labor force. Four family households have adults with limited capacity to work. Three women have physical disabilities (Ruthann VanDyke, Margaret Griffin, and Kimberly Sue Campbell) and one woman is developmentally disabled (Andrea Smith). When categorizing these families by employment stability, I took into the account the clear inability of two women to work (Ruthann VanDyke and Margaret Griffin) and the reduced capacity of the other two to be employed (Kimberly Sue Campbell and Andrea Smith). At the same time, because these families had historically depended exclusively on male earnings, their employment stability was largely based on husband's labor market experience.

Three examples serve to illustrate how households were assigned to employment stability categories. The Kennedys are a married couple family with two earners, an elementary school teacher wife and a carpenter husband. This family is designated as having high employment stability. Their family experience illustrates the rationale of conceptualizing employment as a household status. Mrs. Kennedy has secure primary sector employment, a \$40,000 salary, and a graduate degree she hopes will eventually allow her to move into educational administration. Mr. Kennedy's carpentry work is somewhat seasonal. He may be unemployed two to three months during the winter.

⁹I consider employment of more than five years with a single employer to be stable employment.

His unemployment occurs at a time when his wife is very busy with her work, so he takes over more responsibility for household tasks and children when he is unemployed. Because of his wife's high level of employment, the instability of his employment during the winter is not problematic. When Mr. Kennedy is exceptionally busy during the summer months, his wife is responsible for children and household tasks.

Robin Miller's household is an example of a household that is not pooling income. She and her cohabiting partner share household expenses but each is responsible for their own personal and child-related expenses. Based on her employment only, the employment stability for the respondent and her children is categorized as moderate. She has been employed as a clerical employee at a local bank for four years at a wage that is now \$6.00 an hour. Robin's full-time job is currently secure, but there is no chance of advancement without a college degree. As to long term employment stability, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts many categories of clerical workers to be among the fastest declining occupations between 1995 and 2005 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996b).

The Newmans are an example of a household with low employment stability. This household is a single earner household consisting of a homemaker wife, her four children, and her husband of 2 1/2 years who is employed in low-wage manufacturing. Patty Newman has been out of the workforce for six years and has not worked since moving to this county. She describes her husband as a "jack of all trades" in the informal economy before he got a secondary sector factory job paying \$5.00 an hour approximately ten months prior to the interview. He has no health insurance and has had several layoffs for periods of about one week.

Income

This column lists family income levels in the same categories as those used in the survey. [See Appendix A, page 289.] The survey asked respondents to select the

income category reflecting their total family income for 1994. Respondents' income category selections were compared to responses from the household resources section of the survey that asks about participation in government assistance programs, receipt of child support or alimony, and wages. [See Appendix A, page 286.] In a few cases discrepancies occurred as a result of household employment or compositional changes since 1994. In such cases, income levels were adjusted to reflect current circumstances. Incomes in brackets indicate households that are not pooling income. Both families living in extended family households (McCullen, Smith) list only sub-family income, not total household income. Likewise, one of the families living as a cohabiting household (Miller) does not pool income.

Occupation

Occupational categories were drawn from both surveys and interviews. Respondents were asked to list their main occupation or job title on the survey as well as the kind of work they did [See Appendix A, p. 286]. Their employment history was discussed further in the interview, as was their partners' employment.

Methodological notes

The survey asked the respondent to list the places their child has lived since birth, beginning with their current address. Some respondents listed their last three moves, but had worked backed chronologically only through 1992. In cases in which additional moves were reconstructed from parent accounts, it is likely that the number of moves was underestimated. For example, Melissa Nichols listed three moves, but said in the interview that her daughter had moved eleven times. In fact, she and her daughter had moved three times to different locales, but detailed information about moves to different residences within a particular locale was not gathered in the interview. It would not be possible to piece together eleven moves from the interview

account. In addition, the high incidence of mobile homes in this rural area suggests a reconceptualization of the idea of moving. Sometimes families living in mobile homes do not move, in the sense of changing addresses, but they change trailers. They have a different residence, but remain on the same land, and maintain the same address. The change may represent a substantial upgrading of their housing. For example, Tiffany Walsh compares the “12 X 40 pile of junk” they lived in for three years and the “mansion” (a new trailer) they live in now--all at the same address.

This study examines family structure events over the lifetime of a second or third grader. Data were gathered that pertained to family continuity and change over that nine or ten year period. It is clear from this research, however, that mothers' and fathers' prior events also shape these children's family lives. For example, a child in a first marriage may have a half-brother or half-sister as a result of a mother's previous nonmarital birth. In the case of the Davenports, Nicole gave birth to a son at age 14 and then married at age 23, forming a first marriage stepfamily. The child who was the subject of this research was born in this first marriage, yet his family experience includes another child who does not share the same father. Likewise, a child born in a second marriage may have numerous half-siblings from the previous marriages of his or her parents. In the case of the two children born to the Griffins, Mrs. Griffin already had four children, and Mr. Griffin had two children prior to this second marriage. These two children were born into a complex array of half-siblings who influenced their family experience. In retrospect, this research would have benefited from gathering additional data on events that occurred prior to the birth of the target child.

The survey asked the respondent to list their children and stepchildren, and to indicate stepchildren with an asterisk. This part of the survey provides invaluable contextualization for present family experience. This study of contemporary families reveals family life to be more complex than the researchers anticipated. One shortcoming of the survey has to do with asking respondents to indicate children and

stepchildren. This analysis finds that the realities of family life go well beyond this division. In several cases it is not clear whether children born to mothers prior to the target child and prior to their marriage have the same father as the target child. Thus, it is not always clear if a family household is comprised of a couple with their two children, one of whom was born prior to the marriage, or of a couple with their child and another child unrelated to the husband. The prior case would be a nuclear family household; the later case would have been formed as a stepfamily household. This observation points to the multiplicity of experience within a family household. Children who do not share the same father are likely to experience family life differently. This research would have benefited from greater clarity as to the parentage of other children within the households of some families.

Results

This sample of thirty families divides equally into the three main analytic categories: ten families fit the high continuity category; ten families fit the moderate continuity category; and ten families fit the low continuity category. Families in each category are ordered, in a relative sense, from greatest to least continuity within that category. The diversity and complexity of family experience does not allow for a precise rank ordering of these families. It is not possible to evaluate with precision whether, for example, a child born to a single divorced woman who two years hence remarries (Shoemaker) clearly has a more or less fluid family life than does a child who experiences the separation and divorce of his parents, the remarriage of his mother, and the birth of a new half-brother (Olsen). Multiple factors are taken into account when assigning families their positions within categories, yet such assignments cannot be made on the basis of purely objective criteria. Taking into account the complex nature of family events demonstrates that family fluidity is constructed in multiple ways, and in ways that are not readily comparable. Family experience varies not only in degree,

but also in type.

The goal of this section is to describe the range and diversity of continuity and change in this sample of families. I discuss separately the three categories of family continuity, providing first a descriptive overview of each group of families, and then illuminating the range and diversity of family experience within categories by using individual family accounts. The seven accounts of family life below serve to illustrate the breadth of family experience in this sample, but can not capture that diversity in a comprehensive manner. The marital histories and household arrangements of additional sample families will be highlighted in subsequent chapters to clarify, extend, and illustrate analyses of other research questions.

High continuity families

Families in the high continuity category have moved between zero and three times over the child's lifetime. In all ten cases, children live with both their biological parents who have been married between ten and twenty years. These families have experienced no household compositional changes (other than family life course events such as additional births), with the exception of the Molloy's who allowed a couple who were friends to move in for a month. The median household income for this group of families is \$40-45,000. Employment stability for this group is categorized as follows: three are high, three are moderately high, two are moderate, and two are moderately low. In view of little variation among these families in marital history events and household composition, the most significant differences within this group are found in the area of employment stability.

The Cole family consists of a 39 year old woman, her 41 year old husband, and their sons, ages seven and nine. The couple is in a first marriage of 13 years. She has a college degree and works part-time as a registered dietician for the WIC program. He has a master's degree and works at the regional state university as a professor. The

family moved to the area for the university appointment when the target child was an infant. This family's experience invokes the modern nuclear family ideal. The husband is the primary breadwinner; the wife works part-time now that the children are in school, and is responsible for domestic chores.

The Rogers family consists of a couple, both age 31, in a first marriage of 12 years, together with their daughters, ages eleven and eight. She is a high school graduate, he is not. The family used WIC when the children were younger, and when he was without work, they used food stamps and social service assistance to pay utility bills. Mrs. Rogers has worked in a fast food restaurant, a motel, a discount department store (Ames), and presently works full-time in a shoe factory. Mr. Rogers is a former construction worker who now also works full-time in a factory at the county seat. Both earners have held these jobs for at least two years; both jobs pay \$8.50 an hour; neither job has sick pay benefits. Although this couple works in secondary sector, low wage manufacturing, the respondent says, "we both have good jobs now" (1659). This couple has been able to construct a stable family life on a relatively low material base.

Moderate continuity families

Families in the moderate continuity category have moved between zero and eleven times over their child's lifetime. Six children in this category live with both biological parents, two live with their biological mother, and two are adopted. Examining the marital histories and household composition changes of this group reveals moderate fluidity in family and household configuration. The marital relationships in this group range from a remarriage of six months to a first marriage of fourteen years. The median household income for these families is \$20-25,000. Employment stability for this group is categorized as follows: one is moderately high, two are moderate, four are moderately low, and three are low. The family stories below illustrate that these families have more complex marital and family histories and

well as more unstable employment than the families in the high continuity category above. While the majority of children live with both parents in married couple families, in some cases, the route to that family status was unconventional.

The Davenport family consists of a 32 year old woman and her 34 year old husband, their three children ages eight, six, and four, and her 17 year old son. The couple is in a first marriage of nine years. Mrs. Davenport has an eighth grade education; Mr. Davenport is a high school graduate. The family made an urban to rural transition seven years ago to get out of the city. Since moving, he has been employed irregularly, working three of the past seven years. They are former DSS recipients. He was laid off two years ago and presently cuts and sells wood in the informal economy "to help out." She has worked for three and a half years in a factory, earning \$10.30 an hour, commuting 50 miles each way to the urban center they left seven years ago. Despite her low educational attainment, Mrs. Davenport says that she has always earned more money than her husband.

The Edwards family is made up of a 28 year old woman, her 29 year old husband, and their two children, ages nine and six. The couple is in a first marriage of four years. The couple had a cohabiting relationship for several years prior to the marriage. The couple separated for a time while she was pregnant with the younger child. Both are high school graduates. Mrs. Edwards is employed as an aide on a school bus transporting special education students to their tri-county school site. She works a split-shift, five days a week, for a total of 22 1/2 hours of work at \$7.55 an hour. Mr. Edwards currently commutes to the urban center to work full-time as a mechanic, setting up double-wide mobile homes for \$8.50 an hour. He has held this job for three years; prior to this job, he was employed in construction.

Two of the children in the moderate continuity category are adopted. Adopted children have an additional source of potential fluidity in their lives, that is, the relationship with their biological parents and the circumstances that led to the adoption.

Because this study focuses on continuity and change over the child's lifetime, an adopted child's prior family circumstances were a relevant factor in assigning an adoptive family to a continuity category. The VanDykes were placed in the moderate continuity category primarily because of the adopted daughter's prior family experience. The daughter moved many times before coming to them, as her biological mother moved in and out of several different relationships. Mrs. VanDyke tells in her own words how she and her husband came to be this child's parents:

Samantha came to us from her biological mom. One of her ex-husbands is also an ex to one of my sisters. She was going to just give her up to the County and he said, "No, [Mr. VanDyke] and [Mrs. VanDyke] don't have kids. They want kids." And so, Samantha come and lived with us for about a month in October of 1991. She'd 'av been four then. And then her mom kind of got cold feet about it, took her back, kept her over the winter, and in May she called, and she sent this friend to us. The friend said, "Will you take Samantha for keeps?" And I told her, I said, "It's going to be for keeps. You're not going to keep yanking her back and forth." [11-34]

The child has lived with them for three and a half years, as a foster child for most of that time, and now as an adopted daughter. Since coming to live with the VanDykes, she has seen her biological mother five times. The adoption had been final for about two months at the time of the interview. This family's experience gives new meaning to the term family fluidity. Not only do family boundaries expand and contract as a result of marital events and shifting household arrangements, but occasionally, biological parents decide to break family ties. For some children, family fluidity means adapting to a new household configuration in which there has been a complete change in the cast of characters, and strangers are now called parents.

Low continuity families

Families in the low continuity category have moved between one and at least six times. No children in this category live with both their mother and father. Families in

this category have either a family history of high fluidity or are currently enmeshed in acutely fluid circumstances. Mothers' relationships range from a six month cohabiting relationship to a six year second marriage. The median household income for these families is \$15-20,000. Employment stability for this group is categorized as follows: one is moderately high, two are moderate, three are moderately low, three are low, and one is unemployed.

The Patterson family consists of a couple, both 31 years old, in a first marriage of one and a half years, together with her children ages 11 and 8, one of his children, age 11, and their 20 month old child. Her three children have different fathers, and all were born nonmaritally. The target child is her second born child; the boy has never seen his biological father. She and her two elder children lived in a cohabiting arrangement when her son (the target child) was around four year old, and then moved in with friends when that relationship broke up. She moved into the research setting around two and a half years prior to the interview. She married her husband shortly after the birth of their child. She has a seventh grade education and has remained out of the labor force except for a period of about two months. Mrs. Patterson is a former DSS recipient. Mr. Patterson has a tenth grade education and is a self-employed excavator with an annual income of between \$15,000 and \$20,000.

The Turner household is made up of a 31 year old woman and her three daughters, ages 10, 9, and 4. Mrs. Turner and her husband separated for a year when the target child was five, at which time she and the children moved back to Wisconsin where she had grown up. The couple reconciled, lived together for two years in the research county, but separated again, and now after a year of separation plan to divorce. She and the children live in a trailer owned by her in-laws and located on their land. She has completed an associate degree in medical records at the regional university, but has been unable to get a job. Her program did not include training in medical transcription which has worked against her as she has sought employment.

Two additional obstacles to employment are an unreliable vehicle and no telephone. Mrs. Turner explains that she can not afford both a phone and heat for her poorly insulated home. In fact, she runs out of heating oil regularly. This family has had long term experience with low income and government assistance programs. Her husband has had an unstable employment history of truck driving and factory work. She occasionally baby-sits to earn a little cash. A family income of \$10,000-\$15,000 includes welfare, child support, and food stamps. This family is presently living on the economic edge and seems trapped in that position. Mrs. Turner is virtually isolated from employment opportunities by the intersection of remote rural setting, the lack of transportation, and the inability to be in telephone contact with potential employers.

CONCLUSIONS

This conclusion is directed toward two audiences. The first is the audience that idealizes rural places and rural people. This perspective is found primarily in popular culture. The second audience is family scholars who universalize research about urban families to represent the experience of all families, both urban and rural. To the first, I point out that rural families are not immune to the family disruptions documented in urban families. To the second, I point out that while rural families, like urban families, experience economic stresses in the restructured economy, family adaptations occur in particular contexts. To the degree that rural residents experience a different set of opportunities and constraints than urban families, so must we expect the direction of family change to vary.

Popular culture presents romanticized and nostalgic images of rural life (Pederson 1992). Rural areas are frequently perceived to be locales that have been left behind in society's mad rush to the city. It is urban areas that have embraced individualism, consumerism, and advanced capitalism. Rural life is represented as a

bucolic alternative to the rat-race of urban living. Small towns and rural areas are assumed to be “family friendly” environments that are conducive to permanent marriage and continuous household arrangements (Seebach 1992). Nevertheless, I found substantial fluidity in the household arrangements of at least a third of this sample of rural families. Rural residence did not insulate these families from nontraditional family patterns including nonmarital births, cohabitation, and marital disruption. The idea that rural areas maintain a kind of *gemeinschaft* solidarity that includes marital permanence does not hold in this community.¹⁰

The economic transformations of recent decades have altered the context for family life in both urban and rural settings. While the specific sets of changes to urban and rural areas have differed, in both settings the environments for family life have become less hospitable. Families in multiple contexts--both urban and rural--have been found to be vulnerable to the economic strain that has accompanied the declining fortunes of many families. Both unemployment and underemployment have a destabilizing effect on nuclear families (Fernandez-Kelly 1990:185).

Many families in this rural community construct and maintain family life in a context of restricted economic opportunity and financial insecurity. The single largest category of employment in this county is retail trade. This county has 63% more retail employment than the U.S. totals [See Table 1.]. This category typically offers far lower earnings and fewer weekly hours than any other type of employment [See Table 2.]. The over-representation of retail employment means that higher wage categories of employment are under-represented in this county. The median family income in this locale is less than 70% of the median family income for the state of Michigan. The child poverty rate in this community is one and a half times the overall state rate. It is unsurprising that in this economically depressed research setting we would find

¹⁰Naples (1994) suggests that the social solidarity aspect of the agrarian ideology is associated with the presence of homogeneous social characteristics within a community.

considerable fluidity in family structure and household arrangements.

An important question to be considered is how these results compare to those of other research. I suggested previously that rural residence be considered an aspect of social location (p. 38). I contended that social opportunities are distributed unequally by spatial location and that rural residence may create unique contexts for family life.

In this research, all sample mothers are either currently or previously married. The first marriages of over a third of sample mothers (38%, or 11 of 29) ended in divorce, but nearly three-quarters of them have remarried. Finding that approximately one-third of married couple families in this sample are made up of remarried couples is significant. The median age of sample women is 33; the median age of sample men is 34. All households have a second or third grade child. In this sample of young families, marital relationships have been fragile, yet most divorced sample women have remarried. Marriage is generally viewed as a status of decreasing significance to women (Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton 1998). These data suggest that the particular characteristics of this rural setting may create a context in which marriage continues to hold advantages for women and men. These issues will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

This chapter examined the structure of families and the configuration of households in this sample of families with young children. I suggested in the introductory section of this chapter that the structural conditions in place in rural areas might lead us to expect that many rural families would experience substantial fluidity, but that fluidity might be less visible than was actually the case as a result of a high rate of remarriage. I found that categorizing sample families by marital status did indeed frequently obscure marital transitions and household composition changes. While 77% of families were married couples, only 37% of sample families had the marital history and household structure to fit the definition of modern nuclear families. Clearly the assumption cannot be made that “married couple family” equals “modern nuclear

family.” In this analysis, less than half [eleven of twenty-three (48%)] of married couple households could be categorized as modern nuclear families. These results point to the conceptual pitfall of theorizing about “families” quite apart from history and context. The conclusions to which an a-contextual analysis brings us are likely to be both simplistic and inaccurate. Children do not merely live in families of one of two generic types, married-couple or single-parent, but in family households shaped by particular histories and circumstances, and constructed in a multiplicity of different ways.

This analysis leads me to conclude that the use of marital status data is, by itself, of limited utility to family scholars as an indicator of family stability and marital permanence. That marital status has been used to indicate such, is, upon examination, surprising given how quickly it falls apart upon examination. It is possible that this situation reveals the continuing influence of the functionalist underpinnings of family sociology (Kingsbury and Scanzoni 1993). From a functionalist standpoint, the most important defining property of the family as a social system is its “tendency toward homeostasis or equilibrium” (Kingsbury and Scanzoni 1993:196). Doherty and his colleagues contend that theories for explaining family life are “creations of scholars who have particular conceptual lenses that are shaped by their socio-cultural context” (1993:17). Thus, what we find when we examine family life is significantly shaped by the categories that our pre-existing conceptual lenses have allowed us to bring into sharp focus. With a functionalist set of lenses, then, because families are viewed as fundamentally static, a one time snapshot in the form of marital status may be considered an appropriate indicator for answering the questions we have conventionally asked about family life.

These results call into question the vitality of the modern nuclear family ideal, what is often called the “Benchmark Family” (Kingsbury and Scanzoni 1993). Does this ideal continue to serve as a benchmark--a standard by which all families are

measured or judged--when so many families deviate from this standard? In a context in which so many families fail to measure up to the standard, do we observe the benchmark crumbling? At the societal level, cohabitation is increasing and becoming more respectable; the rates of both female-headed and male-headed family households are increasing; married-couple households with children are increasingly likely to be stepfamilies (Cherlin 1992). Chapter 7 takes up this line of inquiry as it explores how this sample of rural women account for continuity and change in their family lives. In that chapter I consider whether these women explain and interpret their experience with reference to the modern family ideal.

We do see that the benchmark is clearly under revision with respect to its stance on women's employment. The ideology of separate spheres posited breadwinner husbands and homemaker wives, thus discouraging married women from formal economic activity from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. But the decades since 1960 have seen a massive movement of U.S. women into the paid labor force. Dorothy Smith (1993) contends that the modern nuclear ideal, what she calls the "Standard North American Family," is now made up of a primary breadwinner husband and a wife who may be a secondary breadwinner, but whose major responsibility is care giver for husband and children. While my research focuses on the family structure aspects of the modern nuclear family, any change in family ideals is noteworthy. The revision with respect to women's employment represents something less than radical change, still it does illustrate that cultural ideals are responsive to changes in broad patterns of social organization.

Existing census categories were not constructed to facilitate the work of family sociologists in their analysis of contemporary family life. Providing data for social science research has never been a primary intended use of official statistics (Tickamyer 1996a). Tickamyer points out that despite theoretical and analytical breakthroughs, we remain tied to outdated census measures. Such measures impede our work and result in

research framed in terms of outmoded conceptualizations and categories. Tickamyer points to two deficiencies in statistics at the household level: distortions caused by normative definitions of families, and the conflation of family and household (1996a:16). The assumption that families are married couples with children who live in private households, or less frequently, single parents living with children in private households, has rendered largely invisible other family household configurations. Extended family households, multiple family households, cohabiting households, and other sub-family configurations may be underrepresented and misrepresented in analyses that center around a householder. Among the thirty families in this research sample, the two sub-families living in extended family households (McCullen, Smith) would probably not come into view in conventional analyses. The cohabiting households (Miller, Phillips) in the sample present a complex situation. If the women are the householders, that is, the individual in whose name the residence is owned or rented, such households would be categorized as female-headed family households. If their partners were the householders, the households would be categorized in one instance as a male-headed family household (Miller) [because the male partner's children live with him], and in the other case a male-headed nonfamily household (Phillips) [because the male partner has no one related by marriage, birth or adoption in the household]. This example illustrates well the inadequacy of present categories given the complexity of family experience.

I found tremendous diversity in the family lives of this sample of thirty families when using family history, household composition changes, residential moves, length of relationship, and employment stability as indicators of family continuity. I categorized family experience as high continuity, moderate continuity, and low continuity; this sample divided equally into thirds, with one third of sample families fitting each category of stability-fluidity. Clearly the children who sat together in second and third grade classrooms in this small rural school district went home to widely varied family

lives, ranging from highly stable to acutely fluid circumstances. Diversity exists not only in the construction of everyday family life at present, but extends to events over the course of their lives. Some children have experienced no major family changes, while others have adapted to a series of transitions including cohabiting partnerships that began and ended, new stepfathers, step-siblings, and half-siblings. In many cases children have never moved, others have moved repeatedly, up to eleven times.

The relationship between family continuity and social class will be explored in depth in the following chapters. Consideration of family continuity and change cannot be separated from a family's social location. It is immediately clear from Table 4 that higher income family households are concentrated in the high continuity category while lower income family households are concentrated in the low continuity category. Subsequent analysis considers how social class position shapes family life.

Chapter 5

RELATING FAMILY CONTINUITY AND CHANGE TO SOCIAL CLASS

The second primary research question of this study centers on the relationship between social class, household arrangements, and the maintenance of family life. Attention to social class follows from “the premise that families are divided along structural lines that shape their form and dynamics” (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:23). The previous analysis divided families into high, moderate, and low continuity groups. Higher income families were clearly overrepresented in the high continuity category and lower income families were clearly concentrated in the low continuity category.

This chapter divides families into social class categories and examines systematically the distribution of family continuity and change by social class. In Chapter 6, I explore social class variation in how families construct and maintain family life in this rural community. The differentiation of household strategies by social class is the focus of that chapter. Chapter 6 also explores patterns of social support, family stressors and family changes by social class categories. The present chapter is divided into the following sections: an introduction to the research question; a discussion of the division of the sample by social class; an analysis of patterns of continuity and change in household arrangements by social class; and finally, conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

Studying families through the lens of social class

The second research question focuses on how household arrangements and family life vary by social class. It is unsurprising that even a cursory look at the data

would point to the association of family continuity and social class position. Both the structural inequalities literature and the family process literature cited in Chapter 2 lead us to expect it will be more difficult to maintain family life among lower social classes. One of the theoretical premises that guides this research is that families are socially constructed. The supports, connections, and resources that maintain family life differ by social class position. Relative to working class families, middle class rural families will be expected to be somewhat cushioned from the effects of economic transformation. They are able to maintain normative family patterns and structures by their more stable, relatively high wage base, and also by their access to nonfamilial institutions [Rapp (1978) 1992]. Newman's (1988) work illustrates well that middle class families are not immune to the effects of restructuring. But it also demonstrates that families with property, savings, and good credit may have several years in which to try to reestablish their status after experiencing economic setbacks.

Poor and working class rural families are likely to be less able to sustain a married couple family form. The economic restructuring of rural space has lowered the quality of male employment. Men have increasingly been drawn into marginal, seasonal, and informal economy work (Fitchen 1991). Economic distress has a destabilizing effect on family life. Lillian Rubin's (1994) recent study of working class families, both racial ethnic and White, demonstrates that economic deprivation creates tensions and uncertainties that disrupt family life. Billingsley (1992) contends that the two-parent family form is closely connected to the industrial era; in this postindustrial era, traditional family arrangements become increasingly difficult to maintain as families make difficult adaptations to a reconfigured economy.

The interrelationship of race, class, and gender

Social class is just one of the systems of stratification in U.S. society that shapes the context for family life. A social constructionist perspective finds families to be

created in the context of a particular social location. Social location takes into account one's position in society based on race and gender hierarchies in addition to social class, and may include other social characteristics as well (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999). This concept of social location is valuable because it considers the multiple stratification systems in society that distribute opportunity and privilege unequally. A family's social location will affect the way it is influenced by material, political, and economic circumstances. Differing social locations will be expected to produce families configured in different ways (Baca Zinn 1990).

This sample is racially homogeneous, that is, entirely White. Racial homogeneity is unsurprising given the Whiteness of the rural Midwest. Regional census data show that while the Midwest's population was 87% White in 1990, the Midwest's nonmetro population was 96% White in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992b). The effects of restructuring have clearly been shown to have hit racial minorities harder than Whites (Jensen and Tienda 1989, Billingsley 1992, Ortiz 1996). Rubin's (1994) recent study documents the effects of massive social and economic transformations on family life. Working class life--among both Whites and racial minorities--is characterized by job insecurity, a declining standard of living, and fragile marriages. But Rubin finds the effects of restructuring to be differentiated by race. White families have the clear but largely unrecognized advantage of membership in a privileged racial category. As stated by one of her Black interviewees, "Poor and white; it's a big difference" (1994:229).

Inequalities of gender shape the economic foundation on which family life is constructed. Rural women encounter significant labor market constraints which result in higher poverty rates and lower wages than urban women. A primary way in which women's economic disadvantage influences family life is when women head families and are sole adult earners. This research considers how the presence of a single earner who is female shapes family life.

ESTABLISHING SOCIAL CLASS AMONG SAMPLE FAMILIES

This research uses a modified neo-Marxian model of social class because it captures fundamental differences between classes that are relevant to this analysis.¹¹ This conceptualization is a relational model that points to the unequal power positions of the social classes. The principal distinction between the middle class and the working class is important. Middle class families have a family member who has administrative, professional, or managerial employment (Higginbotham and Weber 1992). These workers may be conceptualized as “order givers” while working class workers are conceptualized to be “order takers” (Collins 1988).

A neo-Marxian conception of social class incorporates a large segment of the white-collar workforce, for example, secretaries and clerks, into the working class. Under this model, a majority of the U.S. labor force comes to be defined as working class. [Vanneman and Cannon estimate that 70 percent of the labor force was working class in 1980 (1987:13).] White-collar clerical, technicians, salespersons, and craft workers are seen as working class because they have control over neither other workers nor their own work lives (Vanneman and Cannon 1987:11). Working class families may have incomes as high as middle class families, nevertheless their support structures and opportunity structures are generally less reliable than those available to the middle class.

I divide this sample into the middle class, the working class, and the poor. Because the sample is predominately working class, I subdivide the working class sample by family income categories to capture variation within this class.¹² Intra-class

¹¹Elaboration of this social class model and the rationale for its use are found on pages 39-41.

¹²In making this division by income, I have, strictly speaking, incorporated an aspect of a Weberian model of social class. Income is generally a defining feature of a Weberian social class model, but is not for a neo-Marxian model.

income differentials create multiple contexts for family life. A working class family with a \$45,000 annual income constructs and maintains family life on a substantially different material base than does a working class family earning \$20,000 annually. Further, higher income working class families are more likely to have primary sector employment which provide sick pay, good health insurance, and paid vacation in addition to higher wages.

Results

This sample of families divides into social class categories as follows: four families (13%) are middle class, seventeen (57%) are working class, and nine (30%) are poor. Table 5 indicates the distribution of sample families by social class. The four middle class families (Cole, Kennedy, Williams, Schram) are designated as such on the basis of the kind of work that they do and their sector of employment. Teaching on both the college (Cole) and public elementary school (Kennedy) levels is considered professional employment. Mr. and Mrs. Williams own a restaurant in addition to Mr. Williams' high paid employment. The primary earner in the Schram family is Mr. Schram who is a transportation supervisor for the public school system.

[Table 5 about here]

Seventeen families are categorized as working class. I subdivided the working class group by family income, using \$30,000 as the division point. Seven working class families have incomes higher than \$30,000 annually, and ten working class families have incomes lower than \$30,000 annually. The \$30,000 figure approximates median family income in the community. The median family income for the school district was \$25,405 in 1990. Sample families provided income data for 1994 and 1995, by which time wages would have risen above the 1990 level.

Table 5
Social Class Profile of Sample Families (n=30)

Family	Annual income	Income supports how many?	Occupation male/female
<i>Middle class n=4</i>			
Cole	>\$45,000	4	professor part-time dietician
Kennedy	>\$45,000	5	carpenter teacher
Williams	>45,000	4	self-employed contractor restaurant owner
Schram	>45,000	4	transportation supervisor part-time school bus driver
<i>Working class n=17</i>			
<i>Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000</i>			
Nichols	>\$45,000	3	masonry court reporter
Molloy	>\$45,000	4	telephone co. switchman part-time nursing home kitchen
Olsen	>\$45,000	6	computer drafting part-time registered nurse
Collins	\$40-45,000	5	auto body repair school bus driver
Mannelli	\$40-45,000	5	printer homemaker
Walsh	\$35-40,000	4	diesel mechanic clerical worker
Davis	\$30-35,000	6	diesel mechanic student
<i>Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000</i>			
Rogers	\$25-30,000	4	factory work factory work
Griffin	\$25-30,000	5	factory assembly homemaker (disabled)
Davenport	\$25-30,000	6	unemployed/informal work factory work
Phillips	\$25-30,000	6	concrete construction homemaker
VanDyke	\$20-25,000	3	factory machinist homemaker (disabled)

Table 5 (cont'd.)

Edwards	\$20-25,000	4	mechanic part-time school bus aide
Cooper	\$20-25,000	4	service work factory work
Shoemaker	\$20-25,000	4	factory supervisor homemaker (factory temp.)
Norris	\$20-25,000	4	trencher waitress
McCullen	\$10-15,000	3	factory work
<i>Poor n=9</i>			
Patterson	\$15-20,000	6	excavation (self-employed) homemaker
Newman	\$15-20,000	6	factory work homemaker
Smith	\$15-20,000	6	garbage route driver homemaker (disabled)
Roberts	\$10-15,000	2	part-time retail scanner
Watson	\$10-15,000	3	hair stylist (self-employed)
Miller	\$10-15,000	3	clerical - bank
Campbell	\$10-15,000	4	self-employed/postal (seasonal) homemaker (disabled)
Morgan	\$10-15,000	4	factory work
Turner	\$10-15,000	4	unemployed (babysitting)

Attribution to the category of the poor was done on the basis of the 1994 and 1995 U.S. government poverty thresholds (as provided by the U.S. Department of the Census) and family size. Official poverty thresholds are thought by many researchers to be set too low. For example, Jencks contends that poverty thresholds approximate the lowest level at which families are able to live independently, and actually underestimate poor families' needs by around twenty five percent (1997:xvi). In this study, families whose income was less than 1.25 of the official poverty threshold were considered to be poor. In the case of cohabiting or extended family households, however, a factor of 1.10 was used to account for economies of scale. Income data from two sources were used in calculating poverty status. At one point in the survey, respondents chose an income category corresponding to their previous year's (1994) total family income. This income category was cross-checked with information from another part of the survey which asked the current hourly wage and hours worked per week for both respondents and their spouse or partner. Further, respondents were asked about the receipt of child support, alimony, or government assistance. When the respondent's current income picture did not correspond to the 1994 selected income category, their current income level was used when attributing poverty status. On this basis, nine families are categorized as poor. Eight of nine families are working poor; the one exception is a separated woman who is unemployed and looking for work.

Using this objective standard for measuring poverty, Norma McCullen and her children, with an income of less than \$15,000, are categorized as lower income working class. This family seems misplaced by any subjective measure of poverty. Norma says she is unable to support her children in an independent household on her income and now lives in an extended family household. It is this housing decision and my use of a 1.1 multiplier in assessing poverty status that puts her in the lower income working class rather than in the category of poor families.

This analysis finds a high incidence of poverty in this study sample--nearly one-

third of sample families are poor. The question arises as to whether this sample is substantially poorer than the population in the research site. Using data from the 1989-1990 School District Data Book (State of Michigan), we find that 27.5% of school district children between the ages of 3 and 19 lived in households with income below the poverty line. This rate is 53% higher than the 1990 poverty rate of 18% for all Michigan children ages 3-19. In fact, the poverty rate has fallen in the county since 1990, but because I use a 1.25 multiplier of the official poverty rate as better capturing the population of children who experience serious economic constraints, finding 30% of sample children to be poor is not unexpected.

What is perhaps unexpected is finding that five of nine (56%) poor families in this category have male earners (Patterson, Newman, Smith, Roberts, Campbell). This finding points to the poor quality of employment available to both women and men in this area. Generally, we think of White children in two parent families as not very vulnerable to poverty due to the relatively high levels of White male earnings. For children living with two parents, only 8.7% of Michigan children who lived in households in which only their father was in the labor force were poor in 1990. The poverty rate of 8.7% is for children of all races; the poverty rate for the White subgroup would be expected to be lower. In the rural, almost entirely White school district that is the site of this research, however, 32.4% of children living in two parent families in which only their fathers are employed were poor.

The poverty rate for the same group of children looks very different when both parents are in the labor force. When school district children live in two parent families in which both parents are employed, only 5.7% were poor. The contrast is much less dramatic on a state-wide basis, where we find a 3.5% poverty rate for children in two parent families in which both parents are employed, as compared to 8.7% when only the father is employed. Among sample families, we find that none of the families with two earners are poor. The category of the poor is made up entirely of married couple

families with a wage-earning father or stepfather (n=4) and single parent families (mother-only families, n=4, father-only families, n=1). These poverty data illumine the economic constraints that rural residence imposes on sample families. For these rural families, it is multiple earners, rather than male earnings, that can be counted on to insulate families from poverty. Looking ahead to the discussion of household strategies later in the next chapter, adding earners will be expected to be a primary economic strategy among these families.

Methodological notes

Poverty thresholds are set in reference to two main factors: family income and family size. When considering the poverty status of four families with unconventional household arrangements, a difficult methodological issue arose. In the case of cohabiting households (Miller, Phillips) and extended family households (McCullen, Smith), should poverty status be calculated on the basis of total household or subfamily resources (and correspondingly, total household or subfamily size)? Were these households income pooling and income sharing units or were they not? In three of four cases, households did not pool income. I discovered that the most significant question to ask when considering poverty status was this: Who has access to, or use of, a particular earner's resources? This finding explains one of the differences between Table 4 and Table 5. Both tables have a column that lists family income, but Table 4 has a household size column while Table 5 asks how many persons are supported by that family income. The information in Table 4 is directed toward understanding the household arrangements in the sample, while the information in Table 5 is oriented toward understanding the social class location of sample families.

In both extended families and in one cohabiting household (Miller, McCullen, Smith), "family income" meant "sub-family income" and not "total family household income." For these respondents, family and household are not the same thing. A

family is an economic unit in which resources are shared between parent(s) and children, but residential arrangements are more utilitarian. In the cases of these families, when asked, "Who lives in your household?", the respondents list all household members including, as the case may be, a cohabiting partner, a mother, or a sibling. When asked to list hours worked and wages for one's self and husband/partner, respondents do so. But when asked total family income, these respondents include only sub-family earnings. In these three households, income is not pooled and then redistributed according to need.

In the case of Robin Miller, this divorced mother of two remains completely responsible for providing for her own children. She and her cohabiting partner share household expenses such as the payment on the trailer and the utilities, but go no further than that monetarily. When this mother is unable to pay for some of the things her children need, she asks her former husband for assistance, and does not assume her current partner will help. In the case of Norma McCullen, this divorced mother and her two children live in an extended family household with her mother and stepfather. She says she "couldn't afford to live on her own," and that "her mother was about to lose her house," so she and her children moved in and pay rent. Their residential arrangement represents an adaptive economic strategy for all involved, as the respondent apparently pays rent at a lower than market rate and her mother is now able to make her house payment. But Norma remains responsible for providing for herself and her children. She commutes 35 miles to the metro center to earn \$8.30 an hour in a furniture making factory, and reports that her check is consumed entirely by paying for babysitting, car expenses, and rent. Child support checks pay for children's clothing and a McDonald's meal once a week.

Alternatively, in the remaining case of unconventional household arrangements, members of one cohabiting couple do pool income. This household situation is, however, unique among sample families. The Phillips household consists of a twenty-

five year old woman, her four children ages 9, 7, 4, and 3, and her forty-five year old cohabiting partner. Of all sample families, Shelly Phillips and her children have experienced the greatest number of family discontinuities, and arguable, the most difficult family lives. The financial situation of this mother and her children has been very precarious. She is separated from the father of her two youngest children. Before her boyfriend moved in with her, she was entirely dependent on welfare and on child support from the three men who are fathers to her children. Very little child support has ever been paid; the father of her eldest son, the target child in this study, has never paid child support. This young woman has an eighth grade education and has not found employment to be compatible with family responsibilities. She finds the demands of parenting to be quite overwhelming. She has been raising four children on less than \$10,000 a year. In response to a survey question that asked respondents to describe the change in their families' overall financial condition over the past three years, she reports that it is "much better," and attributes the change to the fact that she "separated and met a man who is willing to work and keep a job." Her partner works in concrete construction, earning \$10.00 an hour. The wide disparity in the economic resources of these partners helps explain why income pooling might be expected to occur in this situation, while it does not occur in either the other cohabiting arrangement or the extended family households. It is also important to point out that while this respondent currently shares her partner's income, her financial situation remains uncertain given the multiple meanings of cohabiting relationships. Some constitute a prelude to marriage, while others represent a relationship of convenience and still others are an alternative to marriage (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999). In their study of single mothers, Edin and Lein find that even after a cohabiting arrangement of several years, women "still believed the man and his money might disappear at any moment" (1997:145).

Returning now to the attribution of poverty status in cases that were less than clear cut, I took my cue from how individual interviewee's presented access to income

within their households. When sub-family units did not pool income on a household basis, they were poor if sub-family income was less than 1.10 of the poverty threshold for the size of the group that income supported. Thus, the Miller family is poor because this mother's earnings are less than 1.10 the poverty threshold for three persons, the number of persons her income supports. On the other hand, the Phillips family is not poor because the household is an income pooling unit, and the total household income is more than 1.25 the poverty threshold for six persons.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL CLASS AND FAMILY CONTINUITY

This analysis considers how viewing family continuity and change through the lens of social class illumines our understanding of the processes that shape and reshape contemporary households. These data point to a clear association of family continuity and social class in this sample. Table 6 divides families by social class and then categorizes families by their placement into high, moderate, or low continuity groups. The factors used in the previous chapter as indicators of family continuity were: number of residential moves, marital history, length of current relationship changes in household composition, and employment stability. To highlight variation in the household arrangements of sample families, two additional columns of data are included in Table 6. First is the marital history/current relationship status of each family. Second, this table indicates whether second and third-grade target children live with one or both parents.

[Table 6 about here]

Middle class families in this sample may be characterized as having uncomplicated marital histories and household arrangements. All middle class families

Table 6
Characteristics of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families (n=30)

Family	Continuity group	Marital history/ current relationship	Number of child's parents in household
<i>Middle class n=4</i>			
Cole	high	1st	2
Kennedy	high	1st	2
Williams	high	1st	2
Schram	high	1st	2
<i>Working class n=17</i>			
<i>Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000</i>			
Nichols	moderate	2nd	1
Molloy	high	1st	2
Olsen	low	2nd	1
Collins	high	1st	2
Mannelli	high	2nd	2
Walsh	moderate	1st	2
Davis	high	1st	2
<i>Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000</i>			
Rogers	high	1st	2
Griffin	moderate	2nd	2
Davenport	moderate	1st (uncon)	2
Phillips	low-acute	sep/coh	1
VanDyke	moderate	1st	2 (adopted)
Edwards	moderate	1st (uncon)	2
Cooper	high	1st	2
Shoemaker	low	2nd	1
Norris	low	2nd	1
McCullen	low	div	1
<i>Poor n=9</i>			
Patterson	low	1st (uncon)	1
Newman	low	2nd	1
Smith	moderate	1st (uncon)	2
Roberts	moderate	widowed	1 (adopted)
Watson	moderate	div	1
Miller	low	div/coh	1
Campbell	moderate	2nd	2
Morgan	low-acute	sep	1
Turner	low-acute	sep	1

are in the high continuity group. All of four couples have conventional first marriages. All of four target children live with both parents.

The working class is made up of seventeen sample families. Among these families, six (35%) are categorized as high continuity families, six (35%) are categorized as moderate continuity families, and five (29%) are categorized as low continuity families. Family income levels in this group range from \$10-15,000 to more than \$45,000. Because the range of economic resources in this social class is wide, families were divided into two income groups: ten families (59% of the working class) have incomes lower than \$30,000; seven families (41% of the working class) have incomes greater than \$30,000. Such a division allows for an income-based analysis of the range of continuity and fluidity in the working class segment of this sample.

Among the seven families in the higher income subgroup of the working class, four (57%) are categorized as high continuity families, two (28%) are categorized as moderate continuity families, and one (14%) is categorized as a low continuity family. This subgroup is made up of four couples (57%) with conventional first marriages, and three couples (43%) in remarriages. Of the three remarriages, two families are stepfamilies and the third is made up of a mother who has a previous marriage, but is married to the target child's father. Five of seven (71%) of these children live with both parents.

Among the ten families in the lower income subgroup of the working class, two (20%) are categorized as high continuity families, four (40%) are categorized as moderate continuity families, and three (30%) are categorized as low continuity families. This subgroup is made up of three couples (30%) with conventional first marriages, two couples (20%) with unconventional first marriages, three couples (30%) in remarriages, one couple (10%) with a cohabiting arrangement, and one divorced single mother (10%). Both unconventional first marriages consisted of a nonmarital birth followed by marriage to the father of that child. Of the three remarriages, two

families are stepfamilies and the third is made up of a mother who has a previous marriage, but is married to the target child's father. The cohabiting couple consists of a mother who is separated from a man who is not the father of the target child and she is living with a man who is not the father of the target child. The divorced mother lives with her children in an extended family household. Six of ten (60%) of these children live with both parents.

Nine sample families are poor. Among poor families, none are categorized as high continuity families, four (44%) are categorized as moderate continuity families, and five (56%) are categorized as low continuity families. Family income levels in this group range from \$10,000 to \$20,000. None of the poor families are couples with conventional first marriages. Two couples have unconventional first marriages, two couples are in remarriages, two mothers are separated, one mother is divorced, one father is widowed, and one couple has a cohabiting relationship. Of the two unconventional first marriages, one mother had three nonmarital births and created a stepfamily by marrying the man who is the father of her youngest child. The other mother had a nonmarital birth and subsequently married the child's father; this family currently lives in an extended family household. Of the remarriages, one family is a stepfamily, and in the other case, the mother had a previous marriage, but is married to the target child's father. The cohabiting couple consists of a divorced mother who with her children shares a household with a divorced father and his children. Two of nine poor children (22%) live with both parents.

These data point to a clear relationship between social class and family continuity. Moving downward through the class structure, we find a pattern of increasing complexity and discontinuity in family structure and household arrangements among these sample families. All middle class children live with both parents while 22% of poor children live with both parents. All middle class families embody the modern family ideal of nuclear structure and permanence. None of the poor families

embody this cultural ideal. Working class families fall between the two ends of the spectrum, with the lower economic status subgroup showing somewhat more complexity in family arrangements.

These data raise a significant question: does family poverty occur as a result of changes in family structure and household arrangements? This data set does not include longitudinal income data, but interviewees did talk about their employment histories and use of welfare over the lifetime of their child. In most cases it is possible to determine whether household changes precipitated a sharp economic decline into poverty or whether poverty occurred among families that had already experienced spells of poverty prior to the alteration of household arrangements.

Of the five poor or nearly poor single mother families (Morgan, Miller, Turner, Watson, McCullen,) four experienced spells of poverty prior to the break-up of the marriages.¹³ The experience of Bonnie Morgan and Norma McCullen is similar. Both grew up on welfare, neither graduated from high school, both used welfare for a number of years while married, and both now have factory jobs; Bonnie's family is working poor; Norma's income is slightly more than poverty level. Robin Miller divorced an abusive, unemployed husband and now does clerical work for a bank; the family is working poor. Dorothy Turner, a separated woman who is currently unemployed, has been married to a man with an unstable work history. The family has used welfare during his bouts of unemployment. This family has experienced spells of poverty in the past, but her inability to get a job has resulted in acute economic need; this respondent describes their financial situation as much worse off than in recent years. Among these five single mothers families, only Colleen Watson's family has experienced a precipitous decline in income. This woman divorced an alcoholic husband and now struggles to earn enough as a self-employed hair stylist to support her

¹³I include Norma McCullen whose income falls just above poverty level in this discussion of the relationship between marital disruption and poverty.

children and maintain their large, well-furnished home. She describes their financial condition over the past three years as “much worse” due to the divorce. This family was accustomed to a middle class lifestyle and now lives on \$10-15,000 a year.

The remaining poor families have a male breadwinner. None of the men who support these families has more than a high school education. This analysis reveals that two women who had been poor single parents remain poor, but have marginally improved their families’ economic status by marriage. Lynn Patterson, with a seventh grade education and three nonmarital births, was on welfare long-term. Her family’s financial condition improved when she married the father of her youngest child. This family is still poor, but relatively better off; they no longer receive government assistance. Patty Newman and her children likely became poor when she and her first husband, who was in the military, separated. She remained on AFDC until she remarried. Her husband earns \$6.00 an hour and they continue to receive food stamps and WIC, but she reports that she and her children are better off than before.

The remaining three families continue to be poor, despite men’s work efforts to support their children. In two cases, families experienced an economic slide with the loss of factory employment. David Roberts commuted to a factory job in the metro center for eight years, then took a year off to “do craft shows” with his wife. Since then, he has only found employment as a part-time retail scanner at \$5.80 an hour. The recent death of his wife has also meant the loss of income from selling crafts. Kimberly Sue Campbell is in a remarriage of twelve years. She reports that her husband worked in a factory up to four years ago, but was injured in an auto accident and lost his job because he could no longer do the required lifting. Since then they have operated a lawn mowing business and have had earnings at the level of \$10-15,000 for the past several years. At the time of the interview, Mr. Campbell was working in the metro center as a seasonal postal worker. In the final case, low earnings and large family size result in family poverty. Andrea Smith grew up in a working

poor family and dropped out of high school in the tenth grade. She had a nonmarital birth at age eighteen, later married the child's father, and then had three more children. She has limited intellectual capacity, and as such, restricted employment prospects; she describes herself as someone who was always "special ed." This family of six has had difficulty living in a nuclear family household on the husband's earnings of \$8.50 an hour as a garbage route driver; they have lived in extended family households three times over the course of their marriage.

To conclude, poor families in this sample are made up of two groups of earners: four single mothers and five fathers or stepfathers who cannot, as sole breadwinners, support their families above the level of poverty. Included in this group are three workers (Mrs. Turner, Mr. Campbell, Mr. Smith) who commute to the metro center. Seven of nine poor families have a full-time worker. Tickamyer and Duncan (1990) found rural labor markets to be characterized by marginal secondary sector employment. The experience of women and men in this rural Michigan study is consistent with their conclusion. Clearly, in this labor market, full time employment for either women or men does not predict economic well-being for a family.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis finds a clear relationship between social class and family continuity. All middle class sample families are in the high continuity group while no poor sample families are in the high continuity group. This analysis also finds a relationship between social class and nuclear family structure. All middle class sample families are conventional nuclear families, while none of the poor families fit that model. This research, based as it is on a multi-class sample, points to social class as an important factor in the differential ability of families to maintain nuclear structure and continuous household arrangements. These data support a theoretical perspective of

family households as socially constructed in particular social locations. By this perspective, varying social contexts will produce a diversity of family configurations (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999).

These results point to the utility of the social class model used in this research. This social class model is valuable because it allows us to link social class to particular contexts that have been shown to be disruptive to family relationships. It is the stability and greater security of their employment that gives the middle class greater control over the economic aspects of their family lives than is the case among the working class and the poor. So, for example, secondary sector factory workers are laid off when orders are slow, while plant managers remain on the job and on the payroll. It is then working class families that experience a time of economic distress, a situation that social science literature has very clearly associated with lower levels of marital and family satisfaction (Voydanoff 1990). The economic distress literature finds a strong relationship between economic instability and family instability; marital conflict frequently increases as partners become hopeless, depressed, or hostile in the face of financial hardship (Conger et al. 1990, Voydanoff and Donnelly 1988). It is the very defining characteristics of social class that are suggestive of whether a particular family will have a tendency toward family continuity or fluidity. If we describe working class and poor families as those with less control and more susceptibility to economic insecurity, then we are also pointing to them as families more likely to have fluid family arrangements. It follows from this conceptualization of social class that the relations of class construct vulnerability in working class and poor families. Families with less control must be adaptable to a degree that families with more control will not require. Families with less control will require strategies that will not be needed in families with greater control over the economic aspects of their lives. The range of family and household adaptations found among families with less control have been documented in a number of studies, including Stack 1974, Wilson 1987, and Stacey

1991).

These data suggest that the restructured rural economy produces considerable family fluidity. Family continuity and change is in this sample closely associated with social class position. This rural labor market does support a middle class population of conventional nuclear families with continuous household arrangements. This restructured rural economy provides a resource base for families that is increasingly both meager and unstable as we move down through the social class structure. Among poor families we find increasing marital disruption and household flexibility as families react to and adapt to economic strain. These findings are consistent with both the structural inequalities and the economic distress literature.

These data point to the variable distribution of social opportunities by spatial context. In analyzing whether women become poor with the transition to female-headed household status, Bane (1986) distinguishes between “reshuffled” and “event-driven” poverty. Bane points out that the economic impact of family structure changes differs by race. Her analysis finds that White women are much more likely to experience “event driven” poverty; 76% of White female householders who were poor, became poor with the transition from a male-headed to a female-headed household. Black women are much more likely to experience “reshuffled” poverty; 28% of Black female householders who were poor, became poor with the transition from a male-headed household to a female-headed household.

Bane’s findings point to the wide divergence in the economic standing of the Black and White populations in this society. Yet in this analysis of a rural White sample, we find that nearly all the female respondents that are currently poor or near poor, and the men involved in relationships (both past and present) with them, have been poor or near poor for a considerable time. Among the five poor or nearly poor single mother families, only one experienced a dramatic decline from middle income to poverty-level income with separation or divorce. Others were already poor, nearly

poor, or had had a recent spell of poverty. While these data do not allow for a precise quantification of rates of “reshuffled” and “event driven” poverty, I find more reshuffled poverty among these White women than did Bane. This finding may reflect the particularities of this small sample. However, it is more likely that this situation describes the family realities of a community which has a high rate of family poverty. The potential for reshuffled poverty is, of course, greater when more married-couple families are already poor. These results draw attention to the limited structure of economic opportunity in rural America. The nonmetropolitan White population is poorer than the metropolitan White population. Rural restructuring has resulted in a decline in the quality of employment opportunities (Tickamyer 1996). Workers, both men and women, without advanced educational credentials find little other than marginal employment with flat wage scales. Male earners as well as female earners struggle to support their families above poverty level. These data suggest that rural residence, like urban residence, creates distinctive patterns of opportunities and constraints for families.

In this study, the unanticipated finding with respect to gender is how low earnings are for a subsample of male breadwinners. Social researchers generally assume that they will find women’s earnings to be lower than men’s earnings. Women currently earn approximately \$.76 for every dollar earned by men. This pattern reflects differentials in educational attainment and experience as well as gender discrimination. Finding that all single mothers in this sample who live with their children in independent households are poor is not entirely surprising. Existing literature documents both that rural women are segregated into gender-typed work and that wage scales for rural women are low. U.S. Census data indicate that single father households have substantially higher income than do single mother households.¹⁴ But in

¹⁴In 1995, median income for female householder families was \$19,691; median income for male householder families was \$30,359 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1997).

this sample, that differential by gender does not exist at the lower end of the employment structure for men. The single father in this sample earns less than the employed single mothers. This man is frustrated by his inability to find full time work that pays a living wage. He and his daughter benefit by relatively generous social support in the form of Survivor's Insurance. Although this sample contains only one case of a single father, several other low wage men in the sample would also be economically vulnerable if they became single parents. Studies of women's economic status frequently note women's economic well-being is dependent on their husband's earnings. Low earnings or low earnings potential makes women vulnerable to poverty in case of marital disruption. An important corollary to that generalization is that economic restructuring has created a context for employment in which the economic status of employed men may also be precarious.

Finding substantial family fluidity among this sample does contradict widely-held myths that rural areas are populated by strong and stable families. Coontz (1992) points out that historical support for nostalgic myths about rural family life is difficult to actually locate in time and space. Nevertheless it is significant to remember that rural society was until recently primarily agrarian. The majority of households in rural areas were involved in family farming until the 1940s (Buttel et al. 1993). Farm families are significantly more likely to be of the married-couple type than are rural nonfarm families (Albrecht and Albrecht 1996). The association of rural areas and permanent marriage is rooted in the memory of a time when rural areas were dominated by family farms. The present reality is that the rural population is largely nonfarm. The social organization of farming, with its interpenetration of work and family, promotes marital permanence. Alternatively, in a nonfarm population as is this research sample, the separation of work from the household means that partner relations are easier to dissolve. Varying rates of married couple households have structural roots. The fact that this sample is a nonfarm population may explain some of

the variance between rural myths and the family structure realities of this sample.

THESIS

4

1979

MICHIGAN STATE LIBRARIES



3 1293 01820 0166

LIBRARY
Michigan State
University

PLACE IN RETURN BOX to remove this checkout from your record.
TO AVOID FINES return on or before date due.
MAY BE RECALLED with earlier due date if requested.

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE
MAY 30 2001 03 27 01	SEP 04 2001 08 15 01	JUN 04 2002 01 18 2002
JUL 22 2001 03 13 01	FEB 17 2002 01 19 2002	MAR 18 2002 07 13 04
JUL 12 2001 04 16 01	AUG 22 2002 09 17 02	JAN 19 2005
MAY 02 2001 09 17 02	OCT 09 2003 01 12 04	
MAY 18 2001 05 03 01	NOV 13 2006 07 28 10	

**FAMILY CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN A RESTRUCTURED ECONOMY:
A CASE STUDY FROM RURAL MICHIGAN**

VOLUME II

By

Barbara A. Wells

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Sociology

1999

Chapter 6

HOUSEHOLD STRATEGIES

This research uses the concept of household strategies to explore how sample families sustain themselves economically. It asks: what decisions do household members make and what actions do they take to make ends meet? The concept of household strategy is useful because it allows for an analysis of how household members respond--both deliberately and spontaneously--to their particular social and economic context. Moen and Wethington contend the concept is valuable because it “bridges the gap between social structure, social change, and individual lives” (1992:247).

Household strategies is a complex concept with multiple dimensions. Household strategies differ according to level of intentionality, goal orientation, and economic consequences. Household strategies vary, then, between conscious and unconscious, specific and general, and the degree to which they influence the economic status of households. In addition, household strategies occur in various socioeconomic contexts; the strategies of lower income families will necessarily be oriented toward household survival, while the strategies of higher income families may be oriented toward promoting economic well-being. The literature review in Chapter Two demonstrates that household strategies vary by social class. Davidson contends that how a household is situated in its broad socioeconomic context affects the strategies household members can and do adopt (1991:12). The work of Hareven (1987), Tilly (1979), Rapp [1992(1978)], and others supports this line of argument.

The term “household strategy” is frequently used interchangeably with several other terms: economic strategies, family strategies, household livelihood strategies, household adaptive strategies, and survival strategies. I differentiate between the term “survival strategies” and the other terms on this list. This distinction is based on the

definition of household strategies as actions and decisions all households, whether rich or poor, undertake. Household strategies may be oriented toward ends that are qualitatively quite different -- household survival as compared to maintenance of a high standard of living. To avoid confusion, I use "survival strategies" only to refer to actions and decisions undertaken in circumstances of economic strain. The household strategies of the poor might be referred to as survival strategies in this chapter, but the household strategies of the middle class would not be classified in this way because the middle class has moved beyond issues of providing for bare necessities. Previous analyses point to circumstances in which the survival strategies of sample families were unsuccessful, that is, they were no longer able to maintain their status as a separate household but had to double up with another household.

This analysis implements the concept of household strategies on two levels. First, I explore how parents bridge the gap between what they perceive to children's needs and available resources. I analyze interview responses to the direct question of how parents provide for their children's economic needs when it is difficult to do so. Second, I explore the broader question of how all sample families--middle class, working class, and poor families--manage to sustain their households economically. An important difference exists between these two analyses. The first analysis--that of interviewee accounts of their strategies to provide their child's necessities--is limited to what respondents say they do to get by. The second analysis--which looks for evidence of household strategies throughout the interviews--considers both what respondents say and also what they do. This analysis looks for implicit, unconscious, and unarticulated household strategies in addition to those described in a straightforward manner. To give an example, eleven sample families live in mobile homes. No respondent articulates that living in a mobile home is a residential strategy used by limited resource families to provide low cost housing. Yet living in a mobile home provides the opportunity for owner-occupied, single-unit, low-cost housing for people without the

financial wherewithal for home ownership. Living in a mobile home is clearly a important household strategy utilized by many sample families.

This chapter is divided into four main sections: first, an analysis of parent-identified survival strategies; second, a categorization and description of household strategies; third, an analysis of how the use of household strategies is differentiated by social class; and fourth, an overview and conclusions.

PROVIDING FOR CHILDREN IN ECONOMIC STRAIN: PARENT-IDENTIFIED STRATEGIES FOR HOUSEHOLD SURVIVAL

This analysis explores the specific household strategies parents use to meet the challenge of providing for their second or third grade child. The central questions are: what are the specific micro-level strategies these respondents identify as using to provide for their second or third grade child, and how do these differ by social class? This analysis examines the range of responses surrounding the following questions asked in the family interview:

“Do you ever find it difficult to pay for some of the things you feel your child should have? When you find it difficult to pay for child-related expenses, what do you do?” [Q I.1.a&b]

These questions ask what it is that parents do to provide for their children in circumstances of either objective or perceived economic strain. Parents’ responses fit into two broad categories: strategies related to resource generation and strategies related to consumption. These data point to a multiplicity of household strategies used to support families in this rural community. These data indicate the circumstances under which respondents conclude that supporting their children is not difficult. The data also indicate the circumstances in which sample parents conclude they are unable to provide adequately for their children.

Data and analysis

Table 7 and Appendix Table A show how interviewees responded to the above questions.¹⁵ Thirteen interviewees responded to the questions above by stating that they did not find it difficult to provide for their child's necessities. Respondents often replied that this was "no problem." This group is made up of all the middle class families (Cole, Kennedy, Williams, Schram), the five working class families with the highest incomes (Nichols, Molloy, Olsen, Collins, Mannelli), two lower-income working class families (Norris, Cooper), and two poor families (Watson, Roberts).

[Table 7 about here]

Among lower income households, the Norrises and Coopers are able to cover their children's needs by careful money management. Diane Norris explains that supporting their children is not difficult, first, because she is employed, and second, "[m]y husband is a tightwad so we don't spend anything we can't pay cash for and we don't spend for anything that we don't feel we need" (2071-2075). Julie Cooper and her husband strictly limit what they buy for their children and expect the children to use their allowances and money from grandparents for special purchases like books.

The responses of interviewees whose families are poor--Colleen Watson and David Roberts--are somewhat surprising given both their economic status and their responses to survey questions 15 and 16 [see Appendix A for survey questions]. These questions ask:

Q. 15. How difficult is it for your family to meet the monthly bills? [Response categories: extremely difficult; very difficult; somewhat difficult; slightly difficult; not at all difficult]

¹⁵Table 7 is a summary of responses by social class. Table A presents strategies identified in each of thirty interviews and is located in Appendix C.

Table 7

When you find it difficult to pay for child-related expenses, what do you do?
Percentage of Parents Identifying Strategies in Class-Based Groups (n=30)

	Not a problem	Resource generation strategies	Consumption-related strategies			Going without
			Cutting back/ substitution	Reallocation of cash	Budgeting	
<i>Middle class n=4</i>						
Total %	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<i>Working class n=17</i>						
<i>Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000</i>						
Total %	78%	14%	14%	29%	14%	0%
<i>Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000</i>						
Total %	20%	0%	40%	20%	20%	20%
<i>Poor n=9</i>						
Total %	22%	22%	44%	22%	33%	11%

Q. 16. To what extent is your income today enough for you and your family to live on? [Response categories: can not meet some necessities; can meet necessities only; can afford some of the things we want, but not all we want; can afford about everything we want; can afford about everything we want and have some left over]

Colleen Watson's responses to these questions indicate that it is "very difficult" to meet monthly bills and that income "can meet necessities" only. Her interview response does not seem to be compatible with her responses on the self-administered questionnaire. This incompatibility raises the possibility that her interview response may reflect an intention to give a socially desirable response. David Roberts indicates in the survey that it is "very difficult" to meet monthly bills, and he "can not buy some necessities." But his adopted daughter is somewhat insulated from this precarious financial condition by an institutional arrangement in the state of Michigan that provides a continuing subsidy to parents who adopt a special needs child. Her adoptive father reports that this subsidy provides medical and dental coverage as well as a stipend to cover her basic needs. In addition, since the recent death of her adoptive mother, this child receives Survivor's Insurance benefits from Social Security.

Other families showed greater consistency in their responses to this interview question [Q I.1.a&b] and their survey responses regarding the difficulty of paying monthly bill [Q 15] than did Colleen Watson and David Roberts. Table 8 shows responses to survey questions regarding the difficulty of paying monthly bills and income adequacy [Q 15 and Q 16 above] as well as indicating which research participants indicated that providing for children's necessities was "not a problem." The middle class families and the five highest earning working class families who related that providing for their children was not a problem, also indicated on the survey that it was "not at all difficult" to meet monthly bills. These questions used a Likert-type five-point scale. This table also presents mean scores by social class category or subcategory for Questions 15 and 16. Highest assessments of income sufficiency are

coded as “1;” lowest assessments are coded as “5.” Mean scores show that research participants assess their income to be increasingly insufficient as we move from highest to lowest social class categories.

[Table 8 about here]

Seventeen research participants describe what they did when it was difficult to pay for things they believed their children needed. When answering these questions, in most cases parents describe relatively short-term strategic adaptations, although in some cases respondents connect to the broad strategies they use to maintain their households. I divide survival strategies into strategies related to resource generation and strategies related to consumption.

Strategies related to resource generation

The three strategies represented in the data that are related to resource generation are working overtime, enlisting help from non-residential fathers, and using public assistance. Laura Davis says that her husband works overtime when the children need something their budget will not accommodate. Two single mothers [one divorced and cohabiting (Robin Miller), one separated (Dorothy Turner)] report that they try to get help from the fathers of their children. Both mothers receive child support, but still cannot make ends meet. Robin Miller says, “I ‘cry’ to their dad a lot.” She negotiates with her ex-husband to help cover extraordinary expenses. She explains that when her son wanted to join football,

It was thirty dollars for him to join. [She said to his father,] “Look, I need you to pay half. I can come up with half if you can come up with half. Okay, he needs shoes, I’ll buy ‘em for him.” [School] pictures we went half. A lot of stuff we go half. We have to. His dad is a big help financially. When it comes to stuff for them, even though he does pay child support, it’s not enough.

Table 8
Respondents' Assessments of Income Sufficiency
Responses of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families (n=30)

Family	<i>Int. Q 1.1.a&b</i> Not a problem	<i>Survey Q 15</i> Difficulty paying bills	<i>Survey Q 16</i> Income inadequacy
<i>Middle class n=4</i>			
Cole	x	not at all difficult	everything we want
Kennedy	x	not at all difficult	everything we want
Williams	x	not at all difficult	everything plus
Schram	x	not at all difficult	everything we want
Mean		1	1.75
<i>Working class n=17</i>			
<i>Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000</i>			
Nichols	x	not at all difficult	some wants, not all
Molloy	x	not at all difficult	everything we want
Olsen	x	not at all difficult	some wants, not all
Collins	x	not at all difficult	some wants, not all
Mannelli	x	not at all difficult	some wants, not all
Walsh		somewhat difficult	necessities only
Davis		slightly difficult	some wants, not all
Mean		1.29	3
<i>Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000</i>			
Rogers		slightly difficult	some wants, not all
Griffin		not at all difficult	some wants, not all
Davenport		very difficult	necessities only
Phillips		somewhat difficult	some wants, not all
VanDyke		somewhat difficult	some wants, not all
Edwards		slightly difficult	everything we want
Cooper	x	slightly difficult	some wants, not all
Shoemaker		-missing data-	some wants, not all
Norris	x	somewhat difficult	some wants, not all
McCullen		extremely difficult	necessities only
Mean		2.78	3.1

Table 8 (cont'd.)

Poor n=9

Patterson		slightly difficult	some wants, not all
Newman		somewhat difficult	some wants, not all
Smith		somewhat difficult	some wants, not all
Roberts	x	very difficult	can not buy necessities
Watson	x	very difficult	necessities only
Miller		somewhat difficult	necessities only
Campbell		somewhat difficult	some wants, not all
Morgan		somewhat difficult	some wants, not all
Turner		very difficult	some wants, not all
Mean		3.22	3.44

Dorothy Turner says that although she receives child support, she asks the husband from whom she is separated for as much additional help as he can give. She also reports that she depends on welfare, Medicaid, food stamps, and a state-sponsored heating assistance program to provide basic necessities for her children.

Strategies related to consumption

Interviewees most often answered these interview questions with consumption-related strategies. Consumption-related strategies take many forms. They can be categorized as cutting back and substitution, the temporary reallocation of cash resources, and budgeting. Cutting back and substitution involves finding ways to lower expenditures so children's needs can be met. Substitution involves using a lower cost alternative to a preferred form of a product or service. Cutting back or substituting occurred in the areas of food, clothing, entertainment, and school-related expenses.

Two mothers reported using food-related substitutions. Robin Miller purchases lower cost foods like hot dogs and macaroni and cheese when purchases such as children's shoes must be made. The Walsh family substitutes unpaid family labor for paid market-based labor. Tiffany refrains from buying expensive purchased snacks, but bakes every week instead. In addition the family raises their own chickens and pigs.

Diane Norris, Dorothy Turner, and Norma McCullen buy used clothing for their children. Shelly Phillips uses hand-me-downs for her children. Shirley Rogers buys lower quality clothing than she would like. She shops discount department stores (K-Mart) rather than higher quality department stores (Hudson's).

Interviewees described several ways of cutting back or substituting in the area of family entertainment. Many interviewees recognize that entertainment is a non-essential that can be cut back in times of economic strain. Dorothy Turner substitutes free library videos for renting videos. For the Griffins, cutting back means not renting new release videos, but waiting for them to go down to a \$1.00 rental fee.

Ruthann VanDyke reports that providing for their adopted daughter requires that she and her husband cut back on entertainment. For example, when their daughter needed boots, they decided not go out for pizza. This respondent outlines a series of substitutions that child-related expenses have brought them to. She states,

instead of getting together with friends and spending money to go bowling, we stay home and play cards with the same friends.

Then rather than spending money on the preferred snack: chips, dip, and soft drinks,

you buy a \$.79 bag of popcorn and pop popcorn enough for a whole army. You can sit and munch on popcorn and make a couple pots of coffee rather than buy a lot of pop. Or if you can find pop on sale somewhere so that it's under a dollar to buy a bottle of pop . . . , then you make the kids stretch it.

Kimberly Sue Campbell gives an example of a substitution for a school-related expense--school pictures. She explains,

[T]his year we wasn't able to afford the school pictures because they were quite high. So, we're going to take [the children] to K-Mart and get their pictures taken as a family and then some by themselves, so we have a picture of 'em which will be cheaper. So we planned it that way, you know.

The temporary reallocation of cash resources occurs when families engage in a strategy in which they say they "juggle the bills" or "finagle the bills." This strategy was reported as used by six families (Davis, Rogers, Shoemaker, Miller, Walsh, Newman), including the two higher-income working class families who had indicated some difficulty in providing for their children's necessities (Davis and Walsh). Laura Davis says that, if necessary, they use "bill money" to buy what the children need. Tiffany Walsh says that her family is "just making it" financially. She says,

I'm talking a fine line in just making ends meet. But it fluctuates, you know. We know when we have the house payment due . . . If there is something the kids need, then I'm on the phone saying, "Hey, I can't pay [some other bill] until next week . . ." It's just winging it (2901-2908).

Shirley Rogers explains that they had to buy winter coats for the children the week of the interview. Money was tight, so they would put off paying the electric bill

until next week. Robin Miller gives an account of how she strategizes to provide for her child: "He needs shoes, um, let's see. Well, if I skimp on this bill, maybe we can get your shoes in two weeks. I just make up the bill next month. That's pretty much how I do it. I finagle a lot (2263-2268)." When asked what she did when it was difficult to pay for things her children needed, Patty Newman says,

If it's a new pair of shoes, hey, no problem. If you need new shoes we get new shoes. We might have to let something slide here or there, but, we always somehow manage to get them what they need one way or another, without breaking any laws. With four kids, you've got to juggle. . . As long as the bills get paid, whether they're late or on time, what is the big stink? As long as my house payment is made and the electric bill payment is made, hey, we're all set as far as I'm concerned. The cable bill can slide, the garbage bill can slide for a while. Well, the car insurance really shouldn't [slide], but, you know, why bicker over it? We've either got it or we don't got it. (1848-1855, 1581-1592)

Budgeting is a broad and not very specific strategy that refers to efforts to stretch available resources to cover necessary expenditures. Sharon Edwards says that occasionally they have to "scrape a little bit." In those cases, "you just pinch a little harder, wait another week to save a little more" (901-903). Irene Shoemaker says that "you just eke it out a little tighter" (1753-1754). Lynn Patterson says that she "gets them what she can" (850). Andrea Smith indicates that she and her husband spread purchases out over several weeks in order to pay for everything. She reports that sometimes school personnel are critical that her children do not have winter clothing as soon as they believe appropriate. Bonnie Morgan figures out ways to "work around things." Often this means not buying things she needs for herself. She says, "I let a lot of my stuff go for my children. I mean, normal mothers do that. Some people don't figure that way, but I do" (1158-1162).

Going without

In three cases, respondents use the same words to indicate that they are not able, by whatever strategy, to provide for their children's needs. Nicole Davenport, Shelly Phillips, and Dorothy Turner say that their children regularly "go without." When asked what she does when she finds it difficult to pay for child-related expenses, Nicole answers as follows: "What do I do? They just, a lot of times they go without. You know, they need to eat more than have certain things. And have a place to live, survive." Shelly says that her children get lots of hand-me-downs, but "they usually end up going without" (995-996). Dorothy replies, "sometimes you go without" (1638).

Difficult circumstances have brought these women to acknowledge they cannot adequately provide for their children. Nicole Davenport is a mother of four who is currently the primary breadwinner for her family. Her husband's employment has been sporadic for several years. She experiences considerable work-family conflict and would like to quit her job. Shelly Phillips and her four children were living on between \$5,000 and \$10,000 a year before the recent beginning of a cohabiting relationship. In recent years she and her children have experienced severe economic deprivation along with numerous traumas including two house fires and the sexual abuse of her eldest son (the target child) by a male babysitter.

Dorothy Turner recognizes that even with child support, government assistance, and additional help from the husband from whom she is separated, she still can not provide a warm home for her children. She explains that they run out of fuel oil regularly during the wintertime. Sometimes this respondent uses turning off the heat as a strategy that allows her to buy immediate necessities. She says, "We go without heat for a week or something like that, because they had to have boots, you know, and stuff" (1644-1646). Later in the interview she comments on that strategy, "If you decide to go without [heat] and the house gets to be 50 degrees in the morning, you are

saying, 'You stupid buck, you know. Why did you choose that?'" (2106-2041).

This analysis allows us to conclude the following from these data: first, families with the highest incomes contend unequivocally that supporting their children is not difficult; second, families with lower income levels report utilizing numerous specific adjustments to provide what their children need. Interview responses bring human agency into view as parents exercise agency in what are usually specific micro-level contexts. Parents describe how they actively provide for their children by making particular choices and decisions. These survival strategies are usually oriented toward bridging the gap between available resources and funds to meet a specific goal.

Parents describe using a small and specific set of strategies for resource generation. Two divorced or separated mothers report appropriating additional resources from the fathers of their children, but neither they nor the other nine respondents with survival strategies indicate receiving assistance from other kin or nonkin sources. Only one respondent says she turns to institutional support to provide her children's necessities. A single employment strategy--working overtime--was named, and that by only one respondent.

These data suggest that research participants live in a context in which the economic responsibility for children is assumed to rest with parents. Women did not report that they could tap into extended family networks of economic support. Provision for children occurs within the household. In cases in which the child's father was absent from the household but involved in his children's lives, mothers asked former partners to contribute beyond the limits of court-ordered child support to meet children's needs. These results are consistent with focus group data from an earlier phase of the broad Strategies for Rural Children and Families research project. None of the low-income mothers participating in focus groups reported receiving substantial financial assistance from their extended families (Bokemeier et al. 1995). Women

could not depend on family help even if, for example, they were evicted from an apartment and parents had the financial means to help. These findings suggest that the ethic of self-sufficiency is very strong in this rural community. Chapter 7 explores women's perception regarding this subject.

In most cases parents say they strategize to provide for their children's necessities by juggling, substituting, and budgeting. In many cases the main issue is cash flow. Households that live paycheck to paycheck cannot finance extraordinary expenses such as three pairs of school shoes out of earnings from one pay period. Most families do quite well living within their often meager means. Respondents invest considerable energy planning to save approximately ten dollars on the annual expense of school pictures or three dollars at the video store. Yet these small-scale savings are important to these limited resource families. In other situations, however, parents cannot pull together the resources to provide for their children's needs. It is important to point out that parents who say their children "go without" are not parents who do not have strategies. Rather, their strategies do not bridge the gap between existing economic resources and necessities.

This analysis of parent-identified strategies points to another issue. A significant subset of sample families do not struggle to provide for their children. Table A [in Appendix C] is a visually stunning representation of the divergent family experience found within this sample. Middle class families and the top five earners in the higher income subgroup of the working class did not experience economic strain and thus provided no strategies for supporting children in times of scarcity. These families have successfully implemented another set of strategies--strategies by which they have achieved a higher level of economic stability and well-being. The next major section of this chapter explores the broad range of economic strategies used by all sample families to make end meet or promote economic well-being.

Finally, this analysis shows the varying environments for family life within this

small school district. Some research participants quickly dismissed the question of providing for their children in economic strain by saying it did not apply to them. This was simply not part of their experience. Lower income mothers gave detailed accounts of carefully conceived adaptive strategies. Some research participants invested considerable emotional, analytic, and physical energy in negotiating with former partners, phoning utility companies, and raising animals for meat. These parents sometimes had to come to terms with the difficult reality that they could not fulfill their parental role of providing for their children's needs. Bonnie Miller must tell her children that the only way she can see her way clear to buying a needed pair of winter boots is to turn off the heat for a week. Then they live in a cold home and try to keep a good attitude. The strains and disappointments built into a life of scarcity do not color the family lives of higher class sample families. Having resources to pay for necessities allows some families to avoid a set of difficult and potentially conflictual concerns. These data illustrate that social opportunities and constraints are distributed unequally by social class. Social class position certainly shapes the experience of family life for Robin Miller. If her son is going to be able to play football, she will need to approach her abusive former husband and negotiate with him to pay for part of the costs. A middle class mother simply writes a check.

MAKING ENDS MEET: STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING HOUSEHOLDS

The previous chapter section should not lead to the conclusion that a strategy is always a conscious plan or a clearly articulated method for achieving a difficult result. Such a conclusion would be erroneous. It is not only parents with limited resources that use economic strategies. Middle class and higher income working class families have also implemented strategies. Through a variety of strategic actions they have achieved a level of economic well-being that allows them to conclude that providing for

their children is not difficult. This chapter section goes beyond the previous analysis of parents' responses to a specific interview question to examine the broader question of how sample households manage to survive economically. I look for strategies both in what respondents say and in what their families do. Actions that are clearly economic strategies may go unspoken in the interview. For example, Rita Mannelli's husband commutes to the metro center for a job earning \$40-45,000 as a printer. She never says that her husband drives 55 miles to work because this rural community does not offer skilled, highly paid working class employment. Yet commuting to the metro center is a very successful economic strategy used by this family.

The strategies section is divided into four main parts: strategies related to resource generation, strategies related to consumption, network-based strategies, and residential strategies. While this analysis considers all categories of strategies, it focuses on the employment-related strategies used in this rural community. These strategies generally have the greatest effect on a household's economic well-being. It is frequently when employment strategies cannot be implemented or are inadequate that families turn to other categories of strategies.

Data and analysis

Strategies related to resource generation

Strategies related to resource generation fall into three main types: employment-related strategies (dual-earner households, commuting, working overtime, and moonlighting), informal economy work, and institutional assistance. Table 9 and Appendix Table B show the distribution of these strategies among this sample. Table 9 summarizes the use of strategies by social class category. Table B indicates how the use of these strategies is distributed on a family by family basis.

[Table 9 about here]

Table 9
Household Strategies for Resource Generation
Percentage of Parents Identifying Strategies in Class-Based Groups (n=30)

	<u>Employment-related strategies</u>				Informal economy	Institutional assistance
	Dual earner	Commutes	Overtime	Moonlighting		
<i>Middle class n=4</i>						
Total %	100%	25%	0%	50%	0%	0%
<i>Working class n=17</i>						
<i>Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000</i>						
Total	71%	86%	43%	0%	29%	0%
<i>Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000</i>						
Total %	40%	60%	50%	0%	30%	20%
<i>Poor n=9</i>						
Total %	0%	33%	22%	0%	44%	33%

Employment related strategies

This category of strategies refers to the decisions made and actions taken by families relative to formal labor force participation. Families encounter a range of options and choices related to employment. These data point to dual earning, commuting, working overtime, and moonlighting as economic strategies used by sample families.

Dual earner couples

In this sample, twenty-four of thirty families are either married couples or cohabiting couples sharing income. Table 10 shows the employment status of these couples. These couples have the option (at least theoretically) of deciding that either one or both adults will be in the labor force. In thirteen of twenty-four cases, both men and women have formal employment. In eight of the thirteen cases, both women and men work full-time. In the remaining eleven couples who have a single earner, ten women and one man do not have formal employment.

[Table 10 about here]

This group of sample women has a lower rate of labor force participation than do all U.S. women. Less than sixty percent of these women are in the labor force, while nearly three-quarters of all U.S. married women with dependent children are in the labor force (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:178-180). Women's employment is not generally something that interviewees explained. Rather, it is women who are full-time at home that explain why it is they are not employed. The ten women not formally employed are out of the labor force for several reasons. Three women (Kimberly Sue Campbell, Margaret Griffin, Ruthann VanDyke) have physical disabilities and one woman (Andrea Smith) is developmentally disabled. Three women (Patty Newman,

Table 10**Employment Status of Married Couples or Cohabiting Couples Sharing Income**

	n	%
Married couples or cohabiting couples sharing income		
Married couples	23	96%
Cohabiting couples sharing income	1	4%
Total	24	100%
Single earner couples	11	46%
Dual earner couples	13	54%
Total	24	100%
Dual earner couples		
Two full-time earners	8	62%
One full-time, one part time	5	39%
Total	13	100%

Lynn Patterson, Shelly Phillips) find that having four young children in their households is a strong deterrent to labor force participation. Laura Davis is a student who is currently attending the regional university. She believes that if you're going to make any money, you need to be "skilled labor" and she recognized that she had no marketable skills. Irene Shoemaker gave up her third-shift factory job to be home with her children, and now occasionally works as a temporary factory worker in first-shift situations. Finally, Rita Mannelli is very self-consciously staying home for what she and her husband believe to be their children's best interest. When the youngest child goes to school she will seek a job in the school system so she has a work schedule identical to her children's school schedule. The man without employment in the formal economy is Nicole Davenport's husband. He lost his formal economy job two years ago and now cuts and sells wood in the informal economy.

Commuting

Interviewees recognize the limitations of this rural economy. When sample families survey local employment prospects they find a limited range of options and low pay. Laura Davis says matter of factly, "He [her husband] has to work in [metro center] or else he won't make enough money to support us" [1166-1168]. Research participants consider commuting to a metro region to earn higher wages, to find employment in particular occupations, to find more stable work, or a combination of these. Bonnie Morgan says, "To get a better paying job or a better job, you have to go to a bigger city to get one" [1539-1532]. An exchange between Irene Shoemaker and the interviewer about her husband's employment illustrate that commuting is very much a way of life for many residents in this county:

Int: What jobs has your spouse had?

Irene: He's drove truck and he's a foreman in a factory now at [auto parts manufacturer]. That's down by the airport in [metro center].

Int: So he's commuting.

Irene: Uh huh, everybody up here does. The guy across the street works the same place my husband does. My two boys only live 15 minutes from here but they work in [metro center] at [factory name]. Just about everybody we know up here drives to [metro center] to work. So for us that's not unusual. [1821-1849]

Commuting usually means leaving this nonmetro county, driving through part of another nonmetro county to a metropolitan county for employment. This strategy is considered by a majority of sample families. The parents we interviewed do not view driving 10 to 20 miles to the county seat or other locales as commuting. Sixteen of thirty (53%) sample families currently have a worker who commutes between 40 and 60 miles each way to his or her place of employment. In addition, some families have former commuters, some families are considering the option of commuting, and others have rejected it as a strategy. Table B indicates which sample families currently have a commuter and whether the commuter is a male or female earner. Among dual earner couples, in no case do both workers commute.

Most interviewees find pay scales to be substantially higher in the metro county. Ruthann VanDyke maintains that her husband who earns over \$11 an hour as a factory machinist in the metro center could earn only \$7 an hour doing the same kind of work locally. She finds a clear relationship between wages and how far rural residents are willing to commute. Jobs in communities at the edge of the metro center pay less than those the full distance into the city, but more than jobs in the rural community in which they live.

Commuting to an urban area for work is clearly no guarantee of high wages. As would be anticipated, this metro region has its share of secondary sector

employment. Norma McCullen, a divorced single mother who did not complete high school, works in a furniture factory at the edge of the metro center. She has what she considers to be low wage work at \$8.30 an hour, but her previous jobs in the rural community paid \$4.35 and \$5.00 an hour. For her, commuting is a strategy necessary for her to even come close to self-sufficiency.

Sharon Edwards reports that her husband commutes to the metro center for a job setting up double-wide mobile homes that pays \$8.50 an hour. She believes he would make the same wage in this rural community, but that the work would be less steady locally. He commutes not so much for wages, but for stable employment.

Anne Kennedy speculates that because of limited opportunity for advancement locally, she may have to commute or move to achieve her career goals. Anne is an elementary teacher with a graduate degree in administration. She recognizes that she is unlikely to find the opportunity she is looking for in this community.

Commuting is an economic strategy with costs as well as benefits. Commuting takes time and requires reliable transportation. Claudia Olsen is articulate in explaining what goes into employment decisions in rural areas:

[P]rior to looking for a job you have to have in your head how far you're willing to drive, what wage you really need to be making if you're going to be driving for a distance and [what] benefits. [You] don't get the income you would get out of a job in a larger city. But you also then have to consider, if I'm driving this many miles, how much am I spending on gas, how much of that is coming out of my income versus the job that's closer to me that may pay me less. How much is going to equal out? [1153-1158;1124-1132]

Melissa Nichols is a court reporter who works on an independent contractor basis for a firm in the metro center. She records depositions for attorneys, transcribes them at home, and then returns the transcriptions to the metro center office. She drives eight to ten hours a week and concludes the following: "[T]hat's a whole workday, so you've got to find an extra day somewhere in your work time to squeeze all your wasted driving time. So, you know, a lot of times I work at night to catch up" [1663-

1669].

Ruthann VanDyke recognizes that her husband's commuting has meant the need to replace vehicles more frequently than would be the case otherwise. Shirley Rogers' husband stopped commuting after two years because they concluded that it did not pay off: "[I]t is not worth it. I mean, it is good money, but by the time you pay out your gas money, you know, the wear and tear on your vehicle, you really don't make no more than what you make here" [2129-2135].

Working overtime

Eight families with working class employment indicate that a household member works overtime. Table B indicates which families receive earnings from overtime work and whether it is the male earner, the female earner, or both earners that work overtime. While in this study working 35 hours or more is considered full-time employment, these respondents use 40 hours as the benchmark, for example indicating on the survey that one works between 40 and 50 or between 40 and 45 hours a week. A total of twelve workers in the following job categories work overtime: factory workers (n=5), diesel mechanics (n=2), auto repair (n=1), construction (n=1), clerical (n=1), garbage route driver (n=1), and hair stylist (n=1).

Working overtime is sometimes articulated as an economic strategy to meet a specific financial necessity. Laura Davis' husband does not work overtime regularly, but does so occasionally if the family needs extra money; Julie Cooper reports that she works 40 to 45 hours a week, depending on whether they need the money.

Alternatively, working overtime may be much more of a way of life. Both of the Walshes regularly work 45 hours a week. Virginia Collins indicates that her husband regularly works 60 hours a week as a "heavy wreck auto body person."

Moonlighting

Moonlighting refers to participating in formal paid employment in addition to one's primary employment in the formal economy. Two sample families (Cole, Schram) are involved in moonlighting. Sharon Cole and her husband received a stipend for their involvement in the "Odyssey of the Mind" program at the elementary school; this program is an after-school enrichment program for academically talented students. Mary Schram moonlights in two ways. First, in addition to her regular job as a bus driver transporting children to and from school, she sometimes generates additional income by driving school district sports teams to "away" events and driving for school field trips; second, she coaches freshman girls' basketball at the local high school.

Informal economy work

Nine families use informal economy work to generate resources for "getting by." Respondents refer to "side-work," "side-jobs," and "jobs on the side." These activities are sometimes undertaken by women or men independent of their partners; in some instances couples collaborate in these activities. Table B shows which families indicate informal economy activity. Three women (Laura Davis, Rita Mannelli, Dorothy Turner) occasionally provide child care in their homes. (All three describe this work as babysitting.) Three women (Diane Norris, Julie Cooper, Andrea Smith) earn extra money cleaning the houses of relatives or acquaintances. In addition to housecleaning, Andrea takes advantage of other opportunities in the informal economy. For example, the week prior to the interview, she had been paid \$5.00 an hour to steam wedding dresses in the bridal shop in which her sister worked. Kimberly Sue Campbell helps her husband in his lawn mowing business by bookkeeping and occasionally by mowing. Diane Norris recently did unconventional informal economy work in construction. She relates that while she was waitressing tables one day, she had the following exchange with a customer:

He asked me if I knew of anybody that wanted to make a little extra money. Like he said that he was paying seven bucks an hour to help him build this log cabin. I looked at him and I said, "I'll do it. I'll help you." He looked at me, and I said, "Trust me, I can lift something. I'm not a wimp." He goes, "Okay, I'll try you out." And it was neat [to build] a beautiful log cabin. [2251-2265]

As was stated above, Nicole Davenport's husband sells firewood on an informal basis.

Some couples collaborate in informal economy work. Patty Newman reports that her husband, who discontinued his informal economy work as a "jack-of-all-trades" in favor of low wage factory employment, occasionally does this handyman work "on the side." Patty often assists him in these "side-jobs." Julie Cooper reports that she and her husband sometimes do odd jobs for extended family members or acquaintances: "If we have relatives or something that needs something done, you know, then we go over there and do it and they usually give us a little something" [923-927].

Three families report informal economy work in the past. Margaret Griffin provided child care in her home before the worsening of her disabling medical condition. David Roberts, a widower whose wife had died recently, tells how a few years ago he had quit his factory job to spend a year in a joint venture with his wife making crafts and selling them at craft shows. Virginia Collins formerly lived in a large urban center in Pennsylvania; she reports that her husband, who works in auto body repair, did "side-work" out of their garage to compensate for the high cost of living in that area.

Institutional assistance

Information regarding the use of institutional assistance was elicited by asking the following interview question:

Most parents need to depend on their families or communities for help as they raise their children. As your child has been growing up, what help have you needed? Has it been available? [Q H.1.]

Follow-up questions asked interviewees to describe the help that came from family or friends and from community programs or agencies. In addition, the survey asks this question:

Does someone in you household participate in any government assistance program (local, state or federal)? [Q. 9.H.]

Table B shows which families currently receive institutional assistance. Of thirty families, only three (Turner, Newman, Phillips) indicate on their surveys that someone in their household participates in a government assistance program. Dorothy Turner discusses receiving AFDC, WIC, and help from churches and a community agency providing heating assistance. Patty Newman receives food stamps and WIC. The Department of Social Services (now Family Independence Agency) is unaware of Shelly Phillips' cohabiting status. Therefore, she continues to receive AFDC, WIC, and food stamps.

Two families receive government assistance not commonly referred to as "welfare." Ruthann VanDyke receives a \$266 per month disability check from the Social Security Administration. David Roberts receives a monthly subsidy from the state for adopting a "special needs" child. Since her adoptive mother's death, this child receives Survivor's Insurance benefits from Social Security. In addition, Mr. Roberts receives a need-based subsidy for child care.

Irene Shoemaker relates that her children are eligible for and receive school lunches at reduced cost. The Shoemakers are a household of four members with an income of \$20-25,000. Clearly many other households were eligible for reduced or free lunches, but no other respondents mentioned them. Use of this program is not included in Table 6.

While only three families use social programs referred to as "welfare" at present, thirteen additional women discussed in the interview their use of welfare assistance in the past. When examining welfare use over time, over half of sample

families used welfare at some point over the lifetime of the target child. These data show the use of institutional assistance is generally a very temporary household strategy. These findings conform to PSID analyses finding that most individuals who are poor move into and out of poverty rather than remain chronically poor (Gottschalk et al. 1994).

Mary Schram, Tiffany Walsh, and Julie Cooper used WIC when the target child was very young. Several women used a variety of social services as a temporary measure at the time of separation or divorce. Margaret Griffin and Melissa Nichols were on welfare after their divorces; Robin Miller received welfare and child care subsidies when she was divorced. She also used the services of a domestic violence agency which facilitated her receiving counseling paid for by the Department of Social Services. Sharon Edwards used public assistance when she and her cohabiting partner (now her husband) separated temporarily.

Both Diane Norris and Lynn Patterson used public assistance for several years following nonmarital births. Both are now married and receive no assistance. Diane reports receiving welfare, WIC, food stamps, Medicaid, and clothing assistance in the past. Lynn, with three nonmarital births, has been off public assistance since her marriage one and a half years ago. Other respondents who were long term welfare recipients have also gotten off welfare. Norma McCullen and Bonnie Morgan received assistance both while married and later as single divorced mothers. Both have worked their way off welfare by factory employment in the metro center.

The Rogers and the Davenport families are also former welfare users. The Rogers used social services including AFDC, WIC, food stamps, child care subsidies, and heat and electric assistance. The Davenports used AFDC and WIC, and depended on private organizations for food and clothing assistance. In addition to those families that have depended on private charities for clothing, food, and heating assistance, two families have received the support of private charities that provide medical assistance.

The Campbells used support from a charity referred to as “Crippled Children” to pay for a medical procedure for their daughter. Ruthann VanDyke received help from the Lion’s Club when she needed eye surgery.

Strategies related to consumption

The majority of parent-identified strategies described earlier in this chapter were consumption-related strategies. These were often specific micro-level adaptations that helped parents provide for specific necessities such as a pair of boots. This section looks beyond those responses to specific questions to identify three types of consumption-related strategies that were found throughout the interviews: money management strategies, self-provisioning and bartering, and substitution. Substitution and self-provisioning and bartering are micro-level context-specific strategies that do not generally contribute to economic wellbeing as significantly as do employment-related strategies. Nevertheless, for some families, both are needed to make ends meet. The more global money-management strategies represent a more generalized way to limit spending and as such make an important contribution to the ability of a few families to make ends meet.

Money management strategies

Many families find that making ends meet requires careful money management. The Norrises buy nothing for which they cannot pay cash. The Walshes and Newmans limit expenditures by having no credit cards. The Walshes do not have a checking account. Tiffany Walsh explains:

It is so easy to go out and spend. We don’t even have a checkbook. [It is] because when we were younger we got into trouble. And we decided this is how it’s going to be. When we have the money, things get paid. That way you can’t like float a check. And then, because you float that one check one time, then it gets caught early and boom, everything else goes. [2881-2895]

Andrea Smith says that she manages the money now because she does it better than her husband did in the past. She is a developmentally disabled mother of four married to a garbage route driver. She says:

[H]e lets me hang on the money 'cause if he hang on the money, if he did, he would spend it. It would just like go in less than one day, we just don't know where it went to. But now since I've been hangin' on the money, I've been managin' it. Like I'll put this here for the bills, this for play and other certain stuff we need to have. And I've been doin' a good job about that. I handle the money and he don't.

Some mothers stress that they make purchasing decisions very carefully to stretch the most out of every dollar. To illustrate, Norma McCullen shops the local mission store for used clothing for her children. She tries to buy gender-neutral jeans and sweatshirts for her daughter so she can get double-duty out of them by passing them down to her son. Robin Miller relates that if they go out to eat as a treat, they go to Ponderosa because it is an all-you-can-eat restaurant. McDonald's is now too expensive for her growing children's appetites. Dorothy Turner has made the difficult decision that she cannot afford a telephone.

Two higher income families who do not report financial difficulties stress the importance of saving money. Rita Mannelli says,

See, we're not material people here. Okay. We save for the things we want. We don't go out and spend. . . . So, I would always be able to afford my child a pair of shoes no matter what. [18892-1295, 1905-1907]

Melissa Nichols says that while they have sufficient income, they are living on a tight budget. She explains their situation:

The main thing is we're trying to save. . . . It is not that you don't have it, it is just that you are trying to save it. . . . You are still trying to live on the most minimum that you can. [1397-1407]

Self-provisioning and bartering

Nine of thirty families engage in self-provisioning or bartering. Six families provide some of their families' food necessities. Three families (Cole, Newman, Campbell) have vegetable gardens; these women report that they freeze or can garden produce. The Edwards family grows strawberries for their own consumption. The Walshes raise pigs and chickens for their own use. Ruthann VanDyke reports that her husband hunts and fishes.

Three families have bartering or exchange relationships. These strategies are classified as consumption-related strategies, because they do not generate cash that might be used in any of a number of ways. Rather, these relationships provide specific services that respondents do not then need to purchase (or perhaps could not afford to purchase) either formally or informally. Irene Shoemaker exchanges babysitting services with friends. Colleen Watson, a hair stylist, provides hair cuts for a family in exchange for housecleaning services. The Davenports live in an older mobile home. On their property is another old mobile home which they rent to people Nicole knows and trusts in exchange for babysitting services.

Substitution

Substituting a lower cost alternative for a preferred product or service was identified previously by interviewees as a primary strategy for meeting their children's immediate needs (pp. 132-133). In many cases, however, it is less than accurate to construct substitution as a parent's "choice" as compared to a higher cost product. For some mothers, using lower cost alternatives is not one among a number of viable options, but the only way to manage. Women like Dorothy Turner, who shops yard sales, garage sales, and Goodwill for boots and coats for her children, may feel they have no "choice" and that there are no alternatives.

In other cases, interviewees express some delight in the substitutions they have

made. Tiffany Walsh finds that although the local indoor roller skating rink is “wonderful” and “the kids love it,” skating is too expensive for many families. She tells how she and other mothers organize bingo nights as a low-cost alternative to more costly entertainment like skating. She says,

A lot of us get together and the moms, what we do is we go to the dollar store and maybe buy \$5.00 worth of gifts. And us moms will sit and for our night out we'll play bingo. But yet the kids get to play their own [bingo] too, you know. And it gives you something to do. It gives us an out, it gives the kids some more interaction. . . . It is like once a month we get together and we play bingo. Just 'cause, I mean, it doesn't cost us very much. [3929-3944]

Network-related strategies

This section considers how families use assistance from family or friends to survive economically or promote economic well-being. Assistance takes the form of information, cooperation, and material assistance. This section addresses interactions with family and friends that are oriented toward maintaining and sustaining sample households economically. No middle class respondents report an economic interdependence with family or friends. Two higher income working class respondents (Davis, Olsen) report assistance from parents in the past. Laura Davis reports that she and her husband have never had to rent housing. They have been able to buy houses because his parents have helped them with down payments. Claudia Olsen tells that she always wanted to be a nurse, but her mother had dissuaded her from that career and encouraged her to be a secretary. She became a secretary, got married, and later became a nurse's aide. Claudia relates what occurred:

I kept saying, “I want to go back to school, I want to go back to school, but I really can't afford it.” And she [her mother] finally said, “If you can stick it out as a nurse aide for six months, and then you still want to be a nurse-- whatever Financial Aid won't pay for, your dad and I will.” And so I went back to school. [1349-1359]

Two lower income working class families (Norris, VanDyke) describe how they

used the assistance of family or friends in the past or present. Diane Norris discusses her struggle to make ends meet several years ago as a single mother of young twins. She had a job at a restaurant, but finding available and affordable child care arrangements was difficult. She describes how a co-worker at the restaurant assisted her:

We had one lady that I work with over at Sally's and she'd watch my children all the time, didn't hardly charge me anything. . . . She only charged me a buck an hour for both kids and she fed 'em, she'd keep 'em overnight if I had to be to work at 5 o'clock in the morning, you know, and stuff like that. [1858-1861, 1868-1873]

Diane also tells how she lived without a car for a year and a half, depending on friends to "tote" her and the twins around. After this period, a neighbor helped her find a suitable car and buy it.

Ruthann VanDyke has a significant physical disability caused by a congenital spinal deformity. Her parents have been a source of economic assistance in several ways. Her mother, now a widow, continues this pattern of support. Ruthann observes that it takes two incomes for families to survive in this community, but her disability prevents her from working. She says that if they had to live on her husband's earnings alone, they would be in "real hot water" (2093). She describes how her parents' support has helped them survive economically:

I'm very fortunate that because my mother has a business and has managed her money very well for many, many years, I get a lot of support there. Being that she has a grocery store, when things outdate or they're questionable, I bring it home and I use it. The normal person off the street would not use it, [but] there's nothing wrong with it--it's not spoiled. It's very useable and so that helps with the grocery bill. [2094-2110]

In addition, family support was important in their purchase of a home and the financing of cars or trucks. The down payment of \$5,000 on the house came from a savings account her parents started for her as a child and added to over several years.

Furthermore, her mother holds the loan on the home. Parental financing of this home

gives Ruthann a sense of security. She says, "I don't have to worry if [husband] is unemployed. I don't have to worry--I have a roof over my head" (2183-2186). Her mother also provides the financing for their vehicle purchases.

Ruthann's monthly disability of check of \$266 a month is an important component of this family's financial security. Her mother's cooperation was essential in enabling her to qualify for this disability program. She explains:

The only way that I'm drawing that is because, thank God, my mother has the grocery store so I could work part-time for five years for her so that I could say that I had worked five years in the last ten so that I could draw my Social Security. [481-488]

This program requires that a recipient must be disabled from a job, that is, no longer able to continue employment because of a disability. Ruthann believes she would have been unable to work to achieve this benefit in another employment setting.

Moving in with parents is an economic strategy currently used by two sample families (McCullen, Smith). In addition to sharing a household, these respondents also report additional reliance on family members. Norma McCullen is a divorced mother of two children who lives in an extended family household with her mother and stepfather. She tried to live independently off welfare but found she "couldn't afford to live on her own." At that time "her mother was about to lose her house," so she and her children moved in and pay rent. Their residential arrangement represents an attractive economic strategy for the respondent as well as for her mother and stepfather. Norma's aunt currently provides child care for her children under an arrangement that is economically advantageous to Norma. She explains:

I had a hard time with babysitting until my aunt said she would watch them. . . . I was paying over \$100 a week for a baby-sitter and I thought, Why am I working? We worked out an arrangement--I pay her \$50 a week year around. Now in the school year, if I was to pay by the hour a regular baby-sitter, sometimes it would not be that much. Even if I take off a day and she doesn't even have the kids at all, I still pay \$50 a week. But then in the summer, I would be paying \$110 to \$125 a week, and I don't have to do that. I still pay

the \$50, but then I bring food--like a friend of mine gets food wholesale, so I'll get different things that I know she likes. If I got a little bit extra [money], I'll pick it up and bring it over to her, you know. So, I try to help out. [191-220]

The Smiths are a family of six that has had difficulty maintaining a separate household on Mr. Smith's earnings of \$8.50 an hour as a garbage route driver. They have lived in extended family households three times over the course of their marriage, and currently live with her parents. Andrea Smith reports that her parents provide additional economic assistance when it is needed:

I depend on my mom, yup. When I need something, she goes and gets it. Like if we are out of money and [youngest child] needs diapers, she'll go out and get me some. I have no worries living here. When I'm on my own, it's worse. That's why I keep moving home, cause, you know, you feel like you're welcome. You're always welcome in your mom's home so I depend on my parents for financial needs and stuff when we're out of money. [1051-1064]

Four other families report living with family members sometime in the past (Olsen, Newman, Walsh, Norris). It is quite possible that additional mothers and children lived with extended family members following a nonmarital birth or some other family transition but did not discuss the matter in the interview.

Among poor families, two sample women report receiving material assistance from family members. Lynn Patterson and her sister-in-law who is on welfare have a reciprocal relationship in which they occasionally help each other out financially. Dorothy Turner is separated from her husband, nevertheless she has a good relationship with his parents. She continues to live in a mobile home they own, she sees them frequently, and they "help out a lot." Dorothy is using a car belonging to a brother who lives in Wisconsin (although the vehicle is undependable). Her parents-in-law have also given assistance in the past. She tells that when her children were very young, her mother-in-law worked at a church-sponsored center that distributed used clothing and was able to get free clothing for the children.

Two additional families describe receiving valuable assistance from nonkin

sources. Robin Miller has a friend who is an auto mechanic. He fixes her car and does not charge “an arm and a leg.” He is casual about receiving payment, telling her to “pay me when you can and do what you can do” (1825-1826). Kimberly Sue Campbell’s husband had not had formal employment for many years. He recently received valuable job advice from a friend and neighbor who works at the main downtown post office in the metro center. This friend advised him to apply for seasonal work (Christmas holiday season) at the post office’s airport sorting facility. This family is thrilled that he has been hired for this temporary job, working 7:30 p.m. to 3:30 a.m. at a facility sixty miles from home.

Residential strategies

Residential strategies used by sample families include household compositional changes, moving, and living in trailers. Doubling up with kin to form extended family households (McCullen, Smith) is discussed above (pp. 156-157) as a network-based strategy.

Household compositional changes

The two cohabiting women in this sample indicate that their decisions about relationships with male partners have some relationship to economic survival. Shelly Phillips is a 25 year old mother of four children. This family had been living on \$5,000 - 10,000 a year. But now she describes their financial condition as “much better” since she “met a man who is willing to work and keep a job.” This man--twenty years her senior--has moved in with her and she speaks laughingly of spending “all his money and mine” (1080-1081). Robin Miller indicates that while her income provides only enough for her family’s necessities, they are still better off now than they were three years ago. She writes on the survey that she “divorced an unemployed father [of her children] and made it on my own until this past summer when my

working boyfriend moved in.”

Moving

Five sample families (Cole, Collins, Turner, Miller, Davenport) moved into this rural community as part of a household economic strategy. The Coles moved to the area for professional reasons. Both Sharon Cole and her husband grew up in Michigan. They moved into the area eight years ago when her husband was hired as a professor at the regional university in the county seat. Virginia Collins explicitly articulates that moving to this community was, in part, an economic strategy. She grew up in Philadelphia, but her parents moved to this nonmetro county when the Virginia was 18. She remained in Philadelphia and married there, but she and her husband found the cost of living in Philadelphia to be very high for a young family. She explains:

That was one of the reasons we moved up here--because things were so expensive down there. All we did--my husband worked every weekend out in the garage doing side work and we just didn't have any family time to do anything. And we were just barely making ends meet. [1393-1401]

While living near her parents was a draw, Virginia gives the following reason for the move on the survey: “We moved here to better ourselves.”

The moves of the Turners, Millers, and Davenports into this area may also be viewed as household strategies. These three families are low income households who formerly lived in the metro center. Each expresses dissatisfaction with their former locale as unsafe or too busy. As Nicole Davenport says, “There is just too much trouble down there” [61-62]. In fact, it is not the entire metro center that is unsafe or overly busy, but it is likely to be the case in those residential areas available to low income families. These families did not have the economic resources to move to safe, uncrowded neighborhoods in the metro center, but they were able to find lower population density and a safer environment by moving to this nearby rural area.

Living in a trailer

Eleven sample families (Roberts, Cooper, Turner, Miller, Walsh, Campbell, Davenport, Edwards, Griffin, Patterson, Phillips) live in trailers; the Newmans live in a modular home. Buying a trailer represents a low-cost housing strategy for many families. While rural areas are increasingly “zoning out” mobile homes, this locale has not done so. Many rural families buy a lot or parcel of land in an open country area and then buy an older mobile home as their “starter home.” They often live in this residence until they can afford higher payments or have paid off their land; they may then upgrade to a newer trailer. Sometimes the old mobile home remains on the property to be used by another family member or is sometimes left in derelict condition. The Walshes recently upgraded to a new trailer. Tiffany Walsh refers to their new trailer as a “house” and points the interviewer to their former residence--a 12 x 40 “piece of junk” that remains on the site. She talks about the prevalence of aged trailers as family housing in this community: “if you walk through that [old] trailer, that is a perfect example of how half of the kids that my children go to school with live” (2960-2694). In the case of Robin Miller and her children, an anticipated change in household composition precipitated the purchase of a bigger trailer. Robin explains the situation:

It took (cohabiting partner) two years to move in because he wanted to move in last year and it was like, no, there isn't room. This trailer isn't big enough. I'm not hanging kids from the ceiling. I said, “When we get a bigger trailer.” It's like, no, not yet and I'm glad I waited because there was no way in my old trailer--it was 10 x 50--was I going to stick a man and two girls anywhere. We would have killed each other. We have our moments here, but we watch each other's space. [1593-1608]

The opportunity that many rural residents have to own their own housing is an option less available to low income urban residents. Two negative aspects of owning a trailer are first, that trailers depreciate rather than appreciate like most housing (although some central city housing is not a good investment), and second, trailers,

especially older ones, are notoriously expensive to heat. Living in a trailer encompasses a range of living conditions among these families. Three sample families (Miller, Walsh, Edwards) have recently upgraded to new (or newer) trailers. The remaining eight trailer-dwelling families live in older trailers that tend to be crowded, shabby, and sometimes in poor repair.

HOUSEHOLD STRATEGIES DIFFERENTIATED BY SOCIAL CLASS

In this section, I explore the question of how household strategies vary by social class categories. These data show that household strategies occur in particular economic contexts. While all sample families use multiple economic strategies to make ends meet, the combination of strategies sample families use to survive differs by their social class placement. If we examine the opposite ends of the social class spectrum, we see that middle class families in this sample survive primarily by wage employment. Middle class employment in U.S. society is generally characterized by relatively secure work, relatively high wages, and employer-provided benefits. This general characterization describes the middle class population in this sample well. Among poor families, formal employment-related strategies are less likely, in and of themselves, to be sufficient for supporting one's family. The primary focus of this section is employment-related strategies. This exploratory analysis looks for factors that help explain differences in the propensity of families to engage in various employment strategies. Moving down through the class structure, we find greater reliance on consumption-related strategies, network-related strategies, residential strategies, and institutional assistance. The use of the latter strategies is perhaps somewhat predictable, because it is frequently need-based, that is, follows on the inability of some families to be free-standing economically self-sufficient units. In addition, this analysis shows that household strategies occur in specific spatial contexts. Among these sample

families, rural residence clearly shapes a family's options as family members decide how best to construct economic survival.

Use of strategies for resource generation

Employment-related strategies

These data point to important relationships and inter-relationships between dual earning, commuting, working overtime, and social class categories. Moonlighting is a minor strategy that will be discussed briefly at the end of this section.

Dual earner couples

Dual earning is a frequently used economic strategy in this rural community. Only Rita Mannelli clearly stated family ideology as the reason she was out of the labor force. Yet Table B shows that thirteen of thirty, or 43 % of sample families are dual earner households. It might be expected that even more of these families would be dual earner households. An analysis of Table B points to clear social class differences in the propensity of families to have both women and men in the labor force. All middle class sample families are dual earner households while no poor families are dual earner households. Nine of seventeen (53 %) of working class families are dual earner households. A closer look at working class families shows that five of seven (71 %) of the higher income subgroup are dual earners, while four of ten (40 %) of the lower income group are dual earner households.

What explains this variation? The most straightforward difference between families at the top and families at the bottom of the social class system is family structure. Family structure explains the single earner status of five poor families: four of nine poor families are single parent families (Roberts, Watson, Morgan, Turner) and as such do not have the option of adding a spouse's earnings; Robin Miller views herself as a single earner based on the decision she and her cohabiting partner have

made not to pool income. In contrast, all middle class families and all working class families with the exceptions of Norma McCullen are married couples (n=19) or cohabiting and pooling income (n=1). As such all of these have the structural possibility of adding an additional earner.

This analysis finds that three factors are related to the likelihood that sample mothers will be employed: disability, educational attainment, and family size. Women who are not employed tend to be either women who are disabled or women with little education or training. In addition, women with four children find the work involved in raising a large family and the cost of child care to be a deterrent to their labor force participation. These three factors are, in this sample, associated with social class placement.

Disability is, in this sample, a class-related variable. Two lower income working class women (Margaret Griffin, Ruthann VanDyke) have physical disabilities; one poor woman (Kimberly Sue Campbell) is physically disabled and one (Andrea Smith) is developmentally disabled. None of these women have formal employment.

Educational attainment is associated with the propensity of this sample of mothers to work. U.S. Census data show the same positive association between education and labor force participation for all U.S. women (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996c). With the exception of Ruthann VanDyke who is disabled and Laura Davis, a high school graduate currently attending college, no mother with more than a high school education is out of the labor force. These data show the clear and expected association of educational attainment and social class. No one, male or female, in the middle class or upper income working class has less than a high school education. The low educational attainment segment of this sample is concentrated in the lower income working class and the poor. Three women have very low educational attainment: Nicole Davenport and Shelly Phillips have an eighth grade education and Lynn Patterson has a seventh grade education. Bonnie Morgan and Andrea Smith have a

tenth grade education and Norma McCullen has an eleventh grade education. Only half the women with less than a high school diploma are employed. The three women who do work formally--Nicole Davenport, Bonnie Morgan, and Norma McCullen--have factory employment. Factory work is not the only work these women have had. Rather, it represents a strategy to maximize earnings. Nicole has also worked in a laundry; Bonnie worked previously as a cook at a bar-restaurant and as a dishwasher at the American Legion Hall. Norma has worked as a nurses' aide, an in-home health aide, and a direct care worker at a facility for mentally and physically disabled persons. These three women commute to the metro center, and in doing so make the most out of their meager educational credentials.

Women with little education understand how limited their employment prospects are. Nicole Davenport contends, "Without an education you end up a general laborer or 'factory rat'" (1455-1456). She says that a limited education leaves you without many options, that you always work in a factory or a fast food establishment where you can not make any money. She says that the work is always the same; you may change jobs to work in a different factory, but you'll always do the same work. Shelly Phillips recognizes that employers today "are looking for college education, for people who will use their heads and make good decision" (1188-1191). She recognizes that, with an eighth grade education, she just does not have the training to get a "good job." She says that when she does look for a job, "I probably won't care if it is a good job or not" (1144-1145).

Low education is sometimes associated with early childbearing. For three of the six women who did not finish high school (Bonnie Morgan, Nicole Davenport, Shelly Phillips), pregnancy was the factor that interrupted their education. Nicole gave birth to her first child at age fourteen. She says,

"You know, I didn't finish school. And to me, that's where I made a big mistake--not finishing school. I had him at a very young age and so . . . I just

quit school. I didn't do what I should have done. And I always tell my kids it is very important to go to school" (1828-1841).

She understands that early birth to have been a life-shaping event that has negatively affected her ability to earn a living.

An additional factor related to women's employment is family size. Among seven households with four children (Olsen, Davis, Smith, Davenport, Phillips, Newman, Patterson) only the Olsens (in the higher income working class) are a dual earner household. Claudia Olsen, the woman who went back to school to get an RN degree as her previous marriage was breaking up, is committed to nursing, even though she works less than full time at present. For her, the rewards of employment--both good pay and personal satisfaction--explain her employment. Nicole Davenport, a mother with an eighth grade education, works in a factory while her husband is unemployed. She says part of the reason he doesn't have a full time job is family responsibilities, that is, a preschooler at home. She wishes, however, that her husband would get a full time job and she could work part time. The remaining mothers of four in this sample are out of the labor force (of these, Laura Davis is attending college).

Variation in family size and women's employment credentials leads to different decisions about women's employment. Women who are not employed are likely to be either women who are disabled or women for whom the rewards of working are not seen to be worth the costs of employment. Women who might work need to see that it is worth the investment of their time and energy. In some contexts women decide it is better to be on public assistance because the family costs of working are too high.

The quality of the work and the level of compensation are taken into account when mothers decide whether to work or remain out of the labor force. Women with little education or training see that they have limited prospects for work that is both satisfying and pays good wages. In addition, women with several children have even greater disincentives. The minimal rewards of working when balanced against the loss

of their labor in the home and the cost of childcare make employment an unattractive option. Patty Newman's explanation of her decision not to work reflects the interplay of these factors:

It's not worth me getting out [in the labor force] for \$4.50 or \$4.25 an hour flipping burgers. I mean, I did that when I was sixteen years old. It's no big deal to me. I don't care. I cook every day anyway -- in all, three maybe four times. It's not going to help me pay my bills and it's not going to help me get any further ahead because then there's a possibility I'll have day care charges. [1745-1755]

The perspective of this woman, a mother of four, remarried 2 3/4 years varies sharply from that of Claudia Olsen, another mother of four, remarried 1 1/2 years. Claudia says, "[M]ost of the time I come home feeling really good about the day's work and feeling like I've actually been able to help somebody" (1384-1387). Her work as an RN provides job satisfaction and good pay that keep this busy mother in the labor force on a part time basis.

Although none of the female householders in this sample are currently out of the labor force, the past experience of Shelly Phillips illumines the difficulties that women with little education, several children, and no partner face when they try to work. As a separated mother of four, Shelly tried to get off welfare by working as a cook in a local bar-restaurant. The only child care arrangements she was able to make were with a relative 30 miles away. She explains that the Department of Social Services wanted her to be a good parent, but she had to work so much to make ends meet that she could not see her children enough to be a good parent. She explains:

Shelly: [B]ecause my older two were in school, the two little ones were at my aunt's in Grant because I had to have a babysitter and that's the only place I could find one. So she watched them and I seen them maybe once a week.

Interviewer: Did you just decide it wasn't worth it?

Shelly: Yup. I decided that was enough. I mean they were suffering and I was suffering. I said, "No more." [817-833]

Deciding that the costs of employment were too high, the respondent went back on welfare and other public assistance programs.

Commuting

The use of commuting as an economic strategy varies by social class. Table B reveals an interesting pattern in which only one of four (25%) middle class families has a commuting member. In no case do middle class breadwinners commute to the metro county. It is in the working class that we see the highest percentage of commuting families. Twelve of seventeen (71%) working class families commute. Dividing the working class by income reveals that commuting is an economic strategy used by the vast majority of the higher income working class. Six of seven, or 86%, of these families have a commuting member. Among the lower income working class, six of ten (60%) of families have a commuter. Among poor families, eight currently have earners; of these eight, three (38%) commute.

These data reveal the contours of this rural labor market. A few families have local professional-managerial employment. The sole commuter in the middle class is Sharon Cole who works part time as a dietician now that her children are in school. She commutes to another nonmetro county for her job with the WIC program. Her husband, a college professor, is the economic mainstay of the family.

Four of the top earners in the working class commute to the metro center for relatively high paid specialized work: a court reporter, a telephone company technician, a computer drafter, and a printer. Individuals in less specialized working class employment commute to find available work, usually at higher pay than would be the standard in their residential community. These workers include factory workers and mechanics.

In families without professional employment, commuting is an important factor in the ability to achieve an income higher than \$30,000. In this community, commuting

seems to be largely responsible for the very existence of a higher income segment of the working class. Six of seven working class families with incomes greater than \$30,000 have gone outside the county for employment opportunities. Rural restructuring is responsible for the commute of Michael Molloy, a telephone switchman. He explains that he was working for the telephone company in the metro center, then:

I got transferred up here and worked for them at the same wage I was making down there but then they--how did they say it--"outsourced" my job up here to a different company. So I ended up having to go back down there again. [1638-1644]

Melissa Nichol's employment options as a court reporter are to commute to a metro center firm providing recording and transcription services to metro attorneys or take a job at the local County Sheriff Department transcribing tape recorded police reports. She currently works as an independent contractor for the metro firm in a kind of piecework arrangement. She is paid by the transcribed page and currently earns \$30-35,000 a year. She would prefer to work as a court reporter in the local county courthouse but there has been no turnover among its few court reporters. The available County Sheriff Department job pays only \$15,000 a year to start. She was hired for that job but, when she found that a woman with eight years experience was making only \$22,000, decided she could not afford to work locally.

The experience of two families in which both men are diesel mechanics illustrates how the options of dual earning and commuting play out in the lives of sample families. The Walshes are a dual earner family in which Mr. Walsh works locally earning \$11 an hour. Mrs. Walsh commutes to a job that pays her \$6.50 an hour as a purchasing assistant. (This job is in another nonmetropolitan county.) The Davises are a single earner family. Mr. Davis earns \$18 an hour, commuting to the metro center. Although these men are the same age, 32 years old, Mr. Davis has lived

in the area longer and has more experience than has Mr. Walsh. His earnings would be predicted to be somewhat higher than those of Mr. Walsh in any labor market context. Yet these families earn approximately the same income, one by using the strategy of dual earning and the other by commuting. In fact, the Walshes earn slightly more than the Davises by using a third economic strategy: both earners in the household work overtime regularly.

For three poor families, commuting is a strategy that maximizes earnings, but still does not bring families above the poverty line. Commuters include a single mother working in a factory (Morgan), a garbage route driver (Smith), and a temporary postal worker (Campbell).

Overtime

Table B shows that twelve workers representing ten households work overtime. We see that among the working class, working overtime is an important strategy to generate necessary income. In the middle class, employment is not generally conceptualized in terms of "overtime." An employee fulfills the responsibilities of his or her job as college professor, school teacher, independent contractor or transportation supervisor without expectation of additional compensation for extra work time. But in the working class, working additional hours may yield a substantial increase in earnings. Eight of seventeen (47%) of the working class families in this sample use overtime as an economic strategy. Three of seven (43%) higher income working class families and five of nine (56%) lower income working class families work overtime. Two families categorized as poor use the strategy of working more than full time to generate additional money.

This analysis reveals that dual earning, commuting, and working overtime are strategies used heavily by the working class. The Phillips household is the only household among the working class that does not use either dual earning or commuting.

All working class households use at least one of these three strategies.

In sharp contrast, Table 9 shows that the poor are much less likely to use these strategies. We find the following: no dual earning households among the poor, three of nine poor households commuting, and two poor households with an earner working more than forty hours a week to generate additional income. When we look at the household circumstances of these families, we see that it is precisely their inability to use these strategies, or the incompatibility of these strategies with family circumstances that keeps them poor. No dual earner households in this sample are poor. In addition to the structural impossibility of dual earning, single parent households encounter obstacles to commuting and working overtime. As lone parents, adding two commuting hours to one's work day creates hardships that decrease the attractiveness of that option.

Similarly, family responsibilities make it difficult for single parents to extend their work days by working overtime. The only single mother who does so is Colleen Watson, a hair stylist who works out of her own home; she works up to fifty hours a week and still generates only \$10-15,000 of income annually. It is precisely because she works at home that she is able to add hours to her work week. In this context, she is able to supervise her children and schedule breaks at times compatible with her parenting responsibilities.

The four married couple households among the poor are impeded to some degree from implementing this trio of income generating strategies--dual earning, commuting, and overtime--by large family size (Patterson, Newman, Smith) and disability (Smith, Campbell). Andrea Smith's husband does commute and work some overtime. This situation may be facilitated by the current extended family household in which they live, a household arrangement that provides support and assistance to this mother of four.

Moonlighting

Moonlighting is a household strategy used by two middle class families (Cole, Schram). These families do not moonlight to buy essentials for their families. Both Sharon Cole and Mary Schram indicate on the survey that it is “not at all difficult” to meet their families’ monthly bills. The Cole’s leadership in the Odyssey of the Mind program generated a stipend but also signaled their support of the school system and community as well as involvement in their children’s education. Likewise, the Schrams, with their new computer and annuities for the children’s college education, do not need Mary to coach girl’s basketball in order to buy food and clothing.

Informal economy

The two upper income working class mothers who are not formally employed provide childcare on an informal basis to generate relatively small amounts of income. Rita Mannelli indicates that it is “not at all difficult” to meet monthly bills and Laura Davis indicates that it is “slightly difficult” to meet monthly bills.

Informal economy work and moonlighting takes on another meaning among the lower income working class. For these working class families, informal economic activity is a deliberate economic strategy. The families engaged in this strategy express some difficulty in making ends meet. In response to survey question 15, “How difficult is it for your family to meet the monthly bills?”, Nicole Davenport indicates “very difficult,” Diane Norris indicates “somewhat difficult,” and Julie Cooper indicates “slightly difficult.” Nicole writes on the survey that her unemployed husband “makes a little on [the] side to help pay the bills.” These three families have incomes of less than \$30,000 annually. Informal work helps them to make ends meet by generating additional needed cash.

Among poor families, four (Newman, Smith, Campbell, Turner) are involved in informal employment. This economic activity takes place in a multiplicity of family

contexts. Patty Newman and her husband occasionally do “handyman” work together as opportunity arises. Three women without formal employment work informally. Kimberly Sue Campbell is a 41 year woman who has never had formal employment. She currently helps her husband run his lawn mowing business. Her right arm has been amputated at the elbow; she concedes that “it might be harder for me [to get a formal job] than it would be for somebody else” (2132-2133). She reports that her husband says she does not have to look for a job, but if things remain as difficult financially as they have been, she speculates that she might consider another type of informal work: babysitting.

Andrea Smith, a developmentally disabled mother, explains why she does not have formal employment and how she generates small sums of money in the informal economy:

Andrea: I’ve been in special ed all my life, so it’s really hard for me to get a job because I don’t know very much stuff--how to do anything. The only thing I know how to do is watching children, cleaning house, and working on cars. I work like off and on. Like when my sister would come over here, she got a job in [metro center] at a bridal shop, at Bridal Mart, and last Thursday I went down there and I worked with her. . . . I steam-dried wedding dresses, and I made \$40. She paid me \$5 an hour to work there, her boss did, and I wasn’t expecting anything. You know, I did it on my own. She gave me \$40. That was good. Made my own money.

Interviewer: Do you like the idea of making your own money?

Andrea: Yes. Being on my dependence, I can come home and get my kids more stuff if I’m working too. . . . I do odd jobs, off and on, you know. I go to peoples’ houses and clean ‘em. Like this week I have to go down to my brother-in-law’s and clean his house for him to get extra cash for me and my kids. [1792-1798, 1512-1557]

Finally, Dorothy Turner participates in the informal economy as a desperation measure. She is separated, is experiencing severe economic deprivation, and is unemployed. She is generating cash by babysitting until she secures formal employment.

Institutional assistance

The resource generating strategy of last resort is institutional assistance. The use of means-tested public assistance is restricted to the most economically vulnerable families in a community. Obviously, sample families have very limited access to this strategy. While only three sample families indicate they currently receive public assistance (other than school lunches), retrospective accounts of past welfare use point to the importance of this option as an economic strategy. Sixteen families (53%)--three at present and thirteen in the past--have at some time in the history of their family lives used public assistance to survive economically. These data point to the use of public assistance as a temporary strategy. Thirteen of sixteen (81 %) families who have ever used welfare are now in the category of former welfare recipients. No one currently receiving assistance views it as a long-term way of life. All women currently receiving welfare are either trying to find employment (Dorothy Turner), or expecting to find employment when their youngest child begins school (Patty Newman, Shelly Phillips).

Use of consumption-related strategies

Consumption-related strategies come into view when respondents have difficulty making ends meet. Consumption-related strategies--money-management strategies, self-provisioning and bartering, and substitution--are used to bridge the distance between economic resources and necessities. Nine of eleven (82 %) families who are upper income working class or middle class offered no strategies for providing for their children in difficult circumstances. The data in Table 8 show that these nine respondents answer survey question 15 regarding the difficulty of paying monthly bills by indicating that is "not at all difficult" to meet this financial obligation. These families indicate that they simple do not experience economic strain, and therefore have no need to adjust consumption-related expenditures. It makes sense that consumption-related strategies are articulated primarily by lower-income working class and poor

interviewees. It is families with more limited resources that engage in a variety of consumption-related strategies to make ends meet. The data in Table 8 indicate that lower-income working class and poor families have greater difficulty paying bills and find their income less than adequate. It is unsurprising that we find families utilizing these strategies to be concentrated among the lower working class and the poor.

It is important to note that activities classified as self-provisioning are not necessarily undertaken as economic strategies. For example, individuals grow their own food for many reasons, such as: they enjoy gardening, they are committed to pesticide-free food, or they want high quality, low-cost food. The Coles illustrate this point. Mr. Cole grew up on a farm and his parents continue to have a big garden. The Coles live on more than ten acres and also garden. Sharon Cole indicates that their income is adequate to provide for all their wants and needs. It seems likely that they garden because they want to or they like to, more than that they choose to have a garden as a way of reducing consumption expenditures.

Use of network-related strategies

The discussion of network-related strategies on pages 154-158 indicates that relatively few respondents report depending on families and friends for economic support. Many respondents indicate strong relationships with their families, saying they could ask their families for economic assistance if necessary, but emphasized the value of self-sufficiency. Differentiating network-related strategies by social class becomes problematic when respondents describe incidents of economic assistance that occurred in the past. Social class is a sometimes fluid category. Therefore, a higher income working class respondent might describe a network-related strategy that may have actually occurred when the respondent had a lower class status. For example, when Claudia Olsen's parents provided the financial assistance for her to go to college for a nursing degree, she was a mother of three working as a nurse aide and her

husband (now ex-husband) was employed in a lower wage factory. Their family income was likely around half of what it is currently. It is significant that this assistance occurred in a different economic context than the present situation. To avoid confusion, this analysis will focus on accounts of current or continuous network-related strategies.

An initial analysis of the data reveals that the use of network-based economic support is highly concentrated among the poor. No middle-class families indicate that they depend on their families or friends for economic advice, information, or assistance. Among the higher income working class, Laura Davis reports receiving frequent financial advice from her in-laws. Among the lower income working class, Ruthann VanDyke, disabled by a congenital spinal abnormality, and her family continue to receive economic support from her family and Norma McCullen and her children live with her mother and stepfather. Among the poor, five families presently employ network-based strategies. This support ranges from moving in with family (Smith) to depending on family (Patterson, Turner) or friends (Miller, Campbell) for economic assistance.

This analysis takes on another dimension if we ask of the data not only what support is received, but also what is given. The latter question was not specifically asked in the interview, but was discussed by some respondents. Analysis of these accounts finds that some poor sample families had patterns of interaction with family that were not discussed among those with higher incomes. First, lower income respondents reported giving assistance as well as receiving assistance from extended family members, while higher income respondents did not. Bonnie Morgan maintains a close relationship with the family of the husband from whom she is separated. She describes their relationship:

I've got my husband's family that would help me 100% . . . but they depend on me more than I depend on them, and that's hard. [One sister-in-law and her

family] may be losing their house. I let them stay here from November to December just because they had no place to stay. I have another sister-in-law that, right now she's trying to make it work with her husband. She's in [county seat], but she basically lives here and that puts a damper on things. [760-799]

Norma McCullen reports that she has a sister who moves on and off AFDC; she and her family "help out" as much as they can. They cannot afford to do very much because none of them has extra money, but they do manage to buy inexpensive Christmas gifts for her sister's children.

Second, family support is shown to be a reciprocal relationship in some lower income families. Some low income respondents have extended families who do not have the resources to give assistance and receive no economic return. Two low income respondents (McCullen, Roberts) spoke of arrangements they made for state subsidized child care. In both cases, a relative received the subsidy to provide care for the target child. David Roberts is a widower who works nights. His daughter (the target child) stays overnight with his adult son and daughter-in-law. He picks her up in the morning and brings her home to get ready for school. This respondent receives state-subsidized child care because his income is very low; his daughter-in-law is the licensed child care provider who receives the subsidy. Norma McCullen describes her situation:

I was working but I was also getting supplemental ADC [for child care]. The state paid my mom to watch them--so that helped a lot too. Yeah, because she was to the point where she had to go to work if she didn't have some kind of income. And the state said, yeah, they would pay for my babysitter. So, therefore, I helped her--she didn't have to go to work. She could stay home and she liked that. [788-800]

At this point, Norma was living with her mother and step-father in an extended family household. Since then she and her children lived independently in an apartment, but were not able manage it financially. By this time her mother and step-father were in danger of losing their house to foreclosure. Norma and her children moved back in and pay them rent--a relationship that is mutually beneficial economically. The household

strategies of Norma McCullen and David Roberts are interdependent and interconnected with those of extended family members.

These data support research by Stack (1974, 1996), Richards (1989), and Edin and Lein (1996) finding that poor households depend on social networks to survive economically. But these data also raise questions about how social networks function among other sample families. The vast majority of nonpoor respondents do not receive what they consider to be economic assistance from their families and friends. At the same time, interview accounts point to very supportive relationships within their social networks, and especially between respondents and their parents or parents-in-law.

Rapp's (1992) distinction between lineal and lateral distribution of resources in extended families is helpful in assessing between-class differences in family support. In working class and poor families, material and economic resources are invested laterally into broad family networks (1992:64). Rapp, in discussing the domestic networks Stack documents, writes that the poor "reproduce themselves by spreading out the aid and the risks involved in daily life" (1992:59). In other words, mutual assistance is a vital survival strategy. Among the middle class, family assistance becomes more lineal than lateral as resources are distributed between parents, children, and grandchildren (1992:64). Assistance is intergenerational as the older generation facilitates the reproduction of middle class status in the younger generation or generations. It is possible that the analysis above did not find the use of family support as an important household strategy among the middle class because the analysis above considered only interactions oriented directly toward maintaining households economically. In the next section I explore patterns of non-economic social support among sample families; I examine how this support is differentiated by social class and whether these network-based relationships provide support that is less than direct economic assistance, but still constitutes a significant household strategy.

Social support

The previous section differentiates by social class the use of network-based household strategies, that is assistance that was specifically oriented toward economic survival or economic well-being of the household. The current discussion focuses on social support that does not fall directly into the category of economic assistance. Social support is divided into three types: family support, non-family support, and institutional support.

Family-based social support

Family-based social support is the most frequently cited category of support. Parents' responses divide into three specific categories: advice, encouragement, and assistance. In addition, some respondents spoke of social support in a generalized sense as "help". The distribution of family-based social support is found on Table 11 and Table C in Appendix C.¹⁶ Most respondents indicate that they depend on family members for social support. Parents and parents-in-law are the most frequently named source of social support; sisters or sisters-in law are mentioned, as are adult children; in one case, a brother is mentioned. Of thirty respondents, only three--Julie Cooper, Kimberly Sue Campbell, and Nicole Davenport--do not specifically mention receiving kin-based support. Kimberly Sue gives social support to kin, but does not report receiving it. Ruthann VanDyke receives substantial material assistance from her family, a subject discussed under the heading of network-based economic strategies on pages 155-156, but she too does not discuss non-economic social support.

[Table 11 about here]

¹⁶Table 11 is a summary of responses by social class. Table C presents social support identified in each of thirty interviews and is located in Appendix C.

Table 11
Non-Economic Social Support: Family-Based and Non-Family Based
Percentage of Parents Identifying Kinds of Support in Class-Based Groups (n=30)

	Family-Based Support				Non-Family Based Support			
	Assistance		Advice	Encourage- ment	Nonspecific support	Neighbors	Friends	Child care providers
	W/children	Other						
<i>Middle class n=4</i>								
Total	100%	25%	25%	25%	0%	50%	25%	25%
<i>Working class n=17</i>								
<i>Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000</i>								
Total	71%	0%	29%	29%	0%	14%	14%	14%
<i>Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000</i>								
Total %	40%	10%	10%	0%	20%	0%	30%	10%
<i>Poor n=9</i>								
Total	56%	0%	33%	0%	33%	11%	22%	0%

The range of family support given varies in both type and frequency. The category of support mentioned most frequently was assistance, the majority of which entails providing care for children. Table 11 and Table C separate family-based assistance into two categories: assistance with children and other assistance. In some cases extended family members provide care for children infrequently and only in special circumstances, such as to give parents the opportunity to have a weekend alone (Davis) or attend a work-related conference (Cole, Watson), or in case of illness (Griffin, Newman). The Molloyes and Edwards have family members who babysit on an occasional basis. In other cases, family support is a regular feature of family life. Four respondents (Williams, Schram, Nichols, Norris) report that they currently depend on their families on a regular basis to furnish transportation or provide care for their children; Mary Schram depends on her mother, Melissa Nichols on her parents, Diane Norris on her father-in-law, and Crystal Williams on her younger sister. The parents of Claudia Olsen and Rita Mannelli provided regular care for children in the past. This assistance is provided at no cost. In three additional cases (Roberts, Miller, McCullen), extended family members are paid to provide care for children. Anne Kennedy frames the function of family support with respect to children somewhat differently than other respondents. She refers to the special bond her daughter has with one of her grandmothers, that she spends "a lot of close time" with her grandmother and that the grandmother invites the children over to her home. In this case, care for children is seen not as instrumentally helpful to parents, but intrinsically important to the child's emotional development.

Lynn Patterson's sister-in-law provides assistance that is somewhat unique. This household made up of Lynn, her three children, her husband who is the father of the youngest child, and one of her husband's other children. Her older two children have different fathers. The respondent made the decision long ago that her older son, the target child, would never see his biological father. As part of custody

arrangements, his half-sister and his step-brother spend every weekend with their non-custodial parents. This mother reports that her son feels left out on the weekends because he does not have somewhere else to go. She says that her sister-in-law has offered to take this child every weekend, so he too will have another place to go on the weekends. I categorize this situation as assistance with children.

Two sample families receive other assistance from their extended families. For two respondents (Griffin, Schram), assistance includes help with household tasks. Margaret Griffin's disability has restricted her physical capabilities; her mother-in-law cleans her house once a week and her father drives her to medical appointments. Mary Schram's family lives next door to her parents. This proximity has facilitated a strong interrelationship between these households. Mary, a bus driver for the local school system, reports that she often drops her children off at her mother's house to do their homework while she completes the bus route. Her parents help with chores if her husband is working late. When she is ill, her mother comes next door to help her.

Six respondents (Cole, Collins, Davis, Roberts, Newman, Smith) report receiving advice from extended family members. Four respondents (Schram, Collins, Davis, Miller) report receiving encouragement from family members. Interviewees' references to family members providing "emotional support" or a family member "listening" to their concerns were categorized as encouragement. In addition, five respondents (Shoemaker, Morgan, Patterson, Phillips, Turner) made non-specific references to receiving social support, saying a family member "helps them out," or "is always there," or they can "depend on" a family member.

Non-family social support

Ten respondents report that their families receive non-kin social support. References to this support were frequently framed as "depending on" someone and often did not include specific details. References to non-kin social support can be

grouped in three categories: support from neighbors (Cole, Kennedy, Collins, Watson), support from friends (Kennedy, Walsh, Rogers, VanDyke, Cooper, Watson, Campbell) and support from child care providers (Kennedy, Molloy, Cooper). In discussing non-kin support, respondents generally referred to support in the present, or support that has been continuous over time. Diane Norris does, however, tell of her reliance on friends and a neighbor when her twins were infants and she lived in a different locale.

Neighbors have provided child-related assistance for respondents Sharon Cole, Virginia Collins, and Anne Kennedy. A helpful neighbor helps Colleen Watson sort out household matters like car repairs. Support from friends takes the form of advice or encouragement (Kennedy, VanDyke, Walsh, Watson, Cooper) or child care (Campbell, Rogers). When asked the interview question regarding their dependence on their families and communities, three mothers discussed how important it was to them to have had long-term child care providers. These paid providers were a source of stability and continuity in the lives of these families. Anne Kennedy, an elementary school teacher says of her child care provider, "She's like a second mother to my kids" (275).

While the interview asked about receiving social support, some respondents talked about giving support as well as receiving it. Mary Schram and Patty Newman say they give more advice and encouragement to friends than they receive. Patty says that she is "over-used" by her friends. Two sample families (Molloy, Norris) provided a temporary residence for friends in difficult circumstances. The Norrises provided shelter for a friend and her three children who needed to get out of a situation in which they lived with a boyfriend in a one-bedroom apartment. She explains:

My house was very, very small. We put her in the garage. We set up bunk beds. We did this for her--we did that. She didn't help me with any of the extra house bills. I think she bought groceries twice and she lived with me for three months. [2701-2713]

The Molloy took in a pregnant friend and her partner for a month.

Institutional social support

When asked specifically about the need for, and the availability and utilization of family and community support, only three respondents (Phillips, Roberts, Miller) discussed non-economic assistance from community institutions. [The use of economic assistance provided by institutions is a household strategy discussed on pages 148-151.] Shelly Phillips and her son who was the focus of the interview have been assisted by community counselors and prevention workers since the discovery that the boy had been molested by a male babysitter. David Roberts mentions the support of Hospice as his wife was dying and the continued presence of that organization as his daughter receives counseling from Hospice. In addition, he explains that when special needs children are adopted, adoption agency workers continue to support the family. Robin Miller received community counseling at the time of her divorce. Because the driving distance to the counselor was prohibitive, the counseling generally occurred by telephone. This respondent talks at length about the difficulty of accessing counseling services for her children. She thinks family counseling services are “hush, hush” in this community and that families are left to fend for themselves. She only recently found out that the school has a counselor, but now has heard that the counselor is leaving the school.

Several respondents raise the subject of community support at other points in the interview. Three additional respondents talk about their families' need for counseling services. Ruthann VanDyke relates that a counselor has helped her adopted daughter come to terms with being rejected by her birth mother. Norma McCullen says that her divorce has had a deep effect on her children. Her daughter sees the school counselor and now her son has asked to talk to the counselor as well. This mother has heard that the school counselor is quitting her job and now says of her son's request, “I'm kind of

putting him off on it, waiting ‘til they get the new one” (883-885). Colleen Watson explains how it happened that she and her children went through counseling. A convoluted set of circumstances resulted in a situation in which her former husband was ordered by Protective Services to pay for counseling which has been beneficial for all of them.

David Roberts gives another account of institutional assistance when he describes the support provided by Hospice and his church in the weeks his wife spent at home before her death. People from the church brought in food and provided “24 hour surveillance,” with some volunteers staying overnight attending to his wife.

Social support differentiated by social class

The data above point to class-based variation in reports of social support. Table 11 and Table C show the distribution of respondent accounts of the various categories of social support, but these descriptive statistics do not address the issue of the quality of social support or assess how it functions. Contrasting accounts of social support in middle class families with the accounts of poor families reveals important differences.

The middle class families in this study have been able to construct networks of social support that perpetuate their economic status. In this sample, social support shores up the difficult project of parenting young children in a dual-earner household. Families with less social support may be unable to sustain this effective strategy for resource generation. Social support facilitates the professional employment of the Cole and Kennedy households and the entrepreneurial activity of the Williams household. The Schrams know that Mary’s parents will step in when things become difficult, for example, when Mary’s husband works late or when she is driving the school bus and the children really need to get to their homework. In this small subsample, social networks contribute to the ability of middle class households to earn the salaries that allow them to conclude they have “no problem” paying their bills. The interview

accounts of Sharon Cole and Anne Kennedy are illustrative. Sharon Cole, a part-time registered dietician, describes how both sets of parents support their family:

My folks and my husband's folks come and help whenever they can, even though they don't live in the area [They live 150 and 190 miles away respectively.] So like last week, or two weeks ago, I was gone to a conference in Chicago all week. And they came, his parents for two days and my mom for two days. So they help us in that way as much as they can. [1557-1580]

Anne Kennedy has been able to construct a network of support that eases the inevitable work and family conflicts that occur in a household in which the mother of young children is employed as a teacher. This respondent depends on friends, neighbors, and a woman who has been her child care provider for fourteen years. As to “picking kids up and bringing them places,” she reports that people at school occasionally volunteer to help and that she “counts on her neighbors a lot.” She describes her neighbors as “good neighbors, real close neighbors” (708-709). But the mainstay of her support network is her child care provider:

She's like a second mother to my kids, and even today when my kids don't need a babysitter, that's who they turn to if there's a problem. They always have her phone number, you know, they have the phone number memorized. And she's the person they'd call if there was a problem.

Anne says she would not “feel good” about working outside the home if she did not have this type of child care situation. A \$40,000 annual salary allows this mother to purchase the support she needs to juggle work and family.

Two further observations by Rapp (1992) regarding social support within the middle class are relevant to this discussion. First, the middle class, with its stable and sufficient material base, is able to commodify some its support needs. The middle class does not need to depend on family or friends as an economic strategy; middle class families purchase many of the services that extended family members might provide. Second, the middle class may invest “‘familial’ energies” in friendship rather than kinship. They are thus protected from the expectations of pooling and leveling that kin

relations may involve (and do involve in the working class or among the poor) (Rapp 1992). In the case of Anne Kennedy, we see that she depends on a paid caregiver to be a “second mother” to her children and friends and neighbors to offer occasional assistance.

Social support among the poor and near-poor looks different. Of the five cases in which extended family members care for children, in three cases (Roberts, Miller, McCullen) they are paid care providers. Parents believe it to be advantageous to have a family member caring for their children, and find these arrangements to be supportive. In one case (Newman), grandparents cared for two of four children when the respondent had surgery. In only Colleen Watson’s case does a poor household receive family support as was seen among middle class respondents, that is, no-cost child care that enabled a respondent to attend to employment-related responsibilities. Colleen says that her father and his wife occasionally care for her children when she attends training conventions for hair stylists.

There is no indication among middle class families that the social support they receive is unpredictable, undependable, or insufficient. Poor respondents do, however, describe situations in which social support was lacking or just not enough. Patty Newman says it was “really rough” when her daughter was born. She explains that she was “divorced from my first husband and was dating this guy that I later found out was no good, and by that time it was too late--she was on the way [she was pregnant with her daughter]” (1057-1062). She had little or no support at this time:

It was just me and the kids. The older two [ages 10 and 7 at that time] were my helpers. They did an awful lot--learned how to do laundry and I supervised them doing meals--because I didn’t know if I was going to be able to get anyone in the house for the one night that I stayed in the hospital when she was born. [1027-1035]

Twenty-four hours after the birth, she and her newborn daughter came home to three additional children (ages 10, 7, and 5) and no assistance. It was a difficult time in

which she was not physically able to do everything she needed to do as a parent. She reflects that she did not get up in the morning to get the children off to school and she did not supervise her kindergartner as she would otherwise have done. Patty has parents 150 miles away who did take two of her children recently when she had surgery. Patty did not explain why her extended family did not offer support at the time of this birth.

Dorothy Turner has garnered all the network-related resources she can gather in, and still needs to turn of the heat periodically to buy her children's necessities. This mother is unemployed and looking for work, but not having a telephone and reliable transportation are impeding her job search. The social support she receives is oriented toward addressing the continuing short-fall between economic resources and necessities as she remains unemployed. This support, although provided by a number of sources such as her in-laws, churches, and public assistance programs, is insufficient to meet this household's needs.

Middle class respondents would probably not conclude that they depend on their family and nonfamily networks as economic strategies. Extended family members who care for their children and help them solve logistical problems are more likely to be seen to be demonstrating their love and concern by "helping out." Help with children reduces tension for parents and provides beneficial relationships for children. Social support allows middle class parents to, as Anne Kennedy says, "feel good" about their work and family lives. Sharon Cole, Crystal Williams, and Mary Schram speak very positively of strong family ties, but none seem to see the instrumental value of these ties. This preliminary exploratory analysis points to the importance of including social support as a type of network-based household strategy. To focus only on direct economic assistance may give the erroneous conclusion that poor families frequently have an economic interrelationship with their extended families, while middle class families do not.

Sample families differ in the amount of interaction they have with their extended families. For those with close relationships with frequent contact, extended families members try, insofar as possible, to fill the most immediate needs of sample families. With lower income families, the most immediate need may be for economic resources. Better-off families in this sample did not have direct economic assistance as their primary necessity. Network-based support among these families then becomes part of the web of supportive structures that perpetuate their middle class status and allows them to appear self-sufficient.

Use of residential strategies

The use of residential strategies generally follows social class lines. Two poor women adapted the composition of their households and thereby were able to improve their housing (Robin Miller) or gain access to far more income (Shelly Phillips). Living in a trailer is an economic strategy that provides low cost, but less than desirable housing. This strategy is used by no middle class families and one of seven (14%) higher income working class families. This higher income working class families lives in a new trailer. Five of ten (50%) lower income working class families and five of nine (56%) poor families live in trailers. In addition, one poor family lives in a modular home. The meaning of another residential strategy--moving--differs by social class. The Cole (middle class) and Collins (higher income working class) families moved into the area for employment in the community. For the Davenport (lower income working class), Turner, and Miller (both poor) families, the moves were precipitated by a desire to escape undesirable urban living situations they experienced as low income households in a metropolitan area.

OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

Household strategies are the decisions family and household members make and the actions they take to sustain themselves economically. This analysis of household strategies concludes that sample families use a broad range of household strategies and that the combination of strategies used by sample families is differentiated by social class. Families of the same social class experience a similar set of structural opportunities and constraints. While individual biographies vary, we expect common threads in the strategies of individuals whose social locations overlap at least in part. Within-class variation is surely present, yet this analysis allows for certain characterizations. Middle class households have achieved a comfortable and secure economic position by professional or managerial work, most of which is local employment. In the case of the Williams family, it seems that long-term family connections in the community (her parents own a large farm; his parents own a business) have facilitated their entrepreneurial enterprises. All families are dual earner households. These families have strong networks of social support.

Among working class families, nearly half depend on income from overtime work. When working class households are divided into higher and lower family income groups, we find important differences. Higher income working class families are very likely to have a commuter. In this category are skilled workers who find they must commute to the metro center for appropriate employment and higher earnings. Higher income working class families are also more likely to be dual earner households. Dual earning differentials are partially explained by disability in lower income working class families. Lower income working class families have much more difficulty paying their bills and use various budgeting and cost-cutting measures to stretch resources to cover necessities. Over half of these families live in mobile homes. Lower income working class respondents report less social support than do other

groups.

Employment is certainly the principal household strategy in this rural sample, and no less so among the poor. Only one poor household does not currently have formal employment and the separated mother who heads that household is looking for a job. Eight of nine (89%) poor households are working poor. Poor households have difficulty implementing the strategies that have been most effective for other households. Four of five (80%) single parent households are poor; most lone parents do not find they can fulfill their parental responsibilities and extend their work days by commuting or working overtime. In addition, two disabled women live in poor households. Given the insufficiency of income-generating strategies, poor families “stretch” and “finagle,” but sometimes find they must move in with parents to keep a roof over their children’s heads. Two-thirds of these families live in mobile or modular homes.

Social class creates distinctive environments for family life. This analysis illumines how social class location shapes the strategies families can and do use. Families are embedded in social contexts in which they have a particular set of resources and constraints. The decisions families make and the actions they take to maintain their households economically reflect these context-specific obstacles or facilitators. In some family contexts it is clearly easier for parents to provide for their children and in other situations it is much harder.

The multiple contexts for family life come into view when we listen to what respondents themselves say about their family lives. The household strategies they have used to maintain their households have occurred in the context of a variety of significant events and family transitions. The adoption of a particular set of strategies is contingent on other circumstances within a household. To explore further the context of family life by social class, I examine the range of stresses and family changes identified by research participants in the interviews. Parents assess significant family

changes in responses to the following interview question:

In the lifetime of your child, have major events occurred that really changed your family? [Q G.1.]

I also look for respondent-identified stresses as they are articulated over the course of the interview.

This research has already identified a diversity of family experience in this sample. Some children have apparently not experienced transitions other than those that can be expected over the life course while other children have lived in circumstances of considerable flux and even tragedy. Responses to interview question Q G.1. (above) are paraphrased in Table 12. In some cases interviewees respond with more than one significant event that has precipitated family change. In four cases, respondents say there have been no changes in their family lives.

[Table 12 about here]

Table 12 shows that the family lives of this sample have been shaped by a number of factors. Fourteen interviewees name events related to family or household structure change as significantly changing their families. These fourteen respondents gave eighteen responses that may be organized in the following way: step-sibling issues (n=5); separation (n=4); remarriage (n=4); divorce (n=3); marriage (n=1); cohabitation (n=1); and parent's death (n=1). Seven respondents chose a death in the family as significant. In most cases, the death was that of a grandparent or great-grandparent. Other responses fall into the following categories: births (n=3); moves (n=2); employment (n=2); fire (n=1); and child's personal trauma (n=1). In addition, there are two cases of missing data and in one case the question did not apply.

Table 12 brings into view between-class differences in the family lives of target children. The small sample of middle class families has been insulated from the tragic

Table 12

In the lifetime of your child, have major events occurred that really changed your family?

Responses of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families (n = 30)

Family

Middle class n=4

Cole: Respondent went back to work part-time [but respondent could not find good child care and discontinued working until both children were in school]

Kennedy: Probably not, but a grandparent died

Williams: Not much -- only adding another child

Schram: None

Working class n=17

Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000

Nichols: Respondent's remarriage - a major adjustment

Molloy: Death of child's grandfather; death of pets

Olsen: Respondent's remarriage and birth of a new stepbrother

Collins: None really

Mannelli: Death of two of child's grandparents

Walsh: Missing data

Davis: Child moved twice before preschool

Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000

Rogers: Death of child's great-grandfather

Griffin: Missing data

Davenport: A death in the family (not specified)

Phillips: The family lost everything in two fires; the child's grandmother was killed; several moves; the child's trauma (he was molested by a babysitter); respondent separated from her husband

VanDyke: Not applicable - child newly adopted

Edwards: Couple separated for a while - continuing effects on child

Table 12 (cont'd.)

Cooper: None

Shoemaker: Child's older stepbrothers (ages 18 and 21) moved out of the household

Norris: Respondent's marriage to child's stepfather

McCullen: Respondent's divorce

Poor n=9

Patterson: Marriage and one of respondent's stepsons moved in

Newman: Respondent's remarriage - she and her husband each have 4 children, a total of 8 children

Smith: Having a baby sister has been very positive for target child

Roberts: Death of child's adoptive mother

Watson: Former husband's leaving the family [divorce]

Miller: Respondent's divorce and later her boyfriend and his daughters moving in

Campbell: No big changes

Morgan: After long-term welfare receipt, both respondent and her husband got jobs; this changed their lives completely; husband walked out; he now lives with his girlfriend

Turner: Respondent and husband are separated and have decided to get a divorce

events and difficult transitions that occur increasingly as we move down through social class categories. A middle class mother (Crystal Williams) indicates they have more than enough money for everything they want and after pausing to think of a major change in their family, names a life-course event--the birth of a second child. This situation (and that of others similarly situated) stand at marked contrast from the concerns of poor families. A poor mother (Robin Miller) who is strategizing to scrape together money so her son can join a football team is also trying to ease the turf battle between her sons and her cohabiting partner's daughters. A lower income working class mother (Norma McCullen) who shops with great care at the mission store because she "won't send [her] children to school in rags" is also concerned that her divorce is the reason her son still wets the bed. Lower income children not only live with economic scarcity, but many also are called upon to make an adjustment to tragic events and difficult transitions.

The interview provided respondents many opportunities to talk about stressful circumstances. I use "stressors" to refer to situations or events that cause mental or emotional strain or tension. Respondents frequently spoke from their own perspective about situations or events that were personally stressful. In other instances respondents spoke in a more general sense of circumstances that have strained the family. Respondent-identified stresses are found in Table 13. I focus on recent, current, or continuous stressors; when clearly articulated, past stressors are also included in the table.

[Table 13 about here]

A clear pattern can be seen in the incidence of stressors by social class. Three of four middle class families indicate no current stressors; one respondent experiences work-family pressures. Reading down Table 13 from middle class respondents to poor

Table 13
Respondent-Identified Stressors (both individual and family)
Distribution in Class-Based Groups of Sample Families (n=30)

Family

Middle class n=4

Cole	No current stressors identified; raising two children 18 months apart was difficult in the past, as was moving to community where they did not know anyone
Kennedy	Difficulty of fulfilling work and family responsibilities during the school year (the mother is a teacher)
Williams	None expressed
Schram	No current stressors identified; it was difficult when children were young because they were 14 months apart

Working class n=16

Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000

Nichols	The adjustment to the new marriage is difficult for all of them; respondent is in role of peacemaker - "it wears me out"
Molloy	None expressed; respondent says they have two beautiful children, a nice house, and a beautiful car
Olsen	Adjusting to new family situation (remarriage and new baby) is a challenge; respondent says, "it's going well"
Collins	No current stressors identified; in the past, economic pressures interfered with family time
Mannelli	Respondent is pressured by transporting children and coordinating their activities; she thinks what she does is hard - it is always "hectic" and "hurry-up"
Walsh	Making ends meet has been difficult but respondent is positive about family life; in past: military experience, abuse, separation
Davis	Time is an issue now that respondent is a student; in past, mother felt "trapped" and "completely stretched" by the pressures of having four children close together

Lower income subgroup n=9 income < \$30,000

Rogers	Making ends meet is "terrible," but respondent is positive about her "laid back family;" no sick pay is a source of concern
Griffin	Respondent feels guilty that she's unable to do housework and is limited in what she can do with her children due to her disability
Davenport	Respondent is very stressed by work and family responsibilities; no leisure time and significant economic stress (husband unemployed)

Table 13 (cont'd.)

Phillips	This family lives in chaotic and discouraging circumstances; multiple traumas; parenting four children is difficult for this mother - "All they do is fight and fight and fight"
VanDyke	Family is relieved to have the adoption finalized and is optimistic about being a family
Edwards	Respondent is stretched by work, children, and home responsibilities
Cooper	Respondent feels time pressure because she's working a lot of overtime; she is tired - "it's everyday life"
Shoemaker	None expressed --they have been "lucky financially" and her husband "works steady"
Norris	Respondent is pleased with the stability they have achieved; mother is an alcoholic who used to bring children with her into bars; greater financial stability as well
McCullen	This respondent feels there is never enough time or money; she is concerned about a serious congenital vision problem her son has and what the future will hold for him

Poor n = 10

Patterson	They all are adjusting to the marriage (adding a husband and one of his children)
Newman	Adjustment to her remarriage continues; there is a constant struggle to make ends meet; financial problems cause hostility between the partners
Smith	Respondent is very concerned about the safety of her children; living in an extended family household means "there's more people to protect my kids"
Roberts	The respondent and his daughter mourn the recent death of wife and mother
Watson	This respondent has a very conflictual and contentious relationship with her former husband; children are caught in a difficult spot
Miller	This respondent has great difficulty making ends meet; her wages are not enough to cover her half of the expenses; she is challenged by accommodating to new cohabiting situation and "juggling" four children (two of hers; and two of his)
Campbell	Lack of money; lack of living space in their small trailer
Morgan	Respondent describes situation at home as "rocky;" husband recently moved out and son is now having problems in school; respondent strained by responsibilities
Turner	Respondent is stressed by severe economic stain; it is difficult to manage without a telephone and reliable transportation; these have contributed to her inability to get a job

respondents we find increasing incidence of strain, that is, an increasing “mismatch” between demands and the resources necessary to meet them (Bos 1987:701). Poor respondents sometimes describe multiple stressors. Primary areas of stress are household structure change (n=5), economic pressure (n=4), family conflict (n=2), and concerns with children (n=2). Among poor respondents we find difficult circumstances and discouraged individuals. Low stress levels are associated with what has been called a “sense of control” (Mirowsky and Ross, cited in Kingsbury and Scanzoni 1993:209). Responses of lower class respondents clearly indicate that there are areas of their lives in which they do not have this sense of control.

Tables 12 and 13 show that the primary differences between higher and lower income households are more than economic. Economic strain is not the only challenge facing lower income families. Rather, numerous stressors including illness and disability as well as necessary adjustments to family structure changes present obstacles and absorb the attention and energy of these low income parents. Economic hardship is associated with greater family fluidity and increased chronic stressors in this study as well as in the family sociology literature (for example, Bokemeier and Garkovich 1987, Conger et al. 1990).

In drawing conclusions about how household strategies are differentiated by social class, we must not conceive of household strategies named in this analysis as a range of options equally available to sample families. The use of different strategies is more than a matter of preference. There is no giant smorgasbord of strategies from which all sample parents choose their favorites. It is not simply that lower income parents have developed a different set of preferences than have middle class parents. It comes down to more than a matter of personal taste. Poor and near poor parents in this sample operate with a set of constraints that limit their options. This analysis points to two primary constraints among this rural sample. First, households that were unable to earn more than one income were at a great economic disadvantage; households with

single parents, disabled adults, or four children (with one exception) were not able to implement this strategy. No dual income households were poor. Second, households in which earners were unable to commute were at an economic disadvantage.

Commuting allowed many lower skilled individuals to hook into higher pay in a healthier labor market in a metro center. Single parent households experienced the greatest constraints to commuting. Some single earner commuters were still poor, but were nearer the poverty line than they would have been with local employment. Single parents experienced the most severe constraints in this rural community. Single parent households were poor, or in the case of Norma McCullen, near-poor.

When surveying the job prospects in this community, Tiffany Walsh said, "There is nothing here" [3276]. This analysis does indeed find little economic opportunity for working class and working poor respondents. Rural restructured economies are characterized by low wage, marginal employment that provides little opportunity for advancement. Such a characterization describes well private sector employment in this nonmetro economy. Residents of this nonmetro county experience a double disadvantage. Rural wages are generally lower than urban wages for comparable work. Further, higher paying categories of work: transportation and public utilities, wholesale trade, and finance, insurance, and real estate, are under-represented in this local economy (see Tables 1 and 2). This economy provides professional-managerial employment and middle class security for a few sample families, but constructing a secure economic base is difficult for most sample families. Among sample working class and working poor men (other than self-employed), wages for those who work within the county range from \$5.80 an hour to \$14.00 an hour; median hourly pay for men with in-county employment is \$10.00. For these working class and working poor women (including Mary Schram, a bus driver), wages for those employed within the county range from \$3.18 an hour plus tips, to \$12.00 an hour; median hourly pay for women with in-county employment is \$6.90. Three of the four

highest paid women within this subgroup have public sector employment working for the school system. Most sample households have rejected the primary category of employment in this county: retail trade. The two retail workers--Diane Norris, a waitress, and David Roberts, a retail scanner--are the lowest paid woman and man in the sample.

Most individuals in this sample assume that the way to enhance their families' economic-being is to increase their work hours or get a "better job." Increasing work effort by working overtime, moonlighting, or adding informal economy work are strategies used many sample families. One promising strategy in looking for a better job would be to look ten to fifteen miles north to the university, an public-sector employer likely to offer one of the best wage and benefit packages in the county. Only one sample worker, Sharon Cole's husband, is employed by the university. It is somewhat puzzling that these sample families do not pursue opportunities at the university. The university--despite its current hard times--is still by far the largest employer in the county. Better jobs are surely available at the university, but it is possible that most of these workers do not have the education, training, or experience necessary for the jobs slots there.

Two working class earners--a printer and a telephone company switcher--have specialized skills and must commute to the metro center to use them. The court reporter commutes to a low-security, no benefit job with high compensation for high work effort. Many sample workers, however, get on the highway and drive south 40 to 60 miles to the metro center to do the same relatively low-skilled work they might have found locally; commuting brings them incrementally or substantially higher pay. The largest category of metro commuters is factory workers (n=6). None of these factory workers has found a job with one of the major, high-quality union employers in the metro center. Most workers commute to take advantage of higher pay scales in the metro area. However, relatively few commute to take advantage of one of the most

attractive attributes of metro employment, that is, greater diversity in the distribution of work by sector of employment. Many commuters--although earning more than they could near home--supply low wage labor for the more marginal employers in the metropolitan center.

This analysis points to important differences between the dominant strategies of the poor families who participated in this research and the strategies identified in studies of poor families who contend with a restructured economy in other contexts. The principal economic strategy for these poor families is employment. The majority of poor families combine low wage employment with owner-occupied low-cost housing (in mobile homes). They live paycheck to paycheck, but most manage to survive in independent households by careful budgeting and manipulating their cash flow ("finagling the bills"). These strategies were generally adequate to sustain households, although they construct a precarious survival.

Research by Stacey (1991) and Stack (1974) identifies other strategies as characteristic of their research participants. Employment was much less available to the urban Blacks Stack studied. In the absence of opportunity structures of formal employment, families lived in "perpetual poverty" (Stack 1974:22). Families depended on extended kin networks for survival. Vital goods and services circulated between households in these networks of cooperative exchange. Housing constituted a shared resource. In the highly fluid circumstances of daily life, few couples were able to maintain separate households.

Stacey's research focuses on working class adults and their grown children in Silicon Valley, California. Stacey found "accordion households" as grown children returned back to live in their family home when employment, family, or personal circumstances created economic difficulties (1991:202). Several children began adulthood with "shaky starts" and had been unable to move into more settled patterns of independent living. Economic resources continued to flow from parents to adult

children. Stacey concludes that the family network-based strategies she documents resemble those found among the poor African American families in Stack's research (1991:254).

One of the premises of this research is that families are shaped by the social context in which they are embedded. Therefore, household strategies are context-specific. Secondary sector employment remains available to the rural families I studied. Further, this group experiences the advantage of membership in the dominant racial group. Racial minorities have historically occupied a labor niche in which they have had access to the least secure and lowest paid job categories in this society. In recent decades, urban Blacks have been concentrated in areas which have experienced a virtual disappearance of work (Wilson 1987, 1996). Stack and I both studied poor families, but the families she studied were poorer and experienced a more limited range of options than did the families I studied. The experience of Stacey's sample and mine are difficult to compare. The participants in my research were younger than Stacey's two primary participants, but older than their children. The young adults in Stacey's study may become more economically self-sufficient in the next five to ten years. A significant difference between Stacey's research setting and mine is the cost of housing. The low-cost housing option available to the population I studied may be an important factor that enables one set of family members to maintain separate households while another set is unable to do so.

Methodological notes

This analysis illustrates again the inadequacy of existing family terminology to capture the diversity of family experience. When categorizing responses to Q G.1. (paraphrased in Table 8), I was confronted with the question of how to describe the relationship between the children of Robin Miller and those of her cohabiting partner. The term step-siblings implies a relationship based on the formal marriage of their

parents. There is no term for describing the more informal relationship between these children. Given the inadequacy of our language, I coded the response “his daughters moving in” as a step-sibling issue. To take this point further, we also lack a term for the relationship between cohabiting adults and their partner’s children. Robin’s children refer to her partner as her “boyfriend;” his children refer to Robin as “Mom.”

Analysis of events that occurred over the lifetime of the target child is difficult because of the fluidity of social class over time. I had anticipated using an analysis of responses to Q F.2. to point toward stresses specifically related to the target child.

This question asks:

In the years it has taken you to raise (child's name), what would you say has been the hardest decision you have had to make regarding (child's name)? [Q. F.2.]

The paraphrased responses to this question are found in Table D which is located in Appendix C. First, this table shows that most major decisions related to some aspect of child-rearing practice. Responses do point to the existence of a segment of the sample in which respondents say that some decision related to family construction and disruption or personal tragedy had been most difficult. In some cases, however, the situation occurred when the respondent and child had a different class location than at present. These particular data, then, are potentially confusing and do not help us understand patterns of personal and family stress by social class.

Chapter 7

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILY AND ECONOMY

This research has explored contemporary household structure and family life in a rural setting. It has focused on two main issues: continuity and fluidity in the structure of family households and the strategies household members use to sustain themselves economically. Surveys and interviews of thirty-one parents representing thirty families have constituted the primary source of data for this research. The focus shifts now to the twenty-nine rural mothers who participated in this research. I consider how these rural mothers perceive and explain their own family and household arrangements and their own economic circumstances in this particular local context.

I find important theoretical and methodological reasons to shift the focus of study to the women who participated in this research. First, given the general invisibility of women in rural research, such a focus is long overdue. The historic focus of rural research on “men’s concerns” such as agricultural production and rural development has effectively excluded women as subjects of research and sources of knowledge (Tickamyer et al. 1993). This chapter makes the invisible visible as it moves women from the margins to center stage. Deliberately giving women an opportunity to speak contributes to more complete, and thus more accurate representations of rural places and rural people. When the perspectives of any social group are excluded in the construction of knowledge, the knowledge produced is partial, and thus, inaccurate. The dominant discourse may little describe the experience of individuals at subordinate social locations. Because women are subordinate to men in rural society, inattention to their experience and their angles of vision distorts explanations of social reality. Second, in this analysis of family life in a restructured economy, it is vital to pay attention to the individuals who are primarily responsible for negotiating the changes that economic restructuring has brought to family lives. That

women continue to take responsibility for family life is seen in the gender distribution of our sample. We invited fathers or mothers to participate in our family interviews, but it was overwhelmingly women who were willing to participate in research about family life. When “family” is the subject, women are assumed to be knowledgeable. But in addition, rural women increasingly enter the labor force, stretch meager household resources to make ends meet, and remain responsible for children in a context of increased divorce. Women, located as they are at the nexus of the household and the economy, are well situated to provide knowledge that illumines the relationship between the restructured rural economy and the construction and maintenance of family life. Third, this chapter uses research participants not only as sources of data, but as interpreters of their own social context and personal experience. These women are competent social actors whose decisions and strategies are grounded in their understandings and perceptions of the structure of opportunity and the parameters of family life in this rural place. A study that explores the social forces that shape family life in a particular locale must surely incorporate the explanations and perspectives of the individuals it has used as local experts, that is, the research participants.

I acknowledge what might be perceived as a lack of fit between this chapter and the other chapters of this work. In previous chapters I used the data that women provided about their families and community to analyze the construction and maintenance of family life in a small rural place. The focus has been on the information they have provided about matters such as employment, budgeting, or the structure of their households. The current chapter adds something important and different to the research. In exploring how these women present, explain, and understand aspects of their family lives, the focus shifts to listening to women’s voices and attending to the more subjective matters of perception and meaning. As researcher, I selected the quotations included in this chapter and frequently summarized women’s

viewpoints. Yet I have tried to present the material in a way in which these women would take the lead in illuminating both diversity and commonality in the assumptions and perspectives that undergird family life with respect to the issues of this research.

INTRODUCTION

Rural America is generally assumed to be a positive and wholesome environment for family life (Seebach 1992). While urban areas are often associated with welfare dependency and single parent families, the enduring character of rural America is typified by the traditional family, economic self-sufficiency, and hard work. While idyllic images of rural life endure, the context for family life in rural places has undergone rapid change (Willits and Luloff 1995). Historically rural society has been highly patriarchal with women's activities largely confined to farm-related and family-related domesticity. Now, with the transformation of the rural economy, the context for women's lives has changed. Fewer families are engaged in farming. The declining quality of men's employment and the growth of the service sector have drawn women into the paid labor force. The 1990 labor force participation rate for nonmetro women ages 25-64 is 65.7%; this rate represents an increase of 19.7% between 1980 and 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1983b, 1993).¹⁷

The structure of rural families and households is changing as well. Rural families are less likely to be two-parent families than in the past. The rate of single parent households has increased among rural as well as urban households. The rate of female-headed households rose from 11.25% of U.S. nonmetro family households in 1980 to 13.7% in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1983c, 1992). While this rise is suggestive of increased family fluidity, the analysis of Chapter 4 shows that the rate of

¹⁷The labor force participation rate for similarly aged metro women is 70.1% in 1990, an increase of 15.5% from 1980.

female-headed households is not a reliable indicator of family structure transition. Using such as a proxy for family structure transitions obscured the extend of family fluidity in this community and likely leads to underestimates of family structure changes in both rural and urban contexts.

It is in this dynamic social context that I examine how, over the course of their interviews, women make sense of their economic status and their family lives. “Giving voice” is a central component of feminist research, yet many feminist researchers acknowledge the methodological difficulties inherent in advancing that commitment. A emphasis on reflexivity means that a scholarly discussion continues on subjects including the researcher-participant relationship, interpretation of data by the researcher, and validity issues (DeVault 1990, Gorelick 1991, Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1991). Frequently feminist researchers, in their desire to engage in a sociology *for* women, wish to expose structures of oppression that may remain hidden from many research participants. This situation raises the complex issue of false consciousness, and brings researchers to ask who should be seen as the expert on the participant’s life--the researcher or the research participant (Gorelick 1991). Gorelick concludes that privileged groups of women may have interest in remaining unaware of their privilege and contends that all research must include analysis of specific social locations.

The concerns of Gorelick and others bear directly on this research and its social class analysis. This research assumes that social location shapes how family life is constructed and experienced. Because all sample women are White and rural, social class is the aspect of social location around which we find the greatest diversity among research participants. The women in this study live in the most economically disadvantaged school district in a county that has the second highest child poverty rate in the state. They live in a local community context in which many families with children struggle to survive economically. This chapter focuses on how women

understand the economic context of this community and how they explain their own economic status. Economic self-sufficiency and hard work are features of the agrarian ideology that persists in rural areas. I consider the commitment of women--whether economically stable, economically insecure, or somewhere between--to these values. I consider whether women who are poor express less commitment to these values. I ask, in effect, whether poor families have deficient values.

Second, this chapter focuses on how sample women understand and explain the structure of their own families. The analysis of Chapter 4 found that only 37% of families fit the nuclear ideal of permanent and private families. While women may have grown up with images of “the classical family of Western nostalgia” [Goode 1971 (1963)], this nostalgic image does not fit the family structure realities of this sample. In Chapter 4, I asked whether the modern nuclear family ideal continues to serve as the benchmark, that is, a standard against which all families are measured, when so many sample families deviate from that ideal form. In that chapter, I considered what families did; in this chapter, I listen to what women say. I consider now whether these women explain their family structure experience with reference to the modern family ideal, in reference to a community context with considerable family fluidity, or somewhere between the poles of this continuum.

The Family Interview data set used for this research is part of the larger Strategies for Rural Families and Children Project which also includes a random sample, county-wide telephone survey (n=300). Telephone survey results illumine the broader county context in which these sample women construct and make sense of their family lives. This survey asks several questions that reveal community sensibilities about family life and perceptions of the economic context. [See Appendix D for the precise wording of survey questions and response categories.] The survey reveals the persistence of traditional family ideology in this county. Fifty-four percent agreed that “It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes

care of the home and family.” [Q. E2]¹⁸ In answer to the question, “Should the law be changed to make divorce more difficult to obtain if children are involved? [Q. E17],” 63% said “yes.” Sixty-eight percent of this sample thought children in single parent homes are worse off than children in two parent homes [Q. E18].

With respect to economic context, the majority of county residents believe the poor do not try hard enough, that most poor people are unemployed, and that time limits on welfare would be positive for children. When asked: “In your opinion are most people on welfare because of lack of effort or because of circumstances beyond their control?” [E23], 62% chose “lack of effort.” Thirty four percent think most of the poor are working, 53% think most are not working and 14% think around half the poor work and half do not [Q. E22]. Sixty-seven percent agree that “Limiting the amount of time families can receive welfare will improve children’s lives in this community” [Q. E4].

This chapter again uses the social class framework introduced in Chapter 2 and used in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. [See Tables 5 and 6.] Four sample families are categorized as middle class, seventeen as working class, and nine as poor. The working class is divided into two subgroups, a higher income subgroup of seven families with incomes greater than \$30,000 and a lower income subgroup of ten families with incomes less than \$30,000. Nine families have incomes below poverty level. We expect to find different perspectives on family structure and economic status within this sample because social class so clearly shapes the life patterns of all of us (Gorelick 1991:473). But this is not to imply a uniform explanation or a unanimous perspective among women in the same social class. Rapp describes social class as a process in which “categories of people get swept up at different times and places and deposited into different relations to the means of production and to one another”

¹⁸Questions Q. E2 and Q. E4 use a five-point Likert scale. “Strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” responses are combined.

(1992:52) Sample women who currently share the same social class have distinctive biographies and may have arrived in their present class position by a number of routes that would have shaped their perspectives differently.

The perspectives below reflect the multiple directions that these interviews took. Women had opportunity to expand on certain aspects of a subject and barely touch on others over the course of the interview. This chapter represents what women wanted to discuss or were willing to discuss with respect to the structure of their families and the local labor market context in which they sustained themselves economically. I look specifically for women's descriptions of the opportunity structures in their local labor market and their explanations for why their own families are economically secure or insecure. I also analyze their perspectives on welfare reform to see how they explain the status of the most economically disadvantaged members of this community.

While women discussed these subjects at several different points in the interview, the relevant discussion came up most frequently in the following contexts. Perspectives on the family economy or the community economic context were found most often at three points in the interview: first, the "Economic and Employment" section of the interview asked questions about making ends meet and employment history [See Section I., pages 295-296 in Appendix B.]; second, Section J., "Evaluating What's Important," asked women to evaluate what factors stood in the way of good jobs [See Section J., pages 296-299 in Appendix B.]; and third, women were asked about proposed welfare changes and how they would affect the community [See Section H. 3., page 295 in Appendix B.].¹⁹ Women's perspectives on matters related to family and household structure were not to be found as predictably. Women's perspectives sometimes emerged in the discussion related to the "Changes in Family/Household" section of the interview [See Section G., page 294 in Appendix B.]. Likewise,

¹⁹Interviews occurred during a time of intensive media attention to "welfare reform" prior to the 1996 Welfare Bill.

participants sometimes explained their family arrangements in response to questions that asked them to assess how they filled various family roles [See Section J. 2. a.-e., pages 298-299 in Appendix B.]. It is noteworthy that lower income women frequently talked about their economic status and family structure in tandem. Clearly, family structure changes affected economic status and sometimes economic status changes affected household arrangements.

MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN: UNQUESTIONED STABILITY

All middle class women in this sample say that their families have no trouble paying their bills and present their family lives as stable and harmonious. Three women's perspectives of the local community context are shaped by their experiences in the work-place. These women: Anne Kennedy, a teacher, Mary Schram, a bus driver, and Sharon Cole, a WIC dietician, interact with and observe poor individuals in the course of their work. Crystal Williams' views are based on local knowledge and general observations.

The perspective of Mrs. Kennedy, an elementary teacher, reflects many years of observing the school and family contexts of children in her classroom. She is very aware that poverty is widespread and that poor children are at a real disadvantage educationally. She speaks at some length:

There are so many parents of my students that are getting federal or state support. Over half the students in my classroom get free lunches and free breakfasts. I would hate to see things like the breakfast program be cut because so many of my students rely on that, and I can see where that has really helped. I know every day at least they've had something in their stomach when they start their first lesson in the morning. . . . I'm not sure [how] some of the parents, you know, if they were forced to find work or rely more on their families, you know, how they would make it. I already see so many families just stretched to their limit. I think that most of the agencies are stretched beyond their limit too. We seem to be in a real pocket here where [these needy

families] are not serviced. [854-894]

She points out that services are centered in the county seat to the north or a town to the south, but that people in these small villages and open country do not have access to services. In response to an interviewer observation about poor families lacking telephones and reliable transportation, Mrs. Kennedy said the following:

I routinely have, I would say, a fifth of my students without a phone and those, of course, are the students that you want to reach and you want to talk to their parents. Or, their daily needs aren't being met and you need to address that and you can't--notes [sent] home with first and second graders don't work. But yeah, that's a real problem. We offer tutoring and it's free. All the parent has to do is pick up the child from tutoring at 4:00 and that's even a problem. The parents can't. They can't be tutored because [a parent] can't be there to pick them up even though the service is completely free and it's one-to-one most of the time. It's wonderful. [920-938]

This research participant, with a master's degree in educational administration, has the highest educational attainment among sample women. Her husband is a carpenter whose work is seasonal; he is unemployed approximately two to three months a year. Their situation is unusual in that she is the partner with stable, professional income and advancement in her career may precipitate a family move. Anne talks about the possibility of moving because it is unlikely that a job in educational administration will develop in the area. She connects professional goals to family outcomes and sees this scenario as positive for her third grade daughter:

I think it's good that she sees me, you know, trying to fulfill my potentials and that she sees that those are things that women can do, that little girls can do, that they can make decisions about their life and follow through and be successful. [1276-1282]

Mrs. Kennedy describes a cooperative relationship with her husband that is focused toward family goals. She says, "You know, my husband doesn't expect me to be home at 5:00 every night and have dinner going. But I think we have a good relationship of give and take as far as meeting the needs of our family" [1209-1214].

Mary Schram emphasizes the importance of stability, routine, and responsibility

in her family. She explains that one of the advantages of living in a rural area is that children learn basic values. Mary says, "They learn basic values, you know, the values of taking care of the animals and taking care of other things rather than being in a small apartment where they don't have anything they feel responsible for" [29-35]. This family lives next door to the respondent's parents and is embedded in a strong network of local extended family ties.

While Mrs. Schram thinks her family is well off economically, she is aware that her financial situation is not typical in this area. She sees poverty in the district from the school bus she drives. She says:

I don't think some people realize how poor [school district name] is. I mean, they only see what they live in. I have seen a lot [driving the bus], and it, it tears you apart some days. And if they cut out [welfare] altogether, I don't know what some of these kids are going to do. [1094-1105]

Mary believes that poor parents sometimes don't make the best use of their money and also observes that if both parents can work, they should work. She does not want people cut off welfare, however, "'til they're up on their feet" [1150].

As a WIC employee, Sharon Cole is aware that the county has a high poverty rate and has considerable experience with what she calls "the welfare population." She is ambivalent about the work she does and is very critical of this population:

I'm sure we are doing a lot of good for these people and then on the other hand, I see we are giving too much of a handout and unless they are responsible for their actions, they are always going to want a handout. So I'm not agreeing with Governor Engler on all he does, but in that respect of them having to go to work I think it is the best thing that ever happened. . . . Because right now, you hand them money--they want more. You don't give them enough coupons for WIC--they want more. They are coming in for extra formula and extra this and that. [They are] going into the food pantry, getting food given to them and going out and selling it to other people and taking the money and doing who knows what with it. [1763-1786]

Mrs. Cole predicts more homelessness and begging on the streets in the aftermath of welfare reform. She explains that her views on welfare are based on her experience

working in the system:

I guess I didn't think about welfare a lot before I worked in the system. You don't think about it. You don't run into it--you don't see it. But when you are there in the homes understanding what's going on and what it is breeding--where they came from and where their kids are going--you are seeing third generation moms coming in at 14 years old--[it's] cyclical. You see a 12 or 13 year old young girl whose mom is 30 years old whose mom is 45.
[1883-1912]

Sharon explains her family's economic security by referring to the fact that they are "professional people" who have gone beyond a high school education.

Sharon Cole describes a companionate marriage of partners on the same intellectual level who dated for a long time before marriage. She says they are "good friends" [2650]. She works 8 to 24 hours a week and remains responsible for domestic chores. The primary conflict she describes occurred when her husband and his parents disapproved of her working when the children were preschoolers. Her children are in school now, and her work is important to her, but she says she would not work without a flexible schedule. She is proud of her ability to "juggle" work and family. She says about her husband,

He really doesn't have to worry about--is he going to have any clean clothes in his closet? They are usually there. He doesn't have to ask. Or, is the dinner on? Or, is there food in the house? Or, are the kids clean or gone to the doctor? I seem to handle that. And we are good friends too, we enjoy kind of the same things. [2643-2652]

Crystal Williams, a restaurant owner, says that if you look in the paper, you see there are plenty of jobs available in the community. The problem is that many people are either too lazy to work or too "picky" to work at a place like McDonald's. She resents situations in which women have "tons of kids" and do not marry the father. She says she knows these circumstances exist because some of the men in this situation work for her father-in-law; she knows they make good money while the women they live with collect welfare. These women are able to get Food Stamps and WIC coupons

and, she observes, from what she sees in their grocery carts, “they eat better than most people do” [898-899]. She supports welfare in the case of a single mother who is going to school and “trying to do something with her life” [875-876].

Crystal explains her family’s financial success as the result of hard work. She finds that she and her husband did not need college education--they have been able to find good opportunities and good wages without it. The family had returned a few days prior to the interview from what is a middle class emblem of success--a family vacation to Florida. She and her husband believe their daughter is very bright and want her to get an excellent college education. They are not so sure, however, that she will be able to find an appropriate opportunity in the area. She dismisses questions about economic strain saying this has never been an issue for them. She limits children’s activities not for monetary reasons, but because working parents do not have the time.

Although Crystal never says this directly, she too seems to be working hard at juggling work and family responsibilities. Mr. Williams who was listening in on part of the interview cuts in at one point to describe his wife as a “superior mother and a superior wife” who doesn’t do enough for herself [1362]. He says, “We are on her thoughts before her own needs. We should do the same, but we don’t” [1384-1386].

These middle class women do not engage the central economic issue on the minds of respondents of all other class categories, that is, the difficulty of earning a “decent living” in this rural county. For the two women with college degrees, it is education that has created opportunities for their success. Mary Schram cites her husband’s promotion and Crystal Williams cites hard work as the factors that have constructed their families’ economic well-being. Crystal Williams and Sharon Cole articulate a classic “culture of poverty” explanation for local poverty. The poor have deficient values outside the societal mainstream: they are welfare dependent and unwilling to work. Anne Kennedy expresses great concern about her low income students and does not attempt to explain family poverty but does point to a link between

low academic performance and low economic status. Poor rural children do not have access to remedial programs because their parents cannot furnish transportation.

These middle class women do not indicate that there has ever been any reason to assume their marriages are not highly satisfactory and permanent. Sharon Cole talks about a long courtship and similar educational background as important factors in their good marriage. While women in other social classes may comment on their own long-term marriages as they stand in contrast to the substantial marital instability they observe in the community, these middle class women do not seem to see this as an issue for them.

These middle class couples have different ways of making sure that family and household work gets done. In no case does the division of household labor seem a contentious subject, but rather, these tasks are accomplished in a way that allows the men and women involved in these relationships to evaluate them positively. Anne Kennedy indicates that her husband does not have conventional gender assumptions that include a wife in the kitchen at 5:00 p.m. Other relationships have more conventional gender role expectations. The other middle class women remain responsible for necessary logistical efforts and emotion work. Sharon Cole has organized her life to meet the assumption that she will indeed be in the kitchen with dinner “on” and the children clean. One of the ways Crystal Williams keeps her family running smoothly is by regularly deferring to everyone else’s needs. Mary Schram works part-time and has parents next door who will step in to help with chores in a pinch, for example, when her husband works late; the parents’ support promotes stability by minimizing the tensions that occur when family life becomes irregular.

UPPER-INCOME WORKING CLASS WOMEN:
“A” FOR EFFORT AT WORK AND HOME

Upper-income working class families (Nichols, Molloy, Olsen, Collins, Mannelli, Walsh, Davis), that is those earning at least \$30,000 a year, have managed to achieve this income level by hard work and long days. The women in this group recognize that living in this community requires an extraordinary work effort to have an adequate income. All seven of these sample families have a member who either commutes to work, works overtime, or both.²⁰ None of these respondents suggests that you cannot find work in the county. Rather, the problem is low wages. These women recognize well the limitations of the local market for labor. The women in single earner families--Laura Davis and Rita Mannelli--say emphatically that their husbands **must** commute to the metro center because county jobs pay poorly. Claudia Olsen contends that “you don’t get the income you would out of a job in a larger city” [1324-1325]; all respondents in this category have engaged this issue and would concur with her.

Tiffany Walsh and her family were drawn to this county by her husband’s long-held desire to own twenty acres of land. But they have found limited economic opportunity in the community. Tiffany writes on her survey, “Finding a job with stability has been horrendous.” This family has nonetheless achieved a measure of stability in this community. The jobs they have now (as diesel mechanic and purchasing clerk) are far better than their first jobs out of the military as split-shift farm laborers. At that time they worked together on a veal farm with hours approximately 4 a.m. to 9 a.m. and then 5 p.m. until 9 p.m.; their young children usually accompanied them to this job.

Mrs. Walsh is very positive about the marital stability they have achieved in the

²⁰The Molloy family interview was a joint interview, with Mr. Molloy the primary participant.

last five years. She describes the first years of their marriage as “rocky.” Both she and her husband were in military service at the time. She says her children were born into an abusive family and that the hardest decision she ever made was to leave her abusive husband. She says, “I think with [husband] and I so many times we could have just given up and said, ‘Forget it,’ and get a divorce, you know. It is so easy to do” [3809-3812]. They were able to get back together and now, she says, “I can honestly say he is my best friend” [3636-3637]. She attributes their marital difficulties to her husband’s military service in Beirut, Lebanon. She says that her husband “has the honor, if you will, to be the first man under eighteen to see war since Vietnam” [3675-3677]. Mr. Walsh was in Beirut at the time of the bomb explosion at the Marine barracks in 1983, and was one of the Marines who “cleaned up” the barracks following the explosion. She now attributes her husband’s abusive behavior to this event, but says that at the time they did not understand what was happening.

Melissa Nichols, a commuting court reporter, recognizes that poverty is widespread in the school district and surmises that welfare use is widespread as well. In general, she thinks there is greater poverty “in the country” than “in the city.” Speaking more specifically, she says that looking at her daughter’s school class, she would estimate that half her classmates are “on aid.” She explains the urban-rural difference as follows:

I think when you get in the city, I think more people are doing well--there is a lot of businesses, a lot of career-oriented people--there is maybe a higher standard than when you get in the country. [1354-1360]

Melissa was on welfare after her divorce; her experience with hard times shaped her perspective on it. She says, “I was on it myself when I was in school. I think it was a great stepping stone, but I think people should use it as a stepping stone. Some people just live on it” [1285-1289]. She used welfare to get the education that enables her to earn \$30-35,000 a year. She recognizes, however, why some local women decide not

to work: that is, “by the time they pay a sitter and make minimum wage, it doesn’t pay” [1285-1300].

Melissa Nichols struggles to make sense of the mismatch between her expectations about family life and the realities of her family life. She admits that she never had career aspirations. She says:

Well, to tell you the truth, I didn’t really want to be anything. All my life I just wanted to be a housewife and a mother and I wanted to stay home and I wanted to have a lot of kids. And things obviously didn’t turn out that way, so I had to make a switch and I had to come up with something quick. [1841-1849]

She moved to an urban area for a job but moved back to this community for extended-family support. Although working long hours commuting and doing transcription at home, she tries to do many of the things she thinks mothers who are not in the labor force do for their children. She explains:

I’d say seventy percent of the time I can pick her up [from school], so I try and give her as much normalcy as I can as far as if I was just a mother that stayed home with her kids. . . . I have always regretted the fact that I had to work. Um, because I wanted to give her a normal [childhood]; I mean, I remember my childhood. My mom was always there and you were always home and it was great. [741-763]

Melissa remarried six months ago and finds the adjustment difficult. She says she is “stuck in the middle” as she tries both to support her daughter emotionally and to please her new husband.

Rita Mannelli is a full-time homemaker who was married previously, but does not discuss her previous marriage.²¹ She stays home with her children full-time because she and her husband think it is the right thing to do. She is entirely responsible for domestic matters. She considers supporting her children emotionally and logistically to be her primary responsibility. She says, “I’m there cheering ‘em on all the time and they’ll say, ‘Oh mom, quit doing that,’ and they laugh, but if I didn’t show up they’d

²¹She apparently had no children in the previous marriage.

be upset" [992-995]. Sometimes she finds the task somewhat overwhelming:

But when it comes down to their sports and me doing the running and going back and forth--and yes, it does get on my nerves--and stuff will get screwed up where [someone says], "Oh, now we'll have to go out to dinner because mom doesn't have enough time to do all the stuff." It's okay, but yes, it happens a lot--but to me it's worth the stressfulness to know that my child is out there not doing drugs, not getting into trouble. [1172-1183]

She believes that what she does is difficult, and that many women could not do it. She explains:

A lot of people are very uppity and they can't stand to be around their kids all day long, I mean, it's a hard life being here all day long and talking to kids. And then when you husband comes home, you have to share him with the kids, and then they all go to bed together. It's like--I've been with kids all day. I don't see any big people. [1413-1422]

Mrs. Mannelli's views about people on welfare are consistent with this family's whole-hearted embrace of classic nuclear family ideology. Not only are men to be breadwinners and women homemakers and nurturers, but in addition, nuclear families are free-standing, self-supporting units. She says, "I don't think people should be able to go for a free ride all their lives because they've made mistakes when they have children. I mean, to me, the only ones that they are hurting are the children" [1724-1729].

Virginia Collins speaks out strongly against the welfare system, contending as did Rita Mannelli that her primary objection is that it is bad for the recipients' children. Virginia articulates her perspective:

I think they need to get people off their butts to get a job, then stop using kids as an excuse. . . . I'm not saying everybody [does that] . . . but they need to educate 'em and get 'em out there and get jobs instead of making it easier for them. The more kids they have, the more money they give 'em to encourage them to stay home and do nothing. [The children] figure there's nothing else out there and they're never going to get anywhere and they might as well be like that. [1892-1935]

This woman is pleased with the economic status gains her family has made since

moving from Philadelphia. Hard work in the form of two full-time jobs plus overtime for her husband (working up to 60 hours a week) in a less costly housing market, have yielded very satisfactory results. This strategy was well in keeping with what she identifies as her independent spirit. She says that she does not ask for help very easily. In fact, she says, "If my children were starving I would ask for food--for money for food--but that would be the only thing" [1783-1786].

Claudia Olsen has lived two very different economic lives, one as a low income mother of three working in the county as a nurse's aide while her husband was employed in low-wage manufacturing. Now, divorced, remarried, and working part time as an registered nurse, she has this perspective on community residents who receive welfare:

I worked as a nurse's aide which is not a cream-of-the-crop job. There was very hard work and we didn't get paid [well] and we weren't respected by the patients most of the time. But I survived it. And I think if there's a will, there's a way--and if they really want to find a job and if they would really, really want to change their life, they could. It may not be the most wonderful job and they may still need some assistance to get by, but it wouldn't be like they were totally sponging off the system. [984-997]

This theme--that women really can change their lives--describes well Claudia's family experience. She is forthcoming about the break-up of her first marriage. She answers the interview question about the hardest decision she had to make about the target child as follows:

Leaving him [her son] here and moving away long enough to get my life back together. I felt like I couldn't be a good mother to any of 'em because there were so many problems in my life and there was no support. . . . When I came back I feel like I had acquired a new respect for them and I was ready to be a mom again. [690-695, 724-727]

In hindsight, she refers to this time as "the short time period when I was not a person worth knowing" [1406-1407] and acknowledges how much her decisions have hurt her sons who were 4, 5, and 7 at the time. She says, "I know that there's no way I'm ever

going to be able to take away the hurt that I've caused them, you know, it's not going to matter what I do and I've learned that the hard way" [1456-1461]. For now, Claudia works to build a new family life with these boys, a new husband, and a baby less than one year old; she anticipates another birth in seven months. She has instituted what she calls an "open-door policy" with her former husband in hope of keeping him involved in his children's lives. She told of her surprise to come home after an evening shift at the hospital to find her husband and former husband watching a movie together in their living room.

Laura Davis and her husband had four children in four years. She says she was "completely stretched" in the early years; without much money and without much support she felt trapped. Her husband did not help with housework or child care tasks; she says, "My husband didn't do that type of thing" [719-721]. She experienced social isolation in those years; Laura says that when she was home with very young children, she was "extremely lonely and frustrated" [1355].

When discussing her relationship with her husband, she says that they have always tried to have good communication. She says,

I think we've both done quite well--at when there is a complication--to swallow our pride and say what we really feel about it. And I think that's the one thing that keeps us together. Because I think in our--we've been married for thirteen years--and we, I don't think we've had any real major confrontations and I think that's, that's the one thing I'm really proud of the two of us, is because we do communicate and we tell each other when something is bothering us before it escalates into something major. [1416-1431]

Mrs. Davis' comments suggest that she makes sense of family life by sharply dividing breadwinning and caregiving responsibilities. If she finds raising four young children to be isolating and overwhelming, it is part of the "job frustration" that she must manage. Her husband's responsibilities do not extend to care for children in the home, even if Laura has difficulty coping with the requirements of her "job." Caring for children is simply her sphere of responsibility. Such a construction still allows Laura to

speak positively about their “good communication.”

Mr. Davis commutes to the metro center to earn \$18.00 an hour as a diesel mechanic. In her one foray into the labor force since the birth of her children, Laura was fired from a factory after an absence of two days due to illness. She hopes to eventually work in a preschool and is enrolled at the university in the county seat. She thinks that--in comparison to others in the area--they are doing well financially.

Mrs. Davis’ viewpoint on welfare is shaped by her sister’s experience on welfare. She does not think people should be on welfare for a long-time, but recognizes how difficult it is for single mothers with young children to work. She says:

My sister is getting a job because they have to, she said. Now they can only be on welfare for so long before they have to have work, or at least [work] part-time. I think that’s good, but I also don’t like it because now my sister has to have twenty hours a week at work and she’s trying to go to school too and she doesn’t have any time left for her babies. She has two real little ones. [966-980]

Carol Malloy points out that an individual’s economic background shapes how they experience the adequacy of their family’s economic resources. She says that she was raised on welfare and her husband Michael was raised on GM wages. Carol says that she and her husband differ on how they assess their current financial condition. She explains, “So it’s like we have a big difference of opinion right there. It’s like, there’s a lot of things, you know, that he says, you know, his family couldn’t afford. Well, it’s like what his family could afford and what my family could afford--there’s a big difference” [1487-1496].

Carol and Michael talk about their relationship in this joint interview. He appreciates the fact that she lets him do “pretty much what he wants” in the fall during hunting season. She jokes that she was “given orders” not to give birth to any children in the fall. Carol is proud of the family life she and her husband have constructed. She says:

I've been married thirteen years and both my children are, not illegitimate, but legitimate. I'm the only one in my family. I've got the longest marriage and the only marriage, you know. So yeah, and I have two beautiful children. I have a nice house. I've got a beautiful car. [1938-1958]

We see clearly in his group of upper-income working class women an ethic of self-sufficiency. All women in this category have "bettered themselves" by one of a number of routes: education, increased work effort, husband's career advancements or marriage to a man who earns a decent living. These women understand that economic stability is difficult to achieve in this community, but it can be done and they have done it. As Claudia Olsen suggests, if you really want to change your life, you can do it. When these women look around their community, they are generally unsympathetic with individuals who are unemployed and receiving welfare, although some see the issue as more nuanced than do others. Both Laura Davis and Melissa Nichols understand the difficulties poor single mothers encounter. Only Melissa Nichols, who was on welfare after her divorce, recognizes why low income single mothers might decide not to work.

Both Melissa Nichols and Rita Mannelli embrace the traditional family ideal of breadwinner father and homemaker mother. Laura Davis has stayed home with children in a household that has had a sharp division of labor by gender. While her mother worked, she stayed home because "my husband and I believe that's where my best place is" [1193-1194].

Melissa Nichols and Claudia Olsen discussed at length transitions in family structure and household arrangements. But these women do not measure their divorced families against ideal "intact" families. Rather, they discuss the challenges of stepfamilies. For Mrs. Nichols, a significant issue has been coming to terms with her long-held assumption that she would be a stay-at-home-mother. While her divorce was the event that precipitated her education and employment, she is remarried now to a man who works as a mason and earns \$12.00 an hour. She earns considerably more

than her husband and indicates no inclination to stop working. It is now the low-wage structure of this rural economy that stands in the way of her full-time domesticity. Carol Malloy does measure her family against the ideals of legitimacy and marital permanence, and in doing so notes that she has achieved something that other members of her family have not done.

I explore in this chapter whether women explain their family lives in reference to a permanent nuclear family ideal. Most upper-income working class women do not. Their own experience, the experience of extended family members, or their observations of people in the community gives them a much clearer sense that family life is tenuous than was found among middle class women. A more persistent ideal than permanent marriage is the gendered division of labor with women as caregivers and men as providers. The persistence of this ideal means that many women continue to look to men as their main economic chance. Two important exceptions are Claudia Olsen and Melissa Nichols who, when their first marriages dissolved or were dissolving, invested in education that would enable them to earn enough to support their children.

LOWER-INCOME WORKING CLASS WOMEN: BETTER TIMES AND HARD TIMES

The ten lower income working class women (Rogers, Griffin, Davenport, Phillips, VanDyke, Edwards, Cooper, Shoemaker, Norris, McCullen) in this sample have family incomes between approximately \$15,000 and \$30,000. We find in this group of women a greater understanding than other groups have shown of the circumstances that make people poor and keep them poor. While these women fall into the same subcategory of the working class, their experience is quite diverse. Eight of ten have been on public assistance; of these, one is currently receiving public

assistance.²² Their varied experience of living close to the edge informs women's understandings of the economic context in this community. The family structure histories of this group are also more varied than those of upper-income working class families. It is difficult to place these diverse accounts into an organizing framework, but two main tendencies can be identified in these interviews. I divide women's accounts into two groups: those who have experienced difficult circumstances but now have reason to view the present positively and those who are currently enmeshed in difficult and discouraging circumstances.

"These are better times"

All women in this group (Cooper, Rogers, Shoemaker, Edwards, VanDyke, Norris, McCullen) describe hard times--a time on welfare, a time of separation, a time of struggle as a single parent, a time of childlessness. But all of these women also indicate that they have moved toward some resolution of their difficulties. With the struggles of the past and sometimes the present in clear view, these women express some reason for optimism about their economic circumstances or their family lives.

Julie Cooper and Shirley Rogers are life-long residents of the county. Both are in first marriages, have two children, are employed full-time, and have used social service assistance in the past. Julie experiences the constraints of the local economy in which, she says, "most of the jobs pay minimum wage or just a little bit more. . . . McDonald's, Burger King, and the factories only pay five-something an hour" [1093-1095, 1117-1119]. She has had a number of jobs: waitress, cook, cashier, factory assembler, and now machine operator. She is proud that each new job she has taken has been a better job than the previous one. She now earns \$6.25 an hour locally. Her impression was that welfare reform would eliminate from the rolls people who were

²²An additional family receives reduced cost school lunches; sample families have not referred to this benefit as "assistance."

cheating, but also would likely “be cutting the people who are working, but still don’t make enough to make ends meet. I think they are going to force them to go out on their own more, instead of giving them that little extra help that they need” [746-752].

When Mrs. Cooper surveys her family life, she says she is proud of the fact that she has stayed married for almost fourteen years. She says, “And that’s something. I think that’s unusual. It is very unusual around here” [1181-1188]. This observation reflects her status as a native of this small school district. She tries not to complain too often at home, instead, “Just go with the flow. I’m usually too tired to put up a fuss anyway” [1211-1213]. Julie refers to the work schedule in which she works considerable overtime and is left with the sense that she never has enough time and energy.

Shirley Rogers is sympathetic toward local welfare recipients. She says, “I have been there before and I know that it is hard” [1586-88.] She tells how when she was working at Kentucky Fried Chicken and her husband wasn’t working, she needed to get public assistance. She has lived in the county all her life, but finds the local economy to be problematic. She says,

Well it is hard around here because there isn’t really that much jobs. And with [the university], I don’t want to say anything bad about [the university], but with [the university] the students come first. So like your grocery stores, your McDonald’s, that kind of stuff, they take in students because their hours are more flexible. [1612-1621]

Although making ends meet is “terrible,” she is optimistic about their future because, she says, “We both have good jobs now” [1660]. “Good jobs” in this county means two factory jobs each paying \$8.50 hourly. Mrs. Rogers works at the largest factory in the county. She understands that she and her husband lack the education to get higher paying local employment. She has a high school diploma and her husband has less than high school.

Shirley was twenty and her husband was nineteen when their first child was

born. She says she has always put her family first. She wants her children to learn responsibility. She reflects, "I like them to learn the responsibility, you know, that everything isn't given to them without them having to do something, you know, in return" [242-248].

Eleven years ago, Irene Shoemaker, a mother of three, was divorced. Her divorce was followed two years later by a nonmarital birth to a daughter, the target child of this interview; she has been remarried now six years.²³ She portrays their relationship as harmonious and says, "I think I do what he expects me to do to keep him happy. Yup" [2210-2211]. The family has experienced some financial "tough times" since Irene gave up her third-shift job to spend more time with the family. She puts a positive face on economic struggle. She says,

I believe in being honest with my kids, you know. [I tell them,] it's going to be rough. We're not going to have, you know, a lot of money. But if you tough it out, and we tough it out together, you know, when good times comes we'll all benefit from that too" [2187-2192].

The overarching theme of the interview with Mrs. Shoemaker was the importance of raising independent, responsible, dependable children. She says that she and her husband were both raised to be independent and taught that you do not ask for help unless you really need it. It is unsurprising, then, that Shirley is concerned that welfare may have a negative effect on the children in the families that receive it. She says,

In my opinion, if the kid grows up seeing, you know, everything taken care of and not having to do anything for it, they're not going to go to work, finish their schooling, whatever, you know. It's going to be a cycle. [1584-1592]

She believes it is a good thing that the "easy way of life isn't here anymore" [1649-1650]. At the same time, she recognizes that some families truly do need a temporary

²³It is unclear from the interview if the man she married is the father of the target child or if he adopted the child when he married her mother.

helping hand. She says:

But there are people out there that need help--and, you know, that's what it should be for--is for the people that go through rough times and need the help and will get back on their feet with the help instead of having people get on it and stay on it the rest of their lives. I think that's what welfare was meant for--was for the people, you know, who try. Everybody comes across rough times and you give 'em help during the rough times so they don't, uh, become depressed or their self-esteem hits rock bottom, you know, stuff like that. So they don't have to worry about the necessities and can get out there and get the job . . . or better their education so they can better their lifestyle and get off the welfare. [1610-1636]

She explains their economic stability by saying "we've been really lucky" that her husband has had steady work in the metro center. He has a tenth grade education and works as a second shift foreman at a low wage manufacturing plant earning \$11.00 an hour.

Over the past few years, Sharon Edwards and her husband have made major strides toward settled living. After a long-term cohabiting relationship in which two children were born, the couple married four years ago and has lived in their brand new double-wide trailer for two months now. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards have found that living in a rural area means fewer job opportunities and less steady work. Sharon works as a school bus aide, insuring the safety of developmentally disabled students. She would prefer to work as a classroom aide, but no jobs have been available. Her husband drives to the metro center because he can not get steady work setting up double-wide trailers in this community. They work hard (he full-time and she half-time) to earn \$20-25,000 annually. She is critical of what she believes to be a substantial segment of the population that depends on welfare. She explains proposed welfare reforms as "gettin' people out of the habit" of welfare [754-756]. She believes that the welfare system should change because many people in the community who could work, do not do so. She believes that while there isn't much employment in the immediate vicinity, they wouldn't have to go far for work. She says, "They can find jobs anywhere. The

local gas station is always hiring somebody, you know. I mean, it's not, if they tried, I think they could get jobs" [805-809]. She also objects to substantial welfare fraud in the community. She says:

I do know people that aren't married and the woman and the kids will be on assistance and the man works, so they draw doubly, you know, and they don't need to. It bothers me, you know. I guess I get mad about it but I think there's a lot of that going on. They don't need it, you know. [778-786]

Her views on this matter are apparently reflected in her own experience. When she and her husband separated temporarily six years prior to the interview, she used public assistance. Apparently this has been her only use of public assistance.

Ruthann VanDyke has a serious spinal abnormality that leaves her unable to bear children. She and her husband have completed with great joy the process of adopting a child, the nine year old girl who was the focus of this interview. (See Chapter 4, page 90, for the circumstances surrounding the informal adoption of their daughter.)

Ruthann contends that the local economy is the biggest obstacle community families face. She says that two parents need to work now because "our economy has gone to pot so bad" [2592-2593]. She believes that this necessity has functioned to increase welfare dependence in the community in the following way: "I've seen a lot of families, that have made that decision--well, if we have to both of us work, then neither of us will work so we can get the welfare" [2625-2629]. She thinks that the answer for most two-parent families is for the mother to work locally and the father to drive toward the metro center for better pay. Ruthann explains:

I think there is jobs out there, I just don't think that in this particular area that they pay very well. We have had some new businesses come into the area. we have a new factory that's been there, I'm going to say, in the last eight years, I'm not sure. [Name of factory], it's right across from the elementary school. I think they start at \$5.00 an hour. So that, okay, maybe you can't live off of it.

You can't support three, four, five kids off from it, but at least if mom's got to work it's a good second income and then that allows dad to go get a better job.
[2720-2746]

She explains their financial difficulties as a result of her disability; her inability to work means they cannot get that necessary second income coming into the household.

Mrs. VanDyke's experience with adoption and foster parenting raises the issue of the meaning of family. This discussion points to the ambiguous nature of family-like relationships. She describes what happened both when they moved the girl into their home as a foster child with the intention to adopt and also recently when they took in other foster children. She relates the following:

We moved her in here on a Saturday morning. Saturday night when we put her to bed she was calling us "Mom" and "Dad." You know, I thought it really strange, but these boys did the same thing. . . . They need the parents, they need that authority figure . . . they need the security and we went through a real rough time with the oldest boy last week because he knows that it's coming close to the time he'll be moved. And so I think probably [he thinks], if I can leave here and have them mad at me when I leave, it won't hurt so much to have to leave. I think that's kind of what is going on. [120-129, 139-150]

Several interviews have pointed to the impermanence of household arrangements.

These observations raise additional questions about the fluidity of family relationships.

The life experiences of Dianne Norris have brought her to a rather coherent understanding of the family ties between children and parents or stepparents. She did not marry the abusive man who was the father of her twins, but married another man three years ago. She describes how her family members have come to understand their relationship. Her children reacted as follows:

The day we got married it was like, [they said,] "Can we call him 'Dad' now?" [I said,] "Yes, you can call him 'Dad' now." Because that was one of the things, that I didn't believe that in case things didn't turn out, you know, if we ended up not getting married, they should not call this man "Dad" until we are legally married, you know. Because I think that would have done damage, you know, [if] all of a sudden that man isn't in our life again. [1662-1677]

She describes her husband's ambivalent reaction to the stepparent situation and her

response:

He didn't feel it was his right to tell my children they were doing something wrong when they were doing something wrong because he wasn't their parent. And you know, it took me the longest time to beat it into his head--yes, you are their parent. You're the one that's putting food in their belly. You're the one that's putting the roof over their head and clothes on their back. You are their father! You know because [biological father] doesn't pay no child support, you know, and he never will. I tried--I dropped it down to a dollar a week for him--he didn't pay that. [1753-1770]

Now the twins' biological father has come back into their lives. The children refer to him as their "real dad" and their stepfather as their "dad." Diane says that her children's experience mirrors her own. She explains:

My father, my blood father, was my blood father. There's no changing that. [Stepfather's name] raised me. My stepfather--he was my father. He's the one that held me when I cried and stuff like that and that's where [husband] is, you know. And [biological father] is there and when they go with him, it's like playtime, it's like being with another kid, you know. [1695-1714]

The accounts of both Dianne Norris and Ruthann VanDyke illustrate the challenge of making sense of family relationships in ambiguous circumstances.

Dianne was on welfare after the nonmarital birth of her twins. She received assistance from a number of social service programs. She says, "I'd of never made it with the kids without it" [1802-1803]. This resourceful single mother was able to buy a house while on welfare. She went to work when the children were six or seven months old and, she says, "As I worked I eliminated, you know, some of the help and stuff, and as I was at my job longer and longer it got to the point where I didn't need the assistance" [1832-1837]. She has worked as a waitress for many years. She says that there are no jobs in this area except in the county seat, but that "college kids get most of the good jobs up there. . . They can hire 'em cheap, you know, flat rate, minimum wage, you know, and like me, a working mom, you know, I've got to make [more]" [2623-2635]. She contends that she and the other waitresses at the restaurant where she

works, are the highest paid waitresses in the county, making \$3.18 an hour plus tips. The difficult route Mrs. Norris has taken to self-sufficiency is an extension of a life of hard times. Her mother had eight children by age 23 and bore a total of eleven children. This respondent says of herself and her siblings:

We're all upstanding people. We work for a living and we work hard. We may not have fancy jobs and we didn't all go to college and stuff like that but we all pay our way through life. And that's the way we were taught, you know, if you want something you have to earn it. [1617-1625]

Dianne is skeptical about welfare reform:

I think it's going to change for the worse, actually. I think they're going to cut the programs, but in the long run they're going to hurt people. They're going to put people out on the streets. . . . It's not going to change whether or not the teenage kids get pregnant today, that's not going to change. Them kids are going to have sex whether they can get welfare or not. I have a niece who is 17 years old and she's got a two month old baby. So, she cannot legally get assistance now. Her mother is still responsible for her, so she's living with her mother. [But] when she's 18 she can sign up. [1923-1944]

She thinks people should not be given assistance for a few years and then abruptly cut off. But rather, they should be able to gradually work off assistance like she did. She also thinks welfare recipients should receive training so they can get decent jobs. She says:

They should teach those people how to be more than a waitress, you know, I mean, or somebody that stands at a cash register, you know, taking cash for groceries. Give them a higher education, make them go to college, make them learn how to get computer, you know, I mean, jeez, it's everywhere, you know. [1991-2001]

Norma McCullen is a divorced mother of two who grew up in the county and has been on welfare most of her life. The divorce was precipitated by her husband's "seeing someone else" while they were married. Since her divorce three years ago, her primary goal has been to support her family. Without a high school diploma, she finds it impossible to do so. She says there is not even moderate wage work in the county, but commuting to the metro center for a factory job paying \$8.30 an hour does not

allow her to pay her bills either. She and her children live with her mother and stepfather to make ends meet. The situation is discouraging; she says, "Sometimes we don't have nothing" [875-876]. She explains her motivation:

I've had so many people say, "Why don't you just quit and go on ADC?" It would probably be alright for my kids, you know--I'd have more time to spend with them. But I don't want them to learn that you can sit home and do nothing. Um, a good example is one time my mom--[she] practically raised my nephew--and ah, he was about five or six and he didn't want to go to school and my mom says, "Billy, why don't you want to go to school?" and he says, "Well, my mom and dad don't go to work. Why should I go to school?" That always sticks in my mind and I don't want my kids to ever get that feeling: my mom don't do anything--why should I? I want them to know you have to work for what you get. I don't want them to think life is a free ride and everybody owes you everything, you know. I want them to be responsible. [1404-1427]

She takes the measure of how she is doing by comparing herself to her four sisters.

She says she is the only one who can hold a job for more than six months and that she gets paid better than they do. This mother says she is working to be self-sufficient for the sake of her children. She remembers that she and her siblings were called "ADC brats" and is determined that her children not be called the same. While Norma is pressured by too little time and too little money, she is proud of being off public assistance.

Making sense of hard times

Three lower-income working class women (Davenport, Griffin, Phillips) are worn down and discouraged by their circumstances. In all cases these women are confronted with a variety of stressful situations over which they have little control. For these women, difficult experiences--husband's unemployment, disability, or multiple tragedies and traumas--shape their perspectives on family life.

Nicole Davenport, a mother of four, finds that in this community both families on welfare and families without assistance struggle to get by. Her friends on assistance

do not get enough help and people like her who are working cannot get help. She says,

I need help too, you know, but I ain't goin' up there [to Social Services in the county seat] to ask because they are going to look at me and say I make too much money. Which I don't think I make too much money. Just making enough to survive. [1199-1204]

Nicole realizes that it is impossible to do well financially without education or training. Her first birth at age fourteen stopped her education at the eighth grade. Low educational attainment stands in the way of her being more than a "factory rat" or general laborer. Over the past eight years, her husband has worked a total of three years and has been unemployed for a total of five years. She believes that her husband should have learned a trade or developed a skill. She says, "He needs more training," and without it, he is unable to get a good full-time job. She feels she should be at home more with her children, but for now, she works full-time because she is afraid that if she didn't, her children would go without food. Nicole Davenport blames herself and her husband for their lack of education, but she also raises the issue of fairness. She says, "I don't think that's right when a family [has to struggle so much]. The jobs now just don't pay" [1199-1204]. Despite the struggle, Nicole takes pride in working for her family. She says, "I'm proud that I'm not sitting at home collecting [welfare]. I'm proud of myself for going out there and working for my family" [1615-1618].

Commuting to her full-time factory job in the metro center and caring for her children leave little time for her husband. She says,

I don't think I'm a very good wife--because my husband comes last. . . . The longer we've been [married], the more children we've had, he doesn't get my [attention]--my attention is last for him. And it can become difficult. [1627-1632].

Margaret Griffin and her husband were both previously married; they have eight children between them, ranging from age nine to twenty-seven. She has a disabling condition that has become acute in recent years. This painful congenital syndrome

prevents her from activities including house cleaning, driving, and working. She has been out of the labor force since her daughter's birth and now "feels guilty" about not being as actively involved with her nine-year old as she would like. She says she is depressed. This disability has both been a financial burden and has created a very real need for extended family support.

Mrs. Griffin feels somewhat out of touch with the local job market. Her husband commutes as does nearly everyone they know, but she believes that there are jobs in the county if you really do not want to commute. Her 18 year old son commutes to the metro center now, but this is a new development. She says most young people are able to find work locally. She points to the jobs her older sons have had working at a party store and trimming Christmas trees in the summer and a neighbor girl's job at Wendy's in the county seat. With respect to better jobs, she says, "But as far as, you know, like real good, good jobs, with me not, not looking for a job right now, I don't know how that goes" [1741-1745].

Shelly Phillips' life has been extraordinarily difficult in recent years. Her first birth was at age fifteen; she is currently twenty-five. She and her four children have experienced multiple traumas in circumstances of deep poverty. Her mother was killed, her son was molested by a babysitter (who has been prosecuted, convicted, and imprisoned), and she and her children had two house fires. Her income from public assistance was between \$5-10,000 annually until just recently when her forty-five year old boyfriend moved in and began sharing his income with her. Her perspective reflects a life of hard times, although at present she is categorized as lower income working class on the basis of her cohabiting partner's income.

Other interviewees have said that individuals in this county are "on aid" because they are unable or unwilling to work or have low paying jobs; Shelly's experience points to another explanation. She explains her economic difficulties as the failure to receive child support. She explains:

I mean, if my kids' dads would pay their child support, then my kids wouldn't have to be on welfare and I could afford to work to make up the rest. You know, just work part time. 'Cause working and trying to pay for day care is--when they want so much and you have four kids--it is a little bit bad.

She has court ordered child support for her four children: \$58 a week for one child, \$79 a week for two children, and she cannot remember what the amount is for the eldest child, because it has not been paid in nine years. Shelly explains that these fathers are "working under the table" and further, two live out-of-state. This woman's understanding of her situation is not that she has been desperately poor because she has not been employed (although she did try to work),²⁴ but rather that these men have let down their children. It is she that has been left to pick up the pieces of their abandonment of their children. She explains:

I think the federal government is going to have to get in on cracking down on the deadbeat dads. Yeah, because all they got to do is pay some money every single week and the mothers have to be the bad ones to say, "No." We have to explain why they are not showing up. We have to explain where their Christmas presents are from that dad and, it is just -- we have to put up with all the stress and all the heartache and all the nightmares and all the sicknesses and all that stuff. And that's hard, especially when they don't pay no child support. That would be nice to have some child support. I don't think I'd know what to do with it. [909-939]

Shelly offers no explanation for the failed relationships with the three men who are fathers to her children nor suggests why all are unwilling to take even modest financial responsibility for their children.

Self-sufficiency, hard work, and traditional families are often represented as central to the character of rural America. This analysis finds that these lower-income working class rural women did reference their expectations for themselves and others against ideals of self-sufficiency and hard work, but were much less likely to compare

²⁴See Chapter 6, pages 166-167.

their family lives to a permanent, nuclear family ideal. Most lower income working class women clearly embrace an ethic of hard work and self-sufficiency. But some find from experience that hard work is not necessarily enough to achieve self-sufficiency. Three women (Shirley Rogers, Julie Cooper, and Nicole Davenport) who work full-time understand that the lack of education and training, not the failure to work hard explains their economic status. Three women (Diane Norris, Julie Cooper, and Shirley Rogers) who needed government assistance to supplement their earnings in the past are sympathetic toward welfare recipients; these women understand that welfare recipients are not merely “free riders,” that is, people who prefer idleness to employment. None of these nine women thinks that welfare receipt is appropriate for someone who “could work.” The difference of opinion centers on who is able to work. Shelly Phillips who currently receives assistance concludes from experience that employment is not a viable option until her four children get in school, but she still believes that if a couple receives assistance, that the man should work.

Among lower income working class women, we find that eight of ten have used welfare at some time in the past (Rogers, Griffin, Davenport, Cooper, Edwards, Norris, McCullen) or present (Phillips). We see no real evidence of women in what Sharon Edwards called “the habit” of welfare. Shelly Phillips currently receives welfare, but she does not want to be in this situation. What she wants is to receive her court-ordered child support and work part-time. Welfare use has been an option of last resort for Shelly and all other women in this category. What we do see is that welfare use is a contingent matter that is related to economic context and family and household transitions. In this group of women, two young married respondents (Shirley Rogers and Julie Cooper) in low-wage, low-skill employment needed temporary assistance. In a labor market with a higher wage scale, this support might not have been necessary. Other women (Margaret Griffin, Nicole Davenport, Shelly Phillips, Sharon Edwards, and Diane Norris) needed assistance at the time of a nonmarital birth, separation, or

divorce. Norma McCullen spent some of her childhood and married years on welfare, but is now proud to have worked her way off welfare.

When these women talk about their family lives few evaluated their experiences with reference to a modern nuclear ideal of permanent and private families. Only Julie Cooper talks about her long-term marriage, and that in contrast to the marital impermanence she observes in the community. Only three (Rogers, VanDyke, Cooper) of ten of these lower income working class families are conventional nuclear families.²⁵ Women with unconventional family arrangements do not indicate that they measure their families against a benchmark standard that leaves them thinking their own families are deficient.

Lower income working class women have a more complex set of marital histories than were found among middle class and higher income working class women. (See Table 4.) As a result, several women in this group grapple with questions that are never raised by the experience of middle class families. To make sense of their social worlds, Ruthann VanDyke, Diane Norris, and Shelly Phillips engage the question: What is a parent? They make connections between nurture, economic support, and parenthood. Dianne Norris and Shelly Phillips specifically consider what it means to be a father. Both conclude that financially supporting children is key. Diane Norris goes further to consider how nurture is also central to fatherhood. Ruthann VanDyke joins Diane Norris in considering how nurture and stability construct family. Ruthann contemplates how parent-like relationships with a nonkin couple can mean family to children.

²⁵See discussion in Chapter 4, page 70 for criteria used for designating modern nuclear families.

POOR WOMEN: "WE'RE MAKING THE BEST OF IT"

Eight women (Patterson, Newman, Smith, Watson, Miller, Campbell, Morgan, Turner) in this sample are poor. We see even in this small subsample of women that there are multiple routes to poverty and several ways of explaining it. Some women grew up poor and have been poor nearly all their lives, some have been poor most of their adult lives, and others experienced a decline in economic status with separation or divorce. Some women became poor by increasing their household size by additional births. The label "poor" describes a variety of life circumstances. The most significant question to ask some of these women is not "Are you poor?", but "How poor are you now?" Some women who have been poor for a long time are actually better off than they were a few years ago. Others who experienced a decline in economic status with divorce were already poor, or at least well acquainted with poverty. The economic shifts that poor women experience are closely connected to changes in family structure and household arrangements. But these changes frequently bring merely a change in relative poverty status. This subsample of women has known more family fluidity than any other social class-based group. None of these women is in a conventional first marriage. All have known the economic challenges that accompany a family structure transition or a shift in household arrangements.

These women are making the best of difficult situations as they engage in some combination of the following activities: raising children with very limited economic resources, working hard to be self-sufficient, and adjusting to new household configurations. I divide these respondents into two groups: single mothers and married homemakers.

Single mothers

Four poor women (Turner, Morgan, Miller, Watson) in this sample are single mothers. Each has her own story to tell and her own way of explaining her family life. Dorothy Turner lives in dire economic straits. She and her husband are separated and planning to divorce. She is currently unemployed and participates in several government support programs; she reports substantial use of these programs during her marriage as well. Mrs. Turner finds herself in an unanticipated situation. She recently earned an associate degree in medical records from the university in the county seat but cannot find employment. She thinks the fact that her program didn't include medical transcription now works against her. She does not have money for heat or clothing for her children, yet the Job Service she is using is encouraging her to take a volunteer position to gain experience and make contacts. A volunteer position would absorb scarce resources in the form of child care costs and transportation expenditures. Without a telephone and reliable transportation, her job search is further impeded. She thinks that not having long term community connections stands in the way of her employment. She explains:

I noticed that there is a lot of times and stuff where--I mean I've applied for jobs and everything--and I don't even get an interview, you know, because somebody who knew somebody got the job. And so, you know, there is a lot of--man I've run into it a lot of times in the last year and stuff--where if you don't know somebody, you ain't going to get in. [1930-1943]

Even with a job she expects to have a difficult time financially because of the high cost of child care. She says:

Lately people want \$2.00 an hour and you still only get \$4.50 an hour for wages around here, you know, \$4.50, \$5.00--and it is like, that's a big hunk. I got three kids, you know, and the oldest one is only ten and stuff, so it is like she's a little young to stay home for any length of time by herself. [1422-1431]

Dorothy believes that proposed welfare cuts will have a negative effect on this community. She knows from her own experience how important WIC can be to good

nutrition for children. She says, "I loved the WIC program. They got to keep that, man" [1709-1710]. She articulates her views about government assistance programs and the community people who use them:

I understand that after you've been on welfare for two years or had two years worth of benefits, it is going to be cut off. You are basically going to be kicked out and because I've been on welfare and stuff, I don't agree with that. Because I do see the kids as suffering and I think that there will be an increase in crime. Simply because people have to survive. And you know, and I see them you know, stealing food and stuff just for kids--or stealing, you know, Tylenol or whatever for kids. You know, because their kid has got a fever. What are they going to do, you know?

I don't really see a lot of people around this area just living off the state for the fun of it. If they are receiving benefits it is because they really need it and that they are trying to, to you know, make ends meet somewhere else. If they have a part-time job, I don't think it is fair to cut everybody off completely. I think that if all people can get is a part-time job around here, or even because there is jobs and stuff here where you don't get, like medical benefits, [they shouldn't be cut off]. And I think that they should continue with the Medicaid. At least for the kids, you know, if they don't do it for the parents, fine, I can understand that. [1485-1524]

Bonnie Morgan and her husband have recently separated. This woman has lived most of her life on welfare but now has factory employment in the metro center. The economic deprivation she experienced as a child motivates her to work hard to support her children. She says:

We lived on welfare. My father didn't do nothin' except lived on welfare. My father and mother were alcoholics. We really lived off the state and that's why I don't live off the state now. I feel that if people can't go out and get a job for their life, then what's the sense in even--I don't know. My parents didn't try and do anything. I didn't have very good childhood. . . . I think the biggest reason I work for a living is because of my upbringing because when I was a kid, I hardly ever got anything. . . . I do think welfare does a lot for people but I do think people that depend on welfare shouldn't do it. I mean, I think kids are better off if their families are working. [1333-1379]

Mrs. Morgan believes people depend on welfare too much. She thinks the governor is on the right track pushing people on welfare to get a job. But, she contends, lots of

people could not live without welfare. Bonnie commutes to the metro center for factory work. She considers factory work a “dead-end job,” but without a high school diploma, it is all she can get. She explains that she did not graduate because she had a baby when she was sixteen. She explains why she thinks her life took this turn:

When I was fifteen, I got pregnant and I had my oldest daughter at sixteen. I don't recommend it to anybody. I really do think [that] it was all due to my upbringing. My parents was like, they was really never supportive of anything I ever did and they just didn't seem to care. That's why I care a lot about what my children do and how they do it and everything else. [1430-1440]

The transition from welfare to work is remarkably significant in the life of this respondent. She says it was when she and her husband went off welfare and got jobs that he decided to leave the family. She believes that employment “did change our lives completely” [1023-1024]. The separation has been very difficult for the children and she hopes her husband will realize his mistake, but believes it will probably be too late.

Robin Miller has experienced a number of transition in recent years. She divorced her abusive husband, adjusted to living as a female householder, and now lives in a cohabiting household.²⁶ She discusses how difficult these transitions were. She says that after the divorce:

I was being mom and dad to both of 'em and didn't know how to budget my time as far as being on my own because I'd never been on my own. . . . It was time to figure out how I was going to be there for both of 'em because their dad wasn't here no more. . . . He [her son] was actually glad when I got divorced, uh, when his dad finally moved out . . . He knew what was going on. He picked up on it. He knew that it wasn't right and that it had to happen, um, yeah, I'd cry myself, cry to myself because I didn't know what to do next. [1297-1301, 1329-1342]

Now she is adjusting to a cohabiting situation in which her boyfriend and his two

²⁶Robin Miller is included with single mothers because she and her cohabiting partner do not pool income. Her economic concerns resemble those of single mothers more than married mothers.

daughters live with her and her two sons. Both partners are employed and they split the household bills; each parent is responsible for the expenses of their own children.

Robin is primarily responsible for childrearing and financial management; she explains, “He leaves the decisions making up to me as far as what bills need to be paid when, what to do with the girls, how do we deal with them, how do we deal with the boys” [1612-1617]. The children are adjusting to the situation as well; she talks about how her older son, the target child has reacted:

He has his moments where he thinks I love the girls more than him, I love [boyfriend] more than him. Um, he has thrown it in my face a couple of times in the past two years. [He asks,] “Why can’t we be alone again?” And if I take him and his brother and we do something--just us--then he is okay until the next time. I have to distribute myself between four kids and I think he is doing okay. He lets it be known if he’s not. [1712-1724]

Robin earns \$6.00 an hour at a bank in the county seat; she has what she calls “crappy insurance” that costs her nearly \$100 a month for health coverage for herself and her children and still requires co-payments. She struggles to buy shoes for her children and is concerned about their growing appetites. She believes two major factors are holding her back from improving her economic status in this community: she lacks education and community connections. She understands that the only way to advance in the bank is to have a college degree in banking; other employers are looking for specific educational credentials as well. She says, “I’ve got some education but not enough to get me anywhere and a high school diploma just don’t do it no more and the little bit of college I had just isn’t enough because I don’t have that degree in whatever” [2766-2772]. She wishes a good employer would give her a chance--“I’m able to learn, teach me, I’ll do it. But they don’t, they don’t want to do that. A lot of places don’t” [2826-2829].

Robin Miller has lived in the community for seven years, but still doesn’t have the connections that would help her get a better job. She explains the issue as follows:

I think a lot of it has to do with the area because people know people--especially in the country. And if you know the right people you can get into the right place and if you're not friends with so and so, you're not going to work for UPS. . . . It's not what you know, it's who you know is a lot of it. Same with people working at [the university]. If you've got a friend working at [the university], no problem, you can get a job there. Um, the same with a lot of places up there [in the county seat]. [Factory name] is the same way. If somebody you know works up there, no problem--you just mention that name and you've got the job. [2855-2875]

She also cites the lack of job opportunities and the difficulty of having reliable transportation on a low income.

Colleen Watson is a life-long county resident who experienced a sharp decline in income with divorce. She understands her current economic status as having everything to do with the breakdown of her marriage that was caused by her husband's alcoholism. Although divorced three years now, she is still surprised at the turn her life took:

When I got married--I didn't get married 'til I was almost 27 years old--and I just never thought, when I finally did get married it was going to be--I would get divorced. I just--it wasn't part of my plan. I just, I mean, I'd known him for six years and [he] seemed like an honest, hard working person and drinking changed all of that. He, you know, I don't hate him, I can honestly say, I don't. I look at him and I don't hate him. I feel sorry for him that somebody could take everything that he had and just mess it up so bad and not realize it. It's really pathetic. I do feel sorry for him. [1883-1907]

She works long hours as a hair stylist in a business in her home and is extremely critical of women who are not self-sufficient. Colleen sees considerable evidence of what she calls a "welfare mentality" in this community. She says:

Well, I can see where there are women that need [welfare], I mean, and if they are on it for a short time and can get their lives together, but like I say, their children don't have any respect for them and I don't think they have any respect for anybody else as far as that goes, their teachers or, there is a different attitude there. I think it's because their parents have no responsibility, I mean, it's an easy way of life. I mean, it's not the best way of life, but you don't have to get up in the morning or have a plan or get dressed. 1003-1017]

She understands that women with infants can not work and pay day care costs if they

have a minimum wage job. But on the other hand, women with school age children should work at a local factory or not think they are too good to work at McDonald's. She says:

I'd work at McDonald's before I'd be on welfare and there are jobs out there. I know a lot of women that--I cut their hair--they're living a struggle every day. [They're working at] K-Mart or Wal-Mart or they're single parents and I think they have a lot more pride in themselves than--they could go the easy way out and get that welfare check every week like a good part of the population do. But can you get your hair cut? You know, I mean, can you afford to get your hair cut? What would you get your hair cut for? [1057-1075]

Married homemakers

Four poor respondents are married women who are out of the labor force (Newman, Patterson, Smith, Campbell). These women have relatively little labor force experience. Andrea Smith and Kimberly Sue Campbell are disabled and have never had regular employment. Lynn Patterson worked for one period of a few months; Patty Newman has worked in a factory and a gas station, although not in recent years.

Patty Newman is a remarried mother of four who receives Food Stamps and WIC. Her husband earns \$6.00 an hour for \$240 weekly gross, but after taxes and child support are taken out, his take home pay is \$138.01. She says that making ends meet is a constant struggle. Mrs. Newman plans to find employment when her youngest child is in school full-time, but for now earning \$4.50 an hour and paying for child care is just not worthwhile. She thinks that the ideal job is the one she has now. She says, "Being home raising my kids, that's the ideal job. Now, if there was only some way to get paid for it, that would be fine" [2262-2265].

Patty is disturbed about the proposed welfare reform. She predicts dire results in the community, that welfare reforms will result in more homelessness, hunger, and increased tensions in families. She says:

I think there's a lot of people going to be hurting around here. Because jobs are really hard to come by and, I don't know, I don't, I don't understand how everybody thinks that people--family-wise anyway--can make it on \$4.25 an hour. And if you've got small children and one person in the family is working, that just makes it too rough--it puts such a burden on--it raises hostility. My husband and I have had fights. . . . We've had our bickers about money and it's not so much me, it's him because he feels he should be doing more.

There has been a lot of abuse [of the welfare system] but the ones it's going to hurt are the kids. It's not going to make the adults any different. It's going to take away from the kids and it's not the kid's fault that it's the parent that doesn't know how to do anything. Because there's a lot of people out there that don't have educations, or full educations and I mean, they're pretty smart, you know, and they have made it, but you can't get into any kind of [good] job.

[1531-1547, 1576-1579, 1705-1717]

Patty discusses the fact that affordable housing is difficult to find. The presence of the university has driven up rents in the county. She says that before buying modular home in which they live, they rented a mobile home for which they paid \$350 a month rent and \$125 a month utilities. She thinks that these changes are proposed by political decision-makers who do not understand the effects they will have. She says:

I don't think anybody in the positions that are within the state--the legislature, the senate--whatever it is, has ever been in a position where they have had to live week to week. I don't think there's a lot of people in those positions that even know what they're talking about. They see things need to change but they don't understand what it's going to do to the people that they're making these changes to. [1784-1795]

This woman also describes the difficulty of patching together a stepfamily. Her children were unhappy about her remarriage. She explains:

I think it's because, they had had me all to themselves and I think they thought they were going to lose me with this--instead of gaining a male figure in the house, a daddy or a father figure, whatever--they took it as losing their mama at first. So it was real confusing. [1248-1250]

The children are adjusting, but Patty relates that her son, the target child of the interview, continues to show some resentment:

If [husband] and I have arguments, [son] is right there, I mean, he's just

jumping in both feet, speaking his mind and saying what he wants. And if I happen to be in one of my moods where I tell him [husband], "Get out," [son] is right there saying, "Yeah, get out. We don't want you here," you know. It's like, "[Son], this is adults. Go to your room," you know. So, that doesn't happen very often. When it does, boy, [son] is right there, like, "Yeah, leave my mom alone." [1288-1300]

Patty does not paint a rosy picture of the course that her life has taken. She says,

I've done cruddy. Well, I blew off college, you know, um, then I started my family and then that marriage run into the sewer. Then I had a couple other relationships and they went into the sewer. Well, I got her [referring to her young daughter] out of the last one, so, I mean, that was worth it, I guess. But nothing became of that. Now I've got the one I'm in. I don't know, things are somewhat settled down. You know, everybody has got their highs and lows and nothing is perfect and nothing seems as bad as it is at the time anyway, once you sit down and really look at it. [2386-2401]

Patty suggests that the biggest problem with her first marriage was the fact that her husband was in the military and absent for extended periods of time. When the interview was finished and tape recorder turned off, she said she was concerned that she had made a big mistake by getting married again.

Lynn Patterson had three nonmarital births and used welfare assistance for many years. A year and a half ago she married the father of her youngest child and no longer receives assistance. She has a seventh grade education and intends to stay home with her children until the youngest goes to school. She says she would like to go to work, "but I'm needed too much here" [1007-1008]. For now, she says, "I've just got to go day by day" [1020]. Lynn says that she stayed home with the other two children and she wants to do the same with her youngest; she says, "It's good for parents to be home when they're young like that, I think" [1046-1048]. She is proud of the fact that she keeps a neat home and has clean kids--"and that's pretty hard to do" [1100-1101].

Lynn Patterson thinks that welfare reform will have quite an effect on the community, "because there's a lot of people on ADC here. . . . There's been people

on it a long time here” [729-736]. She believes there will be jobs for people who have been on welfare because the area is growing. She says, “If you really want a job you can find one here, if you look hard enough you can find one. You know, the situation is with people around here [that] they’re too picky about where they want to work” [747-756].

Two women with poverty-level family income have disabilities. Neither woman indicates that her family has ever participated in government assistance programs. Neither woman has ever had formal employment. Andrea Smith is developmentally disabled and recognizes that her job prospects are limited. She says, “I’ve been in ‘special ed’ all my life so, it’s really hard for me to get a job, because I don’t know very much stuff, how to do anything. The only thing I know how to do is watching children, cleaning house, and working on cars” [1792-1798]. She is fearful of looking for a job:

It scares me to go out to like a job [interview] ‘cause I know if I can’t do somethin’, I won’t get it. . . . I want to get my GED. I want to go to college to be a mechanic. I love workin’ on cars. I work on my own. I give advices to my dad about his truck. [1847-1859]

At issue for this respondent is not whether this local labor market provides good jobs, but whether she will be able to get any job at all. She points to the many stores in the county seat and says, “There’s always places hiring, but they demand so much from you before you can get that job” [1963-1965].

Andrea explains her family life by saying about her husband, “I’ve been with him for ten years, married to him six” [2044]. She was pregnant when she was seventeen, gave birth at eighteen, and then was married at nineteen. She says, “Yup, and every two years I would have a baby. Every two years until I went and fixed it up. I don’t have to worry about it no more” [2115-2119]. She hopes for a different life for her daughter:

I hope she turns out better than I did. That's what I'm lookin' forward to. Hope she has more opportunities for her life than I did. My ma always told me, "Don't get pregnant," you know, and that's what I don't want my daughter to, 'cause I want her to graduate. I want her to go to college and get a career started before she has any kids. [2078-2087]

The Smith family lives with Andrea's parents in an eleven member, four generation, extended family household. She indicates her family cannot live independently right now "'cause our cars keep dyin' on us" [1593]. She says they will stay where they are "until they get their financial back up" [1599-1600]. Andrea is not dissatisfied living with her parents. She appreciates the advice, child care assistance, and financial support her family gives. Her husband is a garbage route driver in a community near the metro center. She knows they should move somewhere near his employment, but she would prefer to put a modular home on her parents' property.

Kimberly Sue Campbell is disabled in that she has an amputated arm and is unable to do normal carrying and lifting. She says, however, that she does not think of herself as handicapped--she says things are just harder for her. The Campbells have been married twelve years. Kimberly Sue was married previously and explains her marital history only to the extent of saying, "Well, I was married once before for seven years, so I've been married quite a bit" [2255-2257].

The Campbells have had a very difficult time making ends meet for the past four years. After an automobile accident, Mr. Campbell was not able to do the heavy lifting required in his work; he lost his factory job and his family's health insurance. Since then he has started a lawn mowing business, mowing in an area up to twenty-five miles south of the research setting. The business has been a struggle. They now see a temporary job with the post office in the metro center as their main economic chance. Kimberly Sue has never worked and she reports that her husband says she doesn't have to work. She writes on the survey that right now the hardest part of being a parent is "having the money to do things that cost money." She thinks that the welfare system

should change because there are people who could work that are not even trying to get jobs. She recognizes that there might not be enough work in the community and that people may need to drive to bigger cities for employment.

It is significant to recall that only one (Dorothy Turner) of nine poor women lives in a household in which no adult has formal employment and that only two (Dorothy Turner, Patty Newman) of nine women indicate their households receive public assistance. This subsample is overwhelmingly working poor. Poor women's explanations for their families' economic status vary somewhat by whether they are single mothers dependent on their own earnings or married women dependent on their husband's earnings. Single mothers (with the exception of Colleen Watson) point to their own educational deficiencies and their lack of connections in the community as primary factors standing between them and higher paying jobs. In addition, these single mothers are aware that good jobs are scarce in this community. The exception among single mothers is Colleen Watson who focuses on the fact that she has lost access to her former husband's high income. Among married women, only Patty Newman and Kimberly Sue Campbell explain why there are poor. Mrs. Newman blames the local economy for her husband's low wage employment while Mrs. Campbell points to the injury that precipitated the loss of her husband's factory job.

Single mothers in this group explain the structure of their families by telling how the men they married failed them.²⁷ One husband found another woman (Bonnie Morgan), another was abusive (Robin Miller), and another became an alcoholic (Colleen Watson). These women discuss their family lives pragmatically and realistically. They do not refer back nostalgically to an ideal family form that they failed at implementing. Instead, they talk about how difficult it is at present not to have

²⁷Dorothy Turner offers no explanation for the decision to divorce.

enough time or money.

Robin Miller and Patty Newman discuss the construction of family life in ambiguous circumstances. Patty Newman remarried almost three years ago. She had hoped that her new husband would be a father figure for her children because the men who are her children's biological fathers are not involved in their lives. Instead, her children have seen this new man as an intruder in their lives. Robin Miller's cohabiting relationship is uncharted territory for all parties involved. On the evening of the interview with Robin, she was somewhat displeased that her partner had left her with his children while he had gone on an overnight hunting trip. She describes an evolving situation in which no one knows the "rules."

While all poor women embrace an ethic of self-sufficiency and hard work, we find among the four married women in this subsample more conventional assumptions about women's roles. Lynn Patterson and Patty Newman emphasize the importance of staying out of the labor force to raise pre-school children. Both women clearly articulate that staying home with children is the most important work they can do at this time. Kimberly Sue Campbell and Andrea Smith have disabilities and have limited employment prospects, but both indicate it would be difficult to work because of their family responsibilities. It is likely that if these women were employed, their families would no longer be categorized as poor. No dual earner couples in the sample are poor.

Poor women's views on welfare use illumine why this subject is such a contentious one in U.S. society. When even poor women have widely differing perspectives on this subject, it is unsurprising that persons with more divergent economic experience do not agree. One former welfare recipient (Lynn Patterson) says that welfare is an "easy way of life," while a current recipient (Dorothy Turner) says that people are not "living off the state for the fun of it." Patty Newman and Dorothy Turner say that people are on welfare because they cannot find jobs, while Robin Miller

and Colleen Walsh say people are “too picky” about jobs and think they are “too good to work at McDonald’s.” Contrary to conventional wisdom about intergenerational welfare dependence, the two single mothers (Bonnie Morgan and Norma McCullen) who grew up on welfare do not want their children raised on it. They remember the humiliation and deprivation associated with welfare support.

CONCLUSIONS

These twenty-nine women “made sense” of their family lives in the context of their community setting. A county-wide telephone survey found that county residents believe it is better for mothers to be home with children, that divorce should be more difficult when children are involved, and attribute welfare use to lack of effort. It is in this context that we talked with mothers about family structure and household compositional changes and financially supporting their children. In this chapter I considered whether women make sense of their own family lives in reference to a permanent nuclear family ideal and a work ethic characterized by self-sufficiency and hard work.

This analysis finds a strong ethic of self-sufficiency and hard work among sample women, but how it is expressed differs by social class. Middle class women assume economic stability and talk about it very little. Upper-income working class women contend that a stable economic base is possible to achieve, but only by extraordinary effort, such as commuting, working overtime, or perhaps going back to college. All respondents in these two groups are members of two-adult households; these women do not seem to acknowledge the advantages this household type affords them both for the possibility of a dual earning household and for providing care and logistical family support. Married women who stay home with children full-time on ideological grounds still believe that single mothers who wish to do the same are

“freeloaders” or “lazy.”

Lower-income working class and poor women have found that hard work does not necessarily translate into self-sufficiency. Most have come to grips with the harsh economic realities faced by low-skilled workers in this restructured rural economy. Perhaps the harshest economic reality is that households with one low-skilled worker will be poor. One might or might not be able to raise their earnings above the poverty line by commuting. It is among the poor that the link between family structure and economic status becomes especially clear. Marriage must be seen as an opportunity structure for women and their children (Baca Zinn 1989). Marriage gives women and children access to another income. In many local labor markets, it is highly significant that with marriage women gain access to a male income because men’s employment is far more likely to be stable primary sector employment than is women’s employment. In this community, however, men’s pay is extremely low. For example, the men represented in this sample who work in local factories earn only \$6.00 - \$8.50 per hour. Access to a man’s wages is, by itself, surely no guarantee of an above-poverty level income. But a two income household is a substantial hedge against poverty. As said previously, no dual earner households in this sample are poor.

It is noteworthy that employment is viewed as “honorable” as compared to taking a “free ride” on welfare, even if the worker cannot earn enough by working to support his or her family. Sample women who spoke out against the use of welfare did not at the same time take into account the low wage structure of the economy. Women were ready to say that working at McDonald’s or the BP gas station was preferable to taking welfare, but getting families out of poverty was not the salient issue. Looking back at the county survey results, the idea that it is better for women to stay home with children while men are working, seems to hold only if men earns enough so that the family is ineligible for government assistance. If men’s earnings are low enough that the family still qualifies for Food Stamps or WIC, the sentiment seems to be that

women should also work. In short, the self-sufficiency ethic seems stronger than ideals about the appropriate gender division of labor.

This chapter finds that women made sense of their family lives in substantially different ways. The perspectives of women presented above varied so widely because there were such broad differences in their objective experiences. The range of experience of sample mothers with family structure and household compositional changes was discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 and summarized in Tables 4 and 6. This research finds a strong association between families in conventional first marriages and a stable economic base. If we divide the sample by income, we find that among middle class and working class families with income greater than \$30,000 ($n=11$), 73% have conventional first marriages. We find that among working class families with income less than \$30,000 and poor families ($n=19$), only 16% have conventional first marriages. In comparing the middle class to the poor, we find that all middle class women are in conventional first marriages, while no poor women are in conventional first marriages. Middle class women took marital stability for granted in much the same way that they took financial stability for granted. Both were simply non-subjects; these couples are doing well financially and apparently have high marital satisfaction. It is important to note that for three of four middle class women, "financial security" has been constructed on the basis of their husbands' income. Among poor women, only Colleen Watson was ever supported by a man at a "comfortable" standard of living. For other poor women, marriage never brought economic security.

I asked whether women would make sense of their family lives in reference to the permanent, nuclear family ideal. Most women did not explicitly do so. Women who had lived through domestic transitions usually explained their personal circumstances pragmatically and realistically. These women regretted how difficult family changes were for their children, but frequently had themselves initiated the break from an abusive, alcoholic, unfaithful, or incompatible partner when

circumstances became unbearable. Family structure change did, however, set in motion a number of household changes. Women's economic status became more insecure, women and children sometimes moved in with parents, women usually went to work, and eventually most women remarried or began a cohabiting relationship. The big subjects women wanted to talk about revolved around making ends meet, coping with time scarcity, and reconstructing family life with a new cast of characters.

This analysis finds strong support for the ethic of self-sufficiency among women of all social classes; however, the permanent, nuclear family ideal does not serve as the benchmark family for all women. Middle class women may assume that ideal, but low-income women do not. Lower income women understand the gulf that exists between them and the permanent nuclear ideal. It simply does not fit the experience of women living on the economic edge. The work of many family scholars demonstrates that continuous nuclear families require a stable and secure resource base (Rapp 1992, Stacey 1991, Stack 1974). In the absence of that base, family relations remain flexible as individuals adapt to economic necessities.

These data contradict a cultural explanation for poverty and the failure to maintain nuclear households. Conservative policymakers and others frequently connect the failure to uphold the nuclear family ideal with a "culture of poverty" mentality. The same families that are said to be poor because they lack the motivation to work are also said to have deficient family values. Poor families are said to prefer welfare to work and single mothers are believed to lack a commitment to stable marriage. The culture of poverty approach ignores the structural sources of both poverty and changing family and household arrangements. We find among the households in this sample a high rate of poverty, but also a high rate of full-time employment. The issue is not insufficient labor force attachment, but low paid work in a limited rural market for labor. A high rate of divorce and other disruption takes place in a context of economic strain and deprivation. Neither poverty nor family fluidity can be seen as

fundamentally connected to deficient values held by these women, that is, values that could be described as outside the mainstream of U.S. culture. What is lacking is the material base to implement the stable family lives these women would like to provide for their children.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS

This research has brought a sample of White rural families into the conversation that links economic context, the construction and maintenance of family households, and family structure. A substantial body of scholarship has already demonstrated the link between the restricted opportunity structure of the restructured economy and the decline of the modern family form in urban settings. Contrary to assumptions about the strong commitment of rural folk to traditional families, this study finds impermanent marriage and substantial fluidity in household arrangements. Nonmarital births, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation create a multiplicity of household arrangements. Only a minority of sample families are classic nuclear families. This research suggests the decline of the modern family form extends to rural locales as well as urban centers.

The family structure realities of this sample do not fit what has been called the “rural mystique” (Willits and Luloff 1995:457). The findings of this study run counter to assumptions about family life in rural places. Both structural and cultural explanations for rural family exceptionality have been advanced. The small-scale structure of rural life stands in marked contrast to urban mass society. Rural areas are believed to be safer and more peaceful than urban areas; rural life is believed to be less stressful than urban life (Willits and Luloff 1995:458). The structure of rural space is assumed to create an environment that is conducive to harmonious family relations. Assumptions of family permanence also follow from the view that rural areas retain a connection to the past by maintaining a traditional value system that is less persistent in urban areas. This traditional value system is viewed as including hard work, self-sufficiency, and permanent marital relationships. What I found in this sample were hard-working families, most of whom were self-supporting, but the majority of which did not fit the permanent nuclear family ideal.

While rural space is believed conducive to family continuity, that perception does not hold up to scrutiny. The rural environment may instead be seen to be increasingly inhospitable to rural family life. Willits and Luloff point out that as a result of demographic, social, and economic changes, “rural places have increasingly fallen behind other areas in wealth, job opportunities, health care, transportation facilities, school adequacy, water and sewage systems, shopping facilities, telecommunications networks, and overall well-being” (1995:454). The restructuring of the economy has increased opportunity structure differentials between rural and urban places. Rural families struggle to make ends meet in a context of increasingly limited economic opportunity and a less than adequate supportive infrastructure.

RURAL FAMILY STRUCTURE: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Economic restructuring has transformed the context for family life in both rural and urban settings. Economist Lester Thurow writes, “The current economic system is no longer congruent with traditional nuclear family values;” he contends that as a result of the new economy, “the family is an institution both in flux and under pressure” (1997). This research views the family as an institution that has adapted historically to changing economic and social circumstances. Families are flexible units that are responsive to environmental contingencies. As macroeconomic changes reshape the economic base for family life in rural places, so do we expect to find adjustments in the organization and structure of rural families and households.

The families I studied live in a poor rural school district in a nonmetropolitan Michigan county. Median family income in the school district is sixty-nine percent of median family income statewide. Secondary sector employment predominates in the county, with retail trade the largest category of employment. This sample included a diversity of family types and household arrangements, including married couple

households, step-family households, cohabiting households, extended family households, single mother households, and a single father household.

Macroeconomic changes do not have a uniform influence on all families.

Previous research has shown that social location shapes the degree to which households are able to maintain the nuclear form. Among these White families, it was social class that created multiple contexts for family life. Those families with continuous modern family arrangements were concentrated at the top of the social class hierarchy. Those families with fluid postmodern arrangements were concentrated at the bottom of the social class hierarchy. All middle class families have conventional first marriages, while no poor families have conventional first marriages. Working class families fell between the two groups, with higher income working class more closely resembling middle class families, and lower income working class families more closely resembling poor families.

It is unsurprising to find adaptive and flexible households among the poorest families. The effects of economic change are not distributed equally within a population. The most economically disadvantaged families are those most vulnerable to destabilizing social forces. Within this sample of families, we see that middle class families have been able to maintain their normative nuclear structure, while the marital bonds of poorer families have been more tenuous and temporary. Most poor or near-poor adults have lived in circumstances of economic uncertainty throughout their adult lives. These families have had varying, but generally limited success at constructing family continuity on an insecure material base. Alternatively, the stable and secure employment of these middle class families has provided supports such as pensions, good health insurance, and wages that have enabled them to purchase, for example, annuities for their children's college education or vacations that provide positive family experiences. A stable resource base insulated middle class families from the day-to-day economic strains and the full-blown economic crises that have been found to

increase hostility and negatively effect the partner relationship in less economically secure families (Conger et al. 1990, Rosenblatt 1990).

The relational nature of social class becomes clear in this rural setting. If middle class professionals, administrators, and managers are “order givers,” it is they who make the decisions that set the parameters for the economic aspects of family life among the working class and the poor. It is the very work that middle class managers do--deciding who is, for example, hired, retained, promoted, or laid-off--that creates and sustains economic instability among the working class. A middle class manager decides that Robin Miller and other bank employees earning \$6.00 an hour must contribute \$100 a month for health insurance coverage for their families; a middle class manager decides that David Roberts' job will remain part-time, although he needs full-time employment; a Social Security Administration manager has reviewed and denied Norma McCullen's application for SSI for her son who has a serious congenital vision impairment; a plant manager decides to close the robotics plant for a week, leaving Mr. Newman laid off, and Patty and her husband “bickering” about how to pay the bills. The working class and the poor are “order takers” in that they do indeed follow orders on the job. Sennett and Cobb (1972) have theorized the significant social psychological effects of “order taking” in the work place. But perhaps more significant for family life, the relations of social class leave the working class families with little control as they must react and adapt to the decisions made by middle class managers in their work settings, prospective employers, social service administrators, and others.

HOUSEHOLD STRATEGIES

The concept of household strategies has been useful in exploring how rural residence shapes family life. Analyzing household strategies has exposed tremendous family diversity within this small rural community. This concept has broad scholarly

appeal because it allows researchers to link individual action to the context in which it occurs. Analyses of household strategies illumine both the structural constraints and opportunities in a particular context and strategic acts of negotiation among options to make choices. Rural and urban areas are assumed to provide differing contexts for family life, but all too frequently the question of how rural residence shapes family life is answered by invoking rural myths about cohesive communities. Analysis of household strategies illumines how rural context actually influences family life.

This analysis identifies social class differences in the adoption of household strategies. Broad differences in household strategies occur because families at different social class locations experience different opportunities and constraints. Class-based groups of families negotiate a set of somewhat similar obstacles and resources to construct strategies to sustain their families economically. Family structure and household characteristics play a significant role in shaping access to various strategies.

This local rural economy supports a small group of middle class families who have stable employment and a comfortable standard of living. Dual earning is the concession these families have made to the restructured economy. The working class encompasses over half of this sample. The working class survives by its labor. The primary strategies involve maximizing work effort, either by working overtime or commuting to the metro center for higher wages. Education or training determine the ability of the working class to access higher wage employment in the metro center. Just over half of the working class use dual earning as a household strategy. Dual earner households are those households among the working class most likely to achieve a comfortable level of living, although such households with local employment struggle financially. Poor families depend on employment for household survival, but are unable to implement the strategies that have been effective for the working class. Poor families in this sample are deterred from dual earning by large family size and disability. Single parents are most disadvantaged as single earners whose family

responsibilities constrain them from working overtime or commuting. When employment-related strategies are insufficient, lower working class and poor families take on informal work, stretch existing resources, or go without necessities. Poor households sometimes turn to means-tested assistance or double-up with parents in extended family households.

This analysis of household strategies illuminates the process of the intergenerational transmission of social class. Sample parents do the best they can for their children, but “the best” varies by social class, as do the outcomes. One family strategizes to invest in annuities for their daughter’s college education. Another family strategies to afford a Girl Scouts uniform. One set of parents is setting up a new home computer and teaching the children how to use it. A single mother is using child support money to take her children to McDonald’s for a lesson in public behavior. The resources of middle class parents function to perpetuate social class across generations. The limited resources of low-income parents do the same.

Structural analyses of the social world are sometimes accused of tending toward structural determinism. Analyses that incorporate household strategies are unlikely to hear such an accusation. This study of household strategies clearly points to human agency. Agency comes into view as research participants relate how they consciously and deliberately make choices that in some way maintain their households or promote family well-being. For example, family members weigh carefully the pros and cons of commuting, taking into account gas expenses, wear and tear on vehicles, and the necessary investment of time. Women with few skills maximize earnings by undertaking a series of incremental job changes that have allowed them to advance from waitressing or fast food to factory work paying \$6.25 to \$8.50 an hour. Mothers achieve economic and parental goals by hiring relatives to provide child care at below-market cost. Time after time research participants told us why in a particular set of circumstances they acted or decided as they did. They emerge not as robots pushed

around by social forces, but social actors who can explain their decisions and admit that these decisions have had positive and negative outcomes. This is not to say that all households choose from the same range of options. Research participants with the most limited economic resources might be more likely to say they feel trapped by circumstances and experience few real options.

This research conforms to earlier studies finding household strategies to be context-specific micro-level adjustments to macro-level conditions. Tilly's (1979) historical research and Edin and Lein's (1996) contemporary research found that strategies adopted varied from place to place and were dependent on local social-structural characteristics. The specific social-structural characteristic that shapes the household strategies of this rural Michigan community is its proximity to and easy access to a large metropolitan center. The construction of a divided highway approximately twenty years ago created commuting as a new option to be considered as households members adopt strategies to make ends meet. Despite the severity of Michigan winters and the sometimes treacherous driving conditions, over half of all sample households currently use this strategy. Another major strategy among sample families is living in a trailer. More than half of lower income working class and poor families live in trailers. This strategy occurs in a community which permits the set-up of mobile homes on open land. It is significant to note that while these two strategies are important in the ability of sample families to survive economically, these strategies may not be available to rural residents in other locales. Trailers are increasingly "zoned out" of rural communities, with the exception of commercial trailer parks. Even more significantly, many rural residents do not live within an hour of an urban center. Many rural residents are limited to restrictive options in their local economies. This research illustrates the particularity of household strategies and how specific they are not only to urban or rural context, but also to time and place.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF AN ANALYSIS OF RURAL SPACE

I conceptualized this research methodologically in terms of the extended case study method (Burawoy 1991). In this particular research, the method involved extending existing family theory to a relatively unexamined setting, in this instance, extending the study of economic transformation and families beyond its urban focus. This research finds that in some cases, the findings conform to previous analyses of urban space; in other instances the structural conditions in place in the rural area I studied shaped family experience in different ways than those documented in urban areas.

One of the important contributions of the Panel Study on Income Dynamics (PSID) is finding that poverty is most often experienced in “spells” rather than as a perennial status (Bane and Ellwood 1986, Gottschalk et al.1994). The results of this study conform to PSID trends, but require some qualification. While this study of rural families did not specifically ascertain prior poverty status, at least nineteen of thirty families have had a spell of poverty. As was found in PSID analyses, the onset of poverty in this research was associated with unemployment as well as family structure changes such as separation, divorce, and nonmarital birth. In addition, in this sample young married couples with marginal employment and children were often poor for several years until they gained labor force experience and moved into higher paying (marginal) work in the community or began commuting. The economic status of eleven families continues to be precarious. These data point to more persistent poverty among this rural sample than Bane and Ellwood (1986) found in PSID data. Two target children have been poor all of their lives and five others have been poor all of their lives with the exception of a brief “spell” above the poverty threshold. Only one poor family has experienced a dramatic decline in economic status. In the case of only five or six of the nineteen ever-poor families do life circumstances predict--in the absence of

unanticipated family structure change or job loss--continued above-poverty level status. The past experience and present realities of others families suggest a reasonable possibility of another spell of poverty. These data support the rural poverty literature finding that poverty is more persistent among rural residents and than among urban residents (RSS Task Force on Persistent Poverty 1993).

One of the central issues at the heart of the conservative discourse about family values is concern over an “epidemic of illegitimacy” (Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton 1998:8). This study finds that eight sample women bore a total of thirteen children in circumstances in which they were not married to the child’s father. These children were born either prior to the women’s first marriage or between marital relationships. Three women later married the father of one or more of their children. The five other mothers married men who were not the fathers of these children. In any case, all women with nonmarital births later married. If conservatives are nervous about women bearing children outside marriage, they may be interested to know that such births apparently did not present a strong obstacle to future marriages in this rural setting.

This research points to the utility of expanding the current conceptualization of social location to include a spatial dimension. The concept of social location takes into account race, class, and gender as multiple systems of stratification that distribute opportunity and privilege unequally (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:24). This research finds that the experience of structural constraints and opportunities varies by more than race, class and gender. Most past research has assumed race, class, and gender variation but has ignored variation across space. In reality, rural residents encounter lower wages, more unstable work, and fewer job ladders. Rural earners, both men and women are much more likely to have low earnings than are urban earners.²⁸ Gorham (1992) found that low earnings rose substantially for all groups over the 1980s. The

²⁸Gorham and Harrison (1990) define low earning as hourly wages that when annualized were below the poverty line for a family of four.

rate of low earnings rose to 31.6% for rural men and 53.9% for rural women; these rates compare to 22.6% for urban men and 36.0% for urban women (Gorham 1992:25). Urban-rural differences in labor market structure have ramifications for family life. One of the major theoretical underpinnings of this research has been that the economic context for family life shapes family structure and household arrangements. If the economic context for rural residents differs from that of urban residents, then we must expect that generalizations made regarding men's and women's family-related behavior may stand at some distance from the realities of rural family life.

Place, class, and marriage

This study of rural families points to the importance of taking spatial context into account when analyzing the relationship between marriage and social class. This research suggests that current generalizations regarding women's economic status and the relationship between economic status and family structure decisions are less applicable to rural places than to urban places. Analyses of changing family structure patterns in the U.S. frequently cite the importance of women's increased economic independence. Historically women have depended on marriage for economic survival. Women had no earnings or low wage work. Middle class women and their children were supported by their husbands' earnings. The labor of both working class women and their husbands was frequently necessary to sustain the household economically. Working class women were in the labor force, but did not earn enough to survive on their earnings alone.

Hartmann (1987) contends that the restructuring of the economy has liberated women from their historical economic dependence on men. Hartmann writes, "The current structural transformation of the economy . . . can be held responsible for the feminization of poverty, the high divorce rate, the increased labor force participation of

women, and a host of other changes affecting how we live our intimate lives” (1987:33). She gives a positive interpretation to this macroeconomic shift, contending that it is the new economy that has allowed women to achieve economic independence. The new economy draws women into the labor force and they become autonomous. They are able to support their children at what is often a low standard of living, but they are nevertheless able to survive as a female-headed household. As a result, women are more likely to live as female householders and less likely to marry or remarry. In this new situation, marriage has become less of an economic necessity for women (Cherlin 1992). Rates of female headship are increasing in all racial groups. Wilson and Neckerman (1987) attribute rising rates among Whites to White women’s gains in economic independence and rising rates among Blacks to joblessness among Black men. They summarize the economic trajectory of White women as follows: “[M]ost white women can maintain their families above poverty with a combination of earnings and income from other sources such as alimony, child support, public-income transfers, personal wealth, and assistance from families” (Wilson and Neckerman 1987:77).

A significant question for this research is how well the description above fits the experience of rural women. In this sample of mothers with young children, I found that eight of eleven divorced women had remarried. In addition, one divorced mother lived in an extended family household and one lived in a cohabiting household. Only one divorced women lived in an independent household with her children. No female-headed household had income above the poverty threshold. These data, when viewed in a community context of limited employment opportunities, suggest rural women may continue to make decisions regarding household arrangements based on their inability to be economically self-sufficient. Scholars agree broadly that economic opportunity decreases women’s economic incentive to marry. In their study of first marriage, McLaughlin and her colleagues point out that rural women may have greater incentives

to marry than do urban women because their economic options are so limited (1993:836). I would contend that women who are responsible for supporting children by low wages in a flat rural labor market may have even greater economic incentives to remarry.

While rural women with children may find remarriage an attractive economic option, remarriage does not improve their economic status dramatically. Both men and women receive low wages in the restructured rural economy. In this study five of nine poor families have a male earner. School district data from 1990 found a 32.4% poverty rate among district children living in two parent homes in which only their father was employed. In contrast, when both parents were employed, only 5.7% were poor. In this sample, no dual earner households are poor. The most appealing factor about remarriage in this community may be that it provides the opportunity to create a dual earner household. Among sample members without advanced education or skills, pooling earnings appears to be the most attractive economic option available.

The low wage structure for male employment in rural areas creates a set of life experiences for White rural residents that may not mesh with prevailing generalizations. Mary Jo Bane (1986) has pointed out that the answer to the question of whether family structure change causes poverty differs by race. PSID data revealed that the majority of Black female householders experienced "reshuffled" poverty, that is, they were already poor before the household structure change occurred. On the other hand, the majority of White female households experienced "event-driven" poverty; for White women, it was usually family structure change that precipitated poverty. Bane's research findings do not fit the biographies of this sample of rural White women. Only one of five poor or near poor single mothers experienced a dramatic drop in economic status when her marriage dissolved. This disparity may reflect the particularities of this small sample, but it may also reflect the structural characteristics of rural places. The majority of poor or near poor single mothers had long lived close to the economic edge.

Among these women, a family structure change like separation or divorce usually brought a decline in income, but many were already below the poverty line. The dominance of low wage, secondary sector work for rural White men creates a set of conditions in which various family life events may have outcomes that run counter to generalizations about White families drawn from aggregate data.

Analyses of PSID data find that the two most effective ways of ending a spell of poverty for a female householder with children are: first, by increasing the woman's earnings, and second, by remarriage (Bane and Ellwood 1986). My analysis finds that remarriage or cohabitation is not a predictable route out of poverty among this sample of rural women. Of the seven women who have undertaken new household arrangements with men in the past three years, in only two cases has the relationship precipitated an exit from poverty. Two of the women in new relationships had raised their incomes above the poverty line prior to entering these new relationships. Three women remain poor despite their new residential relationships with men. The experience of this sample illustrates that having access to a White male's income does not necessary insulate White rural families from poverty. Marriage is believed by many conventional thinkers to be the solution to the problem of poverty among women and children in American society. Yet we see in this low wage rural place that this piece of conventional wisdom does not hold. More poor women and children in this sample live in married-couple households than in female-headed households.

Although many scholars conclude that marriage is an institution that has decreasing significance to White women, the data from this research suggest a more nuanced position. This sample of rural women continues to rely on marriage to sustain themselves and their children despite the fact that marriage to an employed White man does not insure that a family will not be poor. This analysis shows clearly that the economic benefits of marriage differ by spatial context. I view spatial context as an aspect of social location. The conclusions drawn from this analysis of family life at a

disadvantaged spatial location are theoretically related to conclusions drawn from analyses of family life at other disadvantaged social locations. Catanzarite and Ortiz (1996), in their analysis of women's marital status, race, and poverty, conclude that "[b]eing married carries less financial benefit for minority women than for white women" (126). They found that White married women were far less likely to be poor than were married women of color. Their work shows clearly that analyses of economic status and family structure must take variation by race into account. In this analysis I advocate differentiating between the experience of urban White women and rural White women. If the financial benefit of marriage turns on whether one lives above or below the poverty line, then we must conclude that while rural White women were very attracted to marriage, nevertheless marriage appears to be less economically beneficial to rural women than to urban women. This situation reflects a labor market context in which a single earner--male or female--with secondary sector employment is unlikely to earn enough to lift a family above the poverty line. Marriage is more economically beneficial in metropolitan labor markets where White men earn higher wages, yet women in this nonmetro sample report that they have improved their economic status by marrying, remarrying, or cohabiting. Research participants measure their economic situation in relative terms, rather than in reference to an objective poverty threshold.

This research supports strongly the perspective that family structure and household arrangements are socially constructed in particular contexts. I have contended that the continuing importance of marriage among this rural sample reflects a specific set of social and economic opportunities and constraints. In places where White women experience greater economic opportunity, marriage has become less important (Cherlin 1992). But this is clearly not the case in the depressed rural community I studied. A different set of structural constraints exists for urban Blacks. Wilson (1987, 1996) has shown the relationship between the disappearance of

employment for men and rising rates of female headed families among African Americans. In the absence of employment opportunities, men are not seen as “marriageable.” Women and men forego marriage, in part, because a husband without job prospects is an economic liability. Both Wilson’s influential work and this research advance structural arguments in theorizing about contemporary family structure. But this work is not principally a variation on Wilson’s ideas. Wilson illuminates the family structure effects of recent economic transformations in central cities. This study of rural families points out--as did Wilson--that family organization is shaped by the structure of economic opportunity. However, in the context I explored, I found different family effects than did Wilson. In using a multi-class sample I found that the ability to sustain stable nuclear families was strongly associated with social class position. But relationships between class, gender, family structure, and family experience frequently did not conform to research findings based on White urban families. I conclude that the family effects of economic restructuring differ in rural and urban areas. Not only do race, class, and gender shape the context for family life in contemporary U.S. society; but importantly, and in addition, place matters.

IMPLICATIONS

This research leads me to conclude that family social science has not kept pace with changes in the structure and organization of family life in this society. These results point to the inadequacy of social science categories for describing family and household arrangements. Frameworks that were adequate for describing modern families in an industrial society are inadequate for describing the more discontinuous families and flexible households that increasingly characterize the emerging postindustrial society. The family structure realities of this small sample could not be meaningfully summarized by the conventional categories of married couple families,

female-headed families, and male-headed families. By continuing to use old frameworks and to embrace the assumptions that undergirded them, family life appears far simpler than is frequently the case. This research has demonstrated in particular the inadequacy of the “married-couple” family category. “Married couple” indicates only present marital status; this research illustrates that family experience cannot be generalized from marital status. Yet both social scientists and policy makers have generally assumed that a high rate of married-couple households in a population points to high levels of marital permanence. Children in married-couple households are assumed to have family histories characterized by continuity and stability. They are assumed to be living with both biological parents. These assumptions do not hold up in view of the high rates of divorce and remarriage in this society. The general disregard of higher order marriages is unwarranted given the family structure realities in this society. Further, an increasing rate of nonmarital births does not allow us to assume even in first marriages that both partners are the biological parents of children in the household. Prevailing understandings would lead to the underestimation of the fluidity and flexibility of family arrangements found in this research sample and in the U.S. population at large. Although the statistics regarding the prevalence of divorce and remarriage are well known, we continue to theorize as though married-couple families epitomize stability, while single parent families epitomize fluidity.

Family scholars must take up the methodological task of providing new vocabulary for capturing the diversity of family configurations and household arrangements among U.S. households. We cannot hope to understand what we have not adequately described. In this research I introduced the term “first-marriage stepfamily” to refer to a family formed by a first marriage to which a partner brings a child who is not the spouse’s biological child. This term captures the dual realities of, first, the partner relationship, and second, the relationship between partners and children in the household. Yet even this category is potentially confusing. The

question arises as to whose experience determines whether a couple is in a first marriage. One partner may have been previously married, while the other partner was never-married. The language we use to categorize families assumes a commonality of experience within a family that does not necessarily exist.

I also distinguished between conventional and unconventional first marriage to capture the multiple paths to first marriage. I believe that when we discuss first marriage we continue to have pictures in our heads of childless couples who have married and have constructed independent family households. Although we know well that nonmarital births have increased, in our theorizing about marriage we do not fully take into account that some women enter first marriage with, for example, three nonmarital births and a complex relational history. We falsely assume that a population with a high rate of first marriage is a population with highly continuous family relationships. Differentiation between conventional and unconventional first marriages allows us to capture the multiple family realities encompassed in a particular status. These suggestions for categorizing families represent only a very small beginning of what is a vitally important methodological task for family scholars.

Many of the current ambiguities in our understandings of families proceed from the tendency to conflate “family” and “household.” It seems likely that this tendency follows from the assumption that households are made up of nuclear families, that is, residential units which contain parents and their dependent children (in which case “family” and “household” contain the same set of individuals). In contemporary society, however, we find complex households in which individuals have primary linkages to children in other household boundaries. As long as the assumption that family and household are one and the same holds, family scholars will fail to raise many significant questions about the organization of family life. Two brief examples follow. First, children who live in married-couple families are frequently described as living in two-parent families. Yet many of these “two-parent families” are

stepfamilies. By conflating the experience of families that are nuclear in structure with stepfamilies, the issue of how children and stepparents are “family” to each other is unlikely to be examined. Second, both scholars and public policy makers generally assume that economic resources in a married couple household will be used for the benefit of children in that household. The pooling of income in married couples is assumed. In reality, pooling may not occur in households characterized by postmodern arrangements. Family ties extending beyond household boundaries may exert strong demands on the economic resources of individual partners. For instance, a divorced man who remarries and now lives with his wife and her children may be committed to using his income for the college or medical expenses of his biological children living in another household.

Contemporary families and households have been forced into a narrow band of categories based on outdated assumptions about the organization of families. Making sense of the increasing diversity of family experience requires new frameworks that capture what family historian Coontz calls “the way we really are.”²⁹ Without such, our theoretical formulations will have limited explanatory power and family sociology can not fulfill its potential. The institution of the family is clearly in transition. The American public is ambivalent about how to interpret recent trends in the structure and organization of family life. I believe family sociology can make an important contribution to society by facilitating a broader understanding of the ways in which social forces shape and reshape family life.

This research has used a structural framework in analyzing family life. The premise that families are socially constructed in a particular set of economic, political, and cultural circumstances is fundamental to this study. I anticipated finding, and did indeed find, structural underpinnings that shaped family life. Culture of poverty theory

²⁹Stephanie Coontz’s recent book is titled, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America’s Changing Families* (1997).

offers an important analysis of social behavior and social outcomes, but mine is not a cultural analysis. In fact, my findings are diametrically opposed to the culture of poverty thesis. The circumstances found to construct family life in this community are a private sector economy dominated by retail, secondary sector service occupations and low wage manufacturing. I found that cultural norms of hard work and self-sufficiency are strong. In this particular context, family life differs remarkably by social class.

This research contributes to our understanding of the effects of social forces on families by its use of a multi-class sample. Within a small geographic area we find two distinct contexts for family life. Middle class families have secure employment and stable nuclear families. Working class and poor families experience greater insecurity. Moving down from the highest paid working class families to the poorest families, economic vulnerability and family fluidity increases. Even the highest paid working class families may experience downsizing, contingent employment, and the anxiety of being without health insurance. As U.S. society moves to an increasingly bifurcated class structure, these results point to increasing bifurcation in the structure of families. A minority of the population will have the material base on which to maintain stable nuclear households. However, the majority of the population will find that the conditions of employment in the restructured economy will press them toward family lives characterized by temporary relationships and flexible household arrangements.

This study found not only two distinct contexts for family life, but also two sets of assumptions about family life among sample women. Middle class women assume marital stability. All middle class families embody the nuclear family ideal. All women in this social class believe that they, together with their husbands, have worked hard to achieve economic success and likewise have worked hard to create harmonious and stable families.

Working class and poor women have a very different set of assumptions. Only one third of these families are classic nuclear families in structure. Most of these

women did not measure the structure of their families against a benchmark family. For most, this ideal simply does not conform to their experience. These women see marital disruption all around them, and frequently experience marriage as fragile and family relations as impermanent. But they do not blame themselves or others in their community for deficient “family values.” Working class and poor women are not only moving away from living in nuclear families, they are also moving away from invoking that form as the ideal.

These results have scholarly and political implications with respect to the “family values” debate. It is likely that conservatives will continue to decry declining “family values” as the source of “family breakdown” and other social ills (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:19). This argument proceeds from a set of middle class assumptions and experiences about the construction and maintenance of families. Lower income working class and poor women in this sample know that the nuclear family norm exists, but they also have found that in some fundamental sense that it does not apply to them. Life has not come to them in a way that enables them to maintain marital stability and continuous household arrangements. Robin Jarrett’s (1994) study of poor never-married African American mothers is instructive here. These mothers were committed to the ideal of marriage, but understood it was unlikely to be part of their experience given the structural constraints of male joblessness and deep poverty. I suggest that in a similar way, these rural women distance themselves from the nuclear ideal, and go on to construct the most satisfying family lives possible in the context of considerable constraints. They know that some marriages are life-long relationships, and they hope for that every time they enter a relationship. Yet they know from both their own experiences and their observations of others in the community that long term relationships are difficult to maintain.

Changing norms and declining family values have been cited as explanatory factors for increasing rates of poverty, divorce and nonmarital birth in rural areas

(Lichter and Eggebeen 1992, Fitchen 1991). The approach taken in this research has theorized the importance of structural obstacles to family continuity. These data suggests that efforts to prop up the nuclear family norm are likely to be ineffective. This research shows the clear connection between “money trouble” and “family trouble.” Because no economic turnaround is in sight for rural America, greater family continuity is unlikely. What is missing among these rural families is not values, but the material base to support them.

This study raises important questions about the implementation of the 1996 Welfare Reform Bill. Welfare reform was undergirded by the assumption that the availability of welfare discouraged family formation and encouraged irresponsible nonmarital childbearing. In addition, welfare promoted dependency rather than economic independence. The solution to the lack of personal responsibility among welfare recipients was time limits on welfare and the imposition of a work requirement. This research finds a strong ethic of self-sufficiency among this sample. Over half (53%) of sample families have at some time used welfare assistance, but the use of welfare emerges as a temporary solution to economic crises. Welfare is generally used as one would expect policy makers would want it to be used--as a short term way of keeping a household together and children fed. The only woman who might be categorized as welfare dependent deconstructs the “freeloading” issue by pointing out that she is on welfare because the men who fathered her children are not paying their court-ordered child support obligations.

An important progressive critique of welfare reform is its concern with getting families off welfare rather than getting them out of poverty. In this research site, it is unlikely that any single mother will get a local job that pays wages above the poverty line for herself and two children. Women who have a high school diploma, some college, and several years of labor force participation may earn only \$6.00 an hour. A poorly educated new labor market entrant is likely to find only part-time, minimum

wage employment. Women are particularly disadvantaged by the absence of job ladders in the employment open to them in rural labor markets.

Finally, I consider the future direction of family structure change in rural areas. The family structure effects of economic transitions are differentiated by race (Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998). I have contended previously that in considering trends for White families, rural residence is an important factor to take into account. White rural families experience both more limited opportunity structure and a less developed infrastructure of family support services than do White urban families. There is no reason to expect that a more positive environment for family life in rural areas will emerge. Setting aside rosy images of rural areas, we see that rural residence may actually promote family fragility.

Economic changes set in place in recent decades are part of a global economic restructuring that will continue into the future. What is significant for the rural place I studied is the strong labor force attachment of the adult population and the availability of work. In other rural areas, employment may be less available. As is characteristic of rural areas, both men and women earn low wages. In this study, the local labor market creates a situation in which most men are seen as marriageable and most women are unable to provide for children on their own. The same social processes that constructed dual earning as a dominant household strategy predict continued low social class status for single parent families. All sample women with nonmarital births subsequently married. In this restrictive economic context, marriages and other partner relationships are fragile and frequently dissolve, but women readily enter into new partner relationships. Among women who are not working, a man's earnings--even at poverty level--offer an improvement over low welfare benefits. Low wage women need a second income to provide for children's necessities. The pattern of marriage, divorce, remarriage (or cohabitation) is likely to continue as long as women remain economically marginalized by low wage work.

This research shows that family structure diversity is here to stay. In this discussion of family structure change, it is significant to recall that middle class families with professional or managerial employment have been able to maintain continuous nuclear families. Distinctive social class divisions in this society mean that families will continue to be shaped in a multiplicity of ways.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research does not study family life in a quintessential rural setting. This community is not the most perfect embodiment of rurality. The research takes place in a nonmetropolitan county with a regional university to the north in the county seat and a metropolitan center commuting distance to the south. The university seemed to influence the lives of this sample relatively little. One father was a university professor and a mother was a student. The primary influence of the university seemed to be an effect on employment in the county seat. Research participants believed university students received preferential treatment in hiring for retail and fast food jobs. The presence of the university did not transform the rural nature of this setting. The university, located approximately fifteen to thirty minutes from sample families homes, had little cultural influence on the lives of this sample. An institution of higher education was a world apart from the experience of most families.

The presence of a metro center at commuting distance is not normative for nonmetro areas. In this study, access to a metro center created a segment of the working class population with higher incomes than would be found if all working class families had within-county employment. It is likely that the availability of high wage work at commuting distance also shaped the community population and this sample. Without access to higher metro wages, several families with higher skilled earners may

have never settled in this area or may well have moved to a metro area. The accessibility of the metro center resulted in a more economically diverse working class than might be present in some rural communities.

In answer to the question of whether this research setting is representative of rural America, the answer is “yes” and “no.” The question of representativeness must be answered by considering the broad diversity in rural America. No research setting can be representative of, for example, rural Nebraska, upstate New York, and the Mississippi Delta. The same large-scale social processes that shape the structure of economic opportunity in other rural areas, have had their effects on the rural Michigan community I studied. But the local manifestations of these processes vary from place to place. This research setting worked very well for a study of household strategies. It shows the malleability of labor and the flexibility of household strategies. While commuting to the metro center was not a viable option twenty years ago, a divided highway has changed the way nonfarm families support themselves.

Our entree to this community was through the local elementary schools. We were presented in the schools’ newsletters as university researchers who were studying rural families. It is likely that these institutional connections shaped our sample. While we did interview individuals who were enmeshed in difficult family circumstances, other families might have been reluctant to open up their family lives to researchers. We did, for example, have one woman willing to be interviewed whose husband would not permit it. In another case a woman who agreed to participate in the research questioned whether we wanted to interview her because the school had informed us that her son was having trouble in school. As a result, we probably found more positive family dynamics than are generally found community-wide. In this respect our data have the same kinds of limitations as other studies with self-selected samples.

Other limitations follow from using research instruments that were not specifically designed to address my research questions. This study would have

benefited from a more systematic assessment of social support. My analysis includes all references to family and nonfamily social support as found in interview accounts. But I am left believing that accounts of social support are incomplete. I expect that in some cases more social support was received than we were able to ascertain within the confines of these interviews.

This study would have benefited from a more systematic gathering of family structure histories. Part of the problem here is that the research team did not anticipate finding as complicated marital and relational histories and as much fluidity in household arrangements as we indeed found. The interview and survey instruments used in this study reflect researchers' assumptions regarding the family characteristics of this rural population. So, for example, the survey allowed spaces for four moves over the lifetime of the second or third grade target child. In reality, some families had moved more than four times. One mother indicated in her interview that her daughter had moved eleven times. In addition because of the way family information was gathered, some questions I had, such as the paternity of a particular child, could not be answered definitively. In most cases, however, I was able to piece together the family structure histories through interview and survey data. These limitations suggest the likelihood that the results of this study underestimate the fluidity of family arrangements in this sample.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

A SURVEY OF CHILDREN'S LIVES IN RURAL MICHIGAN

APPENDIX A

A SURVEY OF CHILDREN'S LIVES IN RURAL MICHIGAN*

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our family study. You will be helping us learn more about the experiences of rural children in Michigan. Our main goal is to better understand what children experience in their day-to-day lives. It is also important to know how children are influenced by things such as changes in residence, family size, how families make ends meet, school experiences and health status.

First, we would like to ask you a few questions about the people who usually live with you. Please start with yourself. For each person, indicate in the space provided their sex, birth date, years of schooling completed, and whether the person lives with you.

1. Who lives in your household?

		sex (circle)	birth date month/yr.	years of school completed	Living at home? yes or no
A.	You	M F	_____	_____	
B.	Spouse or partner (if one)	M F	_____	_____	Y N

Next, we would like to ask you a few questions about your children or stepchildren, starting with the oldest child. Please indicate step-child with *.

		sex (circle)	birth date month/yr.	years of school completed	Living at home? yes or no
C.	Child 1	M F	_____	_____	Y N
D.	Child 2	M F	_____	_____	Y N
E.	Child 3	M F	_____	_____	Y N
F.	Child 4	M F	_____	_____	Y N
G.	Child 5	M F	_____	_____	Y N
H.	Child 6	M F	_____	_____	Y N
I.	Child 7	M F	_____	_____	Y N
J.	Child 8	M F	_____	_____	Y N
K.	Child 9	M F	_____	_____	Y N
L.	Child 10	M F	_____	_____	Y N

If more than 10 children/step-children, please check here _____

* Reproduced in this appendix are the introductory material and questions 1-5 and 9-20 of the original survey. This research is based on responses to these questions. Questions 6-8 are omitted in this appendix because they were lengthy and did not relate to the research questions of this study.

Are there any other adults and/or family members living with you?

Please complete the information below for each:

Relationship (such as mother brother, friend, grandparent, etc.)	sex (circle)	birth date month/yr.	years of school completed	Living at home? yes or no	
M. _____	M F	_____	_____	Y	N
N. _____	M F	_____	_____	Y	N
O. _____	M F	_____	_____	Y	N
P. _____	M F	_____	_____	Y	N

If more than 4 other adults or family members, please list on the back of this page.

2. What is your present marital status? (circle only one)

- A. First marriage _____ number of years you have been married
- B. Remarried _____ number of years in current marriage
- C. Separated
- D. Widowed
- E. Divorced
- F. Member of an unmarried couple
- G. Single, never been married
- H. Other: specify _____

3. If you are not currently married or remarried, what is your relationship status at the present time?

Are you: (circle one)

- A. Seriously involved with someone and living together?
- B. Seriously involved but not living with someone?
- C. Dating?
- D. Not seeing anyone right now?

4. Do you live on a farm?

- A. No
- B. Yes, less than ten acres
- C. Yes, more than ten acres

5. Children may change homes for several reasons. Their families may move, their parent with custody changes, or their family may be looking for better schools or other kinds of services. List the places where your child has lived since he or she was born. Start by listing the place where you and your child live now. Give the year and the reason you child moved to that place. Then work backward.

	City/state where child lives or lived	Year the child moved in	Reason why child moved here
Start with your current home	1. _____	_____	_____
Previous home	2. _____	_____	_____
	3. _____	_____	_____
	4. _____	_____	_____

Household Resources: Employment and Family Income

To better understand the resource picture of the families in our study we need to know something about your family's work and income.

9. First, we would like some information about your work: Please circle as many as apply.

- A. Yes, employed full-time . . . Hours per week ____ \$ per hour ____
- B. Yes, employed part-time . . . Hours per week ____ \$ per hour ____
- C. Unemployed (if so, are you currently looking for work? - yes no)
- D. Stay at home full time
- E. Retired
- F. In school
- G. Disabled
- H. Does someone in your household participate in any government assistance program (local, state, or federal)? yes no
- I. Does someone in your household receive child support or alimony? yes no
- J. Self employed
- K. Other (please specify) _____

10. Have you changed your main job in the last 2 years? No Yes

11. Please give us some information about the type of work you do now.

- A. What is your main occupation or job title? _____
- B. What kind of work do you do -- that is, what are your main duties on the job? _____

12. Do you have any other jobs in addition to your main job?

- A. No
- B. Yes -----> If yes, what is your job title? _____

13. If you have a spouse or partner, is that person employed?
(Please circle as many as apply.)
- A. Yes, employed full-time . . . Hours per week ____ \$ per hour ____
 - B. Yes, employed part-time . . . Hours per week ____ \$ per hour ____
 - C. Unemployed (if so, are you currently looking for work? - yes no)
 - D. Stay at home full time
 - E. Retired
 - F. In school
 - G. Disabled
 - H. Self employed
 - I. Other (please specify) _____
14. How satisfied are you with your family's present financial situation?
- | | | | | |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| completely | very | somewhat | not very | not at all |
| satisfied | satisfied | satisfied | satisfied | satisfied |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
15. How difficult is it for your family to meet the monthly bills?
- | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| extremely | very | somewhat | slightly | not at all |
| difficult | difficult | difficult | difficult | difficult |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
16. To what extent is your income today enough for you and your family to live on?
- A. Can not buy some necessities
 - B. Can meet necessities only
 - C. Can afford some of the things we want, but not all we want
 - D. Can afford about everything we want
 - E. Can afford about everything we want and have some left over
17. Thinking about your family's overall financial condition -- what you own, owe, earn, are able to buy, and so on -- which of the following best describes any change in your overall financial condition over the past 3 years?
- a) Much worse b) Worse c) Same d) Better e) Much better
- 18a. If your financial conditions have changed during the past 3 years please describe the change(s) below.
- 18b. In your opinion, have the job opportunities increased or decreased in (Name) County during the past 3 years? (please circle) Increased Decreased
- Would you please explain?

18c. Do you think that job opportunities will be better or worse in (Name) County in the next 3 years? (please circle) Better Worse Please explain.

19. For each item listed below, think about the amount of money your family spends for family members now living in your household. Over the past 3 years, how has the amount you spent changed? In general, do you feel that the amount you spend today is:

	Lot Less	Less	No Change	Lot More	More
A. Food eaten at home	1	2	3	4	5
B. Food eaten away from home	1	2	3	4	5
C. Clothing purchases for you and spouse/partner	1	2	3	4	5
D. Clothing purchases for your children	1	2	3	4	5
E. Child care/baby sitting	1	2	3	4	5
F. Medical care for you or your spouse/partner	1	2	3	4	5
G. Medical care for your children	1	2	3	4	5
H. Dental care for you or your spouse/partner	1	2	3	4	5
I. Dental care for your children	1	2	3	4	5
J. Health insurance	1	2	3	4	5
K. Transportation	1	2	3	4	5
L. Entertainment and recreation	1	2	3	4	5
M. Other (describe)	1	2	3	4	5

20. Please check your approximate total family income for 1994.

Less than \$5000	_____	\$25,000-\$30,000	_____
\$5000-\$10,000	_____	\$30,000-\$35,000	_____
\$10,000-\$15,000	_____	\$35,000-\$40,000	_____
\$15,000-\$20,000	_____	\$40,000-\$45,000	_____
\$20,000-\$25,000	_____	Greater than \$45,000	_____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: CHILDREN'S LIVES IN RURAL MICHIGAN

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: CHILDREN'S LIVES IN RURAL MICHIGAN

A. Quality of Rural Life

1. Let's start by talking about this area as a place to raise children. Some people believe rural places are ideal, while others believe that there are real challenges for parenting in rural areas. What have you found to be good as well as difficult about raising children in rural Mecosta County?
 - a. What is good about raising children in this area?
 - b. Is there anything about this area that makes it hard to raise a child?
 - c. How does this area compare with other places you have lived as far as being a place to raise children?
 - d. Did you grow up here? If not, where?

B. Child's Daily Experiences

1. Next we would like to know more about your child's everyday experiences.
 - a. Tell me about a typical day for your child . . .
 - i. For a recent day
 - ii. How were your child's daily experiences different before he/she went to school?

PROBES: ASK A PROBE ONLY IF NO RESPONSE TO ABOVE QUESTION

What kinds of routines does your child have? For example: getting ready for school, going to bed, or at mealtime.

What does your child do after school?

What does your child enjoy doing?

2. As a parent and as you look back over these typical daily activities of your child...what do you think really matters as far as the development of your child is concerned?

C. Health and Development

1. As a parent, you are aware of how your child grew and developed. You also are aware of how healthy your child was during that time. Please think for a minute about these things, for example, how your child learned to walk and talk and how he/she learned to express his/her feelings -- and, finally, think about any illnesses your child may have had during those early growing years.

- a. Please tell us your concerns and your feelings about your child's development, in general.

- b. **Motor Skills**

Would you tell me about your child's learning to walk and later do other physical things? What do you remember about these things?

PROBE:

Did you have any concerns?

What did you do about those concerns?

- c. **Speech and Language Development**

Would you tell me about your child's learning to speak and pronounce sounds?

What do you remember about these activities?

PROBE: ASK A PROBE ONLY IF NO RESPONSE TO THE ABOVE QUESTION.

Did you have any concerns? For example, did your child speak earlier or later than other children of the same age?

What did you do about those concerns?

- c. **Emotional and Social Development**

(i) How has your child gotten along with other family members (his/her brothers and/or sisters, parents)?

(ii) How does he/she get along with other kids?

(iii) What does he/she do when he/she is playing by him/her self?

- (iv) What is he/she like when he/she is playing with things, such as toys?

D. School Readiness

1. Thinking back to your child's first day of school, was your child ready for school?
 - a. Why or why not?
2. How do you think teachers know if a child is ready for first grade?
3. During your child's preschool years, did you do anything that you thought helped him/her prepare for school?
 - a. What else might you have done?
4. Was the school helpful in your child's making the adjustment to going to school?

E. School Experiences

1. How does your child feel about going to school?

PROBES: ASK A PROBE ONLY IF NO RESPONSE TO ABOVE QUESTION

Does he/she like his/her teacher?
Any social problems?
Have a special friend or friends at school?

2. Have your child's feelings about school changed?
 - a. Are they getting better or worse?
3. How are you involved in your child's school?

PROBES: ASK ONLY IF NO RESPONSE TO ABOVE QUESTION

Class trips?
Homeroom parent?
Bringing treats?
Supervising extra curricular events?

IF THEY DO NOT MENTION MUCH INVOLVEMENT, ASK:

4. How do you find out about what is going on at school?

F. Time Scarcity and Decisions

1. Thinking back over your child's life, can you think of any one time when the pressures of your time were especially great?
 - a. A time when you just did not seem to have enough time or energy to go around?
 - (1) Describe the specific event or events, which triggered this.
 - (2) During this situation, what kinds of activities did you let go undone?
 - (3) Did anyone help you around the house or with childcare?
 - (a) Who?
 - (b) What did they do to help?
2. In the years it has taken you to raise this child, what would you say has been the hardest decision you have had to make regarding this child?
3. How did things turn out?
4. What kind of a decision-maker would you say you are?

G. Changes in Family/Household

1. In the lifetime of your child, have major events occurred that have really changed your family?
2. How did this event (or these events) effect your child?

H. Social Support and Services

1. Most parents need to depend on their families or communities for help as they raise their children. As your child has been growing up, what help have you needed? Has it been available?

PROBES: ASK A PROBE ONLY IF NO RESPONSE TO ABOVE QUESTIONS

From your family or friends?

From community programs or agencies?

EXAMPLES: Help with...
INFORMATION or ADVICE
MONEY
FOOD
LISTENING TO CONCERNS
SOMEONE TO TALK TO
TRANSPORTATION
CHILD CARE
ROLE MODEL FOR CHILD

2. What kinds of child care arrangements have you made while your child was growing up?
 - a. Is making child care arrangements a problem?
_____ No.

_____ Yes. In what way(s)?
3. There is lots of talk about welfare reform. Do you think the welfare system is going to be changed? How?
4. How do you think it will (change) be different in your community? (How will your community respond?)

I. Economic and Employment

1. When a family has young children, there is often a struggle to make ends meet. Financially speaking, how do you feel about your ability to support a school-age child? (Think of all the costs associated with raising your child.)
 - a. Do you ever find it difficult to pay for some of the things you feel your child should have?
 - b. When you find it difficult to pay for child related expenses, what do you do?
2. When your child was a preschooler, was it easier or harder to financially support your child then it is now?
3. How about when your child was an infant? Was it easier or harder to financially support your child then than it is now?
4. Do you ever do any other work or jobs to help earn extra money...or to save money? For example, work such as raising your own food.

5. When you were growing up, what did your parents do for a living?

a. Was your mother employed?

J. Evaluating What's Important (for parents that are either currently employed or with substantial work experience).

I'm going to read you a list of things that sometimes keep people from getting good jobs in their lives.

1. Please tell me if these things have been important in keeping you from getting really good jobs.

a. How about family responsibilities?

_____ No

_____ Yes. In what ways have family responsibilities interfered with getting a good job?

b. How about because you are a woman?

_____ No.

_____ Yes. In what way has being a woman interfered with getting a really good job?

c. How about not having the right education or training?

_____ No.

_____ Yes.

(i) Why didn't you get more education or training?

_____ You didn't have the chance?

_____ or because

_____ You didn't use the chances you had?

_____ or because

_____ The education and training wasn't available?

d. What about not having enough ability?

_____ No.

_____ Yes. What skills or abilities do you feel employers are looking for?

e. How important has not trying hard enough been in keeping you from getting good jobs?

f. What about not having the right connections with people (who are hiring) for good jobs?

_____ No.

_____ Yes. Are there any ways you could increase your connections with these people?

g. What about living in this area?

_____ No.

_____ Yes. Is it because this is a rural community?

J. Alternative Evaluating What's Important (for parents not currently employed).

1. Do you expect to look for a job sometime in the future?

If respondent answers "yes."

When rural parents decide to look for a job, they often find that getting a good job is a real challenge. When you decide to look for a job, what obstacles or challenges do you think you might face?

- a. Do you think family responsibilities will make it difficult for you to get a good job? Why or why not?
- b. Do you think that being a woman will make it harder?
- c. Do you think you have the right education and training for a good job? What skills or abilities do you think employers are looking for?
- d. Do you have connections with people who could help you get a good job?
- e. Will living in this area make it hard for you to get a good job? If yes, is it because this is a rural community?

If respondent answers "no."

- a. How did you come to that decision?
- b. Do you think you have the skills to get a good job?

Ask all respondents whether or not they are currently working or not working outside the home at the time of the interview.

2. Now I would like to ask you some questions about how well you have dealt with different parts of your life, given the chances you have had. (Ask one or the other questions that follow given a positive or negative response to each item.)

- a. Given the chances you've had, how well have you done in the work or jobs you've had?

_____ Well. What are you especially proud of?

_____ Not well. What would you like to have changed?

- b. How well have you done at being a good friend - a person your friends can count on?

_____ Well. What are you especially proud of?

_____ Not well. What would you like to have changed?

- c. Given the chances you have had, how well have you done in taking care of your family's wants and needs?

_____ Well. What are you especially proud of?

_____ Not well. What would you like to have changed?

- d. If married or living with someone: How well have you done at being a good wife to your husband/husband to your wife?

_____ Well. What are you especially proud of?

_____ Not well. What would you like to have changed?

- e. How well have you done at being a good mother/father to your children?

_____ Well. What are you especially proud of?

_____ Not well. What would you like to have changed?

3. We have talked about some of the activities of your past and current life. Looking to the future, what are some of the things you especially look forward to for your child in the next few years?

APPENDIX C

ADDITIONAL TABLES

Table A

When you find it difficult to pay for child-related expenses, what do you do?
Parent-Identified Strategies by Class-Based Groups of Sample Families (n=30)

Family	Not a problem	Resource generation strategies	Consumption-related strategies			Going without
			Cutting back/ substitution	Reallocation of cash	Budgeting	
Middle class n=4						
Cole	x					
Kennedy	x					
Williams	x					
Schram	x					
Total %	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Working class n=16						
Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000						
Nichols	x					
Molloy	x					
Olsen	x					
Collins	x					
Mannelli	x					
Walsh			x	x	x	
Davis		x		x		
Total %	78%	14%	15%	29%	14%	0%

Table A (cont'd.)
Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000

Rogers		x			
Griffin	x				
Davenport					x
Phillips					x
VanDyke	x				
Edwards				x	
Cooper	x				
Shoemaker			x		x
Norris	x				
McCullen	x				
Total %	20%	0%	20%	20%	20%
Poor n=9					
Patterson				x	
Newman			x		
Smith				x	
Roberts	x				
Watson	x				
Miller		x		x	
Campbell					
Morgan					
Turner		x			x
Total %	22%	22%	22%	33%	11%

Table B
Household Strategies for Resource Generation
Characteristics of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families (n=30)

Family	Employment-related strategies				Informal economy	Institutional assistance	
	Dual earner	Commutes	Overtime	Moonlighting			
Middle class n=4							
Cole	x	m		m	x	m	
		f	x	f	f	x	f
Kennedy	x	m		m		m	
		f		f	f		f
Williams	x	m		m		m	
		f		f	f		f
Schram	x	m		m		m	
		f		f	f	x	f
Total %	100%	25%	0%	50%	0%	0%	
Working class n=17							
Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000							
Nichols	x	m		m		m	
		f	x	f	f		f
Molloy	x	m	x	m		m	
		f		f	f		f
Olsen	x	m	x	m		m	
		f		f	f		f
Collins	x	m		m	x	m	
		f		f	f		f
Mannelli		m	x	m		m	
		f		f	f		f
Walsh	x	m		m	x	m	
		f	x	f	x	f	f
Davis		m	x	m	x	m	
		f		f	f		f
Total	71%	86%	43%	0%	29%	0%	
Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000							
Rogers	x	m		m	x	m	
		f		f	x	f	f
Griffin		m	x	m		m	
		f		f	f		f
Davenport		m		m		m	x
		f	x	f	f		f

Table B (cont'd.)

Phillips		m		m	x	m		m		x
		f		f		f		f		
VanDyke		m	x	m	x	m		m		x
		f		f		f		f		
Edwards	x	m	x	m		m		m		
		f		f		f		f		
Cooper	x	m		m		m		m	x	
		f		f	x	f		f	x	
Shoemaker		m	x	m	x	m		m		
		f		f		f		f		
Norris	x	m		m		m		m		
		f		f		f		f	x	
McCullen		m		m		m		m		
		f	x	f		f		f		
Total %	40%		60%		50%		0%		30%	20%
Poor n=9										
Patterson		m		m		m		m		
		f		f		f		f		
Newman		m		m		m		m	x	x
		f		f		f		f	x	
Smith		m	x	m	x	m		m		
		f		f		f		f	x	
Roberts		m		m		m		m		x
		f		f		f		f		
Watson		m		m		m		m		
		f		f	x	f		f		
Miller		m		m		m		m		
		f		f		f		f		
Campbell		m	x	m		m		m		
		f		f		f		f	x	
Morgan		m		m		m		m		
		f	x	f		f		f		
Turner		m		m		m		m		x
		f		f		f		f	x	
Total %	0%		33%		22%		0%		44%	33%

Table C
Non-Economic Social Support: Family-Based and Non-Family Based
Distribution in Class-Based Groups of Sample Families (n=30)

Family	Family-Based Support				Non-Family Based Support			
	Assistance		Advice	Encourage-ment	Nonspecific support	Neighbors	Friends	Child care providers
	W/children	Other						
Middle class n=4								
Cole	x		x			x		
Kennedy	x					x	x	x
Williams	x							
Schram	x	x		x				
Total	100%	25%	25%	25%	0%	50%	25%	25%
Working class n=17								
Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000								
Nichols	x							x
Molloy	x							
Olsen	x							
Collins			x	x		x		
Mannelli	x							
Walsh							x	
Davis	x		x	x				
Total	71%	0%	29%	29%	0%	14%	14%	14%

Lower income subgroup n=10 income < \$30,000

306

Table D

In the years it has taken you to raise (child's name), what would you say has been the hardest decision you have had to make regarding (child's name)?

Responses of Class-Based Groups of Sample Families (n = 30)

Family***Middle class n=4***

Cole: Deciding if child was faking illness because something was not going well at school

Kennedy: Deciding whether daughter was ready to start school

Williams: Don't know

Schram: Making decisions about discipline

Working class n=16***Higher income subgroup n=7 income > \$30,000***

Nichols: Deciding how to handle a situation in which daughter reported that the babysitter was swearing

Molloy: Deciding whether child was ready to start school

Olsen: Leaving her children for a while and moving to Detroit where she had strong support

Collins: Handling child's temper

Mannelli: Deciding about child's bottle when he was a baby

Walsh: Leaving abusive husband (separation)

Davis: Making decisions about discipline

Lower income subgroup n=9 income < \$30,000

Rogers: No hard decisions - they have had extended family help

Griffin: Handling being in the hospital and separated from her daughter

Davenport: Deciding whether to quit work to spend more time with child who is struggling in school; husband is unemployed

Phillips: Having son go to hospital for psychological evaluation

VanDyke: Missing data

Edwards: Deciding son was not ready for first grade and enrolling him in "primary" after kindergarten, rather than first grade

Table D (cont'd.)

Cooper: Deciding what children should watch on TV and who they should be allowed to play with

Shoemaker: The challenge of raising a girl after three boys

Norris: Moving in the middle of the school year

McCullen: Missing data

Poor n=10

Patterson: Not letting son see his biological father - it still hurts son, but is better in the long run

Newman: Putting son on medicine for ADD

Smith: Letting daughter stay overnight at a friend's house

Roberts: Explaining to daughter that her adoptive mother was going to die

Watson: Limiting involvement in extracurricular activities to one or two

Miller: Deciding whether to move back to the metro center after her divorce

Campbell: Deciding whether to hold daughter back in school; deciding how to handle lack of living space in their small trailer

Morgan: Letting son grow up - he is her youngest child

Turner: Daughter had problems with a teacher last year and she considered having her moved to another teacher during the school year

APPENDIX D

STRATEGIES FOR RURAL FAMILIES AND CHILDREN COUNTY-WIDE TELEPHONE SURVEY WORDING OF QUESTIONS CITED IN CHAPTER 7

APPENDIX D

STRATEGIES FOR RURAL FAMILIES AND CHILDREN COUNTY-WIDE TELEPHONE SURVEY WORDING OF QUESTIONS CITED IN CHAPTER 7

- E2** It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family.

(Would you way you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?)

%	LABEL
28.7	Strongly agree
25.0	Somewhat agree
7.1	Neither agree or disagree
19.3	Somewhat disagree
19.9	Strongly disagree
	Do not know

- E4** Limiting the amount of time families can receive welfare will improve children's lives in this community.

(Would you way you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?)

%	LABEL
35.6	Strongly agree
31.7	Somewhat agree
7.1	Neither agree or disagree
11.7	Somewhat disagree
13.9	Strongly disagree
	Do not know

- E17** Should the law be changed to make divorce more difficult to obtain if children are involved?

%	LABEL
63.2	Yes
36.8	No
	Do not know
	Refused/no answer

E18 Generally speaking, do you think that children in a single parent home are much worse off, somewhat worse off, as well off, somewhat better off, or much better off than children in a two-parent home?

%	LABEL
23.5	Much worse off
44.8	Somewhat worse off
15.5	As well off
12.6	Somewhat better off
3.6	Much better off
	Do not know
	Refused/no answer

E22 Thinking about people who are "poor" (live in poverty), would you say that most people who are poor are working or that most are not working?

%	LABEL
34.1	Most are working
52.3	Most are not working
13.6	About equal working and not working
	Don't know
	Refused/no answer

E23 In your opinion are most people on welfare because of lack of effort or because of circumstances beyond their control?

%	LABEL
61.5	Lack of effort
38.5	Circumstances beyond their control
	Do not know
	Refused/no answer

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Acker, Joan, Kate Barry, and Johanna Esseveld. 1987. "Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research. In Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook (eds.), *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*. Pp. 133-153. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Albrecht, Don E., and Stan L. Albrecht. 1996. "Family Structure Among Urban, Rural and Farm Populations: Classic Sociological Theory Revisited." *Rural Sociology* 6(3):446-463.
- Amott, Teresa. 1993. *Caught in the Crisis: Women and the U.S. Economy Today*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Baca Zinn, Maxine. 1989. "Family, Race, and Poverty in the Eighties." *Signs* 14(4):856-874.
- Baca Zinn, Maxine. 1990. "Family, Feminism, and Race in America." *Gender and Society* 4(1):68-82.
- Baca Zinn, Maxine. 1994. "Feminist Rethinking from Racial-Ethnic Families." In Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (eds.), *Women of Color in U.S. Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Baca Zinn, Maxine and D. Stanley Eitzen. 1996. "The Historical Making of Family Diversity" In *Diversity in Families 4th ed.* New York: HarperCollins.
- Baca Zinn, Maxine and D. Stanley Eitzen. 1999. *Diversity in Families 5th ed.* New York: Longman.
- Bane, Mary Jo., and David T. Ellwood. 1986. "Slipping Into and Out of Poverty: The Dynamics of Spells. *Journal of Human Resources* 21:1-23.
- Bane, Mary Jo. 1986. "Household Composition and Poverty." In Sheldon Danziger and Daniel Weinberg (eds.), *Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't*. Pp. 209-231. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Barlett, Peggy F. 1993. *American Dreams, Rural Realities: Family Farms in Crisis*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Beech, Betty A. 1988. "Time Use in Rural Home-Working Families." In Ramona Marotz-Baden, Charles B. Hennon, and Timothy H. Brubaker (eds.), *Families*

- in Rural America: Stress, Adaptation and Revitalization*. Pp. 134-141. St. Paul, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
- Billingsley, Andrew. 1992. *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Bokemeier, Janet L., and Ann R. Tickamyer. 1985. "Labor Force Experiences of Nonmetropolitan Women." *Rural Sociology* 50(1):51-73.
- Bokemeier, Janet L., and Lorraine Garkovich. 1987. "Assessing the Influence of Farm Women's Self-Identity on Task Allocation and Decision Making." *Rural Sociology* 52(1):13-36.
- Bokemeier, Janet L., and Lorraine E. Garkovich. 1991. "Meeting Rural Family Needs." In Cornelia B. Flora and James A. Christenson (eds.), *Rural Policies for the 1990s*. Pp. 114-127. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Bokemeier, Janet L., and Kristin Yount. 1993. "Qualitative Insight to Complement National Information Systems." In James A. Christenson, Richard Maurer, and Nancy Strang (eds.), *Rural People, Data and Policy Information Systems for the 21st Century*. Pp. 187-202. Boulder CO: Westview Press.
- Bokemeier, Janet L., Barbara Wells, Patricia Gross, David Imig, and Dennis Keefe. 1995. "Lost Children in Rural Poverty: Viewpoints of Community Professionals and Low Income Mothers." Paper from Rural Sociological Society Annual Meetings, Washington, DC, August 19, 1995.
- Bokemeier, Janet L. 1996. "Rediscovering Families and Households: Rediscovering Rural Society and Rural Sociology." Presidential Address for the 1996 Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society in Des Moines, IA, August 15, 1996.
- Boss, Pauline. 1987. "Family Stress." In Marvin B. Sussman and Suzanne K. Steinmetz (eds.), *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*. Pp. 695-723. New York: Plenum Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1988. "The Forms of Capital." In John G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Pp. 241-258. New York: Greenwood.
- Broman, Clifford L., V. Lee Hamilton, and William S. Hoffman. 1990. "Unemployment and Its Effects on Families: Evidence from a Plant Closing Study." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 18(5):643-659.
- Brown, David L. and Mildred E. Warner. 1991. "Persistent Low-Income Nonmetropolitan Areas in the United States: Some Conceptual Challenges for

- Development Policy." *Policy Studies Journal* 19(2):22-41.
- Bultena, Gordon, Paul Lasley, and Jack Geller. 1986. "The Farm Crisis: Patterns and Impacts of Financial Distress Among Iowa Farm Families." *Rural Sociology* 51(4):436-448.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1991a. "Reconstructing Social Theories." In Michael Burawoy et al., *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*. Pp. 8-28. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1992b. "The Extended Case Method." In Michael Burawoy et al., *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*. Pp. 271-287. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Buttel, Frederick H., William P. Browne, Susan Christopherson, Donald Davis, Philip Ehrensaft, David Freshwater, John Gaventa, and Philip McMichael. 1993. "The State, Rural Policy, and Rural Poverty." In Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, *Persistent Poverty in Rural America*. Pp. 292-326. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- CACI Marketing Systems. 1994. *The Sourcebook of County Demographics: Seventh Edition*. Arlington, VA: CACI.
- Catanzarite, Lisa, and Vilma Ortiz. 1996. "Family Matters, Work Matters? Poverty Among Women of Color and White Women." In Diane Dujon and Ann Withorn (eds.), *For Crying Out Loud: Women's Poverty in the United States*. Pp. 121-139. Boston: South End Press.
- Celine, Ann. 1996. "At Home in America." *The American Enterprise* 7(1):65-66.
- Cherlin, Andrew. 1992. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Chodorow, Nancy J. 1993. "Perspectives on the Use of Case Studies: All it Takes is One." In Philip A. Cowan, Dorothy Field, Donald A. Hansen, Arlene Skolnick, and Guy E. Swanson, (eds.), *Family, Self, and Society: Toward a New Agenda for Family Research*. Pp. 453-462. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Clay, Daniel C., and Harry K. Schwarzweller. 1991. "Introduction: Researching Household Strategies." In Daniel C. Clay and Harry K. Schwarzweller (eds.), *Research in Rural Sociology and Development: Household Strategies*. Pp. 1-10. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Collins, Randall. 1988. "Women and Men in the Class Structure." *Journal of Family*

- Conger, Rand D., Glen H. Elder, Jr., Frederick O. Lorenz, Katherine J. Conger, Ronald L. Simons, Les B. Whitbeck, Shirley Huck, and Janet N. Melby. 1990. "Linking Economic Hardship to Marital Quality and Instability. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52:643-656.
- Conger, Rand D., and Glen H. Elder, Jr. 1994. *Families in Troubled Times: Adapting to Change in Rural America*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Cook, Judith A. and Mary Margaret Fonow. 1990. "Knowledge and Women's Interests: Issues of Methodology in Feminist Sociological Research." In Joyce McCarl Nielsen (ed.), *Feminist Research Methods: Exemplary Readings in the Social Sciences*. Pp. 69-93. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Coontz, Stephanie. 1992. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books.
- Coontz, Stephanie. 1997. *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families*. New York: Basic Books.
- Davidson, Andrew P. 1991. "Rethinking Household Livelihood Strategies." In Daniel C. Clay and Harry K. Schwarzweller (eds.), *Research in Rural Sociology and Development: Household Strategies*. Pp. 11-28. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Davidson, Osha Gray. 1990. *Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto*. New York: The Free Press.
- Deavers, Kenneth L. and Robert A. Hoppe. 1992. "Overview of the Rural Poor in the 1980s." In Cynthia M. Duncan (ed.), *Rural Poverty in America*. Pp. 3-20. New York: Auburn House.
- DeVault, Marjorie L. 1990. "Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis." *Social Problems* 37(1):96-116.
- Dill, Bonnie Thornton, and Bruce B. Williams. 1992. "Race, Gender, and Poverty in the Rural South: African American Single Mothers." In Cynthia M. Duncan (ed.), *Rural Poverty in America*. Pp. 97-109. New York: Auburn House.
- Dill, Bonnie Thornton. 1994. "Fictive Kin, Paper Sons, and Compadrazgo: Women of Color and the Struggle for Family Survival." In Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (eds.), *Women of Color in U.S. Society*. Pp. 149-169. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- Dill, Bonnie Thornton, Maxine Baca Zinn, and Sandra Patton. 1998. "Valuing Families Differently: Race, Poverty and Welfare Reform." *Sage Race Relations Abstracts* 23(3):4-30.
- Doherty, William J., Pauline G. Boss, Ralph LaRossa, Walter R. Schumm, and Suzanne K. Steinmetz. 1993. "Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach." In Boss, Pauline G., et al. (eds.), *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach*. Pp. 3-30. New York: Plenum Press.
- Duncan, Cynthia M. (ed.). 1992. *Rural Poverty in America*. New York: Auburn House.
- Duncan, Cynthia M. 1996. "Understanding Persistent Poverty: Social Class Context in Rural Communities." *Rural Sociology* 61(1):103-124.
- Duncan, Cynthia M. and Ann R. Tickamyer. 1988. "Poverty Research and Policy for Rural America." *American Sociological Review* 19(3):243-259.
- Edin, Kathryn, and Laura Lein. 1996. "Work, Welfare, and Single Mothers' Economic Survival Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 61:253-266.
- Edin, Kathryn, and Laura Lein. 1997. *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low Wage Work*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Eitzen, D. Stanley, and Maxine Baca Zinn. 1998. *In Conflict and Order: Understanding Society* 8th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Elder, Glen H. Jr., and Avshalom Caspi. 1988. "Economic Stress in Lives: Developmental Perspectives." *Journal of Social Issues* 44(4):25-45.
- Engels, Friedrich. 1972. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. New York: International Publishers.
- Fernandez Kelly, M. Patricia. 1990. "Delicate Transactions: Gender, Home, and Employment among Hispanic Women." In Faye Ginsberg and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (eds.), *Uncertain Terms*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Fitchen, Janet M. 1981. *Poverty in Rural America: A Case Study*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Fitchen, Janet M. 1991. *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places: Change, Identity and Survival in Rural America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- Fitchen, Janet M. 1992. "Rural Poverty in the Northeast: The Case of Upstate New York." In Cynthia M. Duncan (ed.), *Rural Poverty in America*. Pp. 177-200. New York: Auburn House.
- Fitchen, Janet M. 1995. "Spatial Redistribution of Poverty through Migration of Poor People to Depressed Rural Communities." *Rural Sociology* 60(2):181-201.
- Flora, Cornelia Butler. 1988. "Public Policy and Women in Agricultural Production: A Comparative and Historical Analysis." In Haney, Wava G., and Jane B. Knowles (eds.), *Women and Farming: Changing Roles, Changing Structures*. Pp. 265-280. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Flora, Cornelia Butler. 1992. "The New Poor in Midwestern Farming Communities." In Cynthia M. Duncan (ed.), *Rural Poverty in America*. Pp. 201-211. New York: Auburn House.
- Fuguitt, Glenn V. Calvin L. Beale, and Michael Reibel. 1991. "Recent Trends in Metropolitan-Nonmetropolitan Fertility." *Rural Sociology* 56(3): 475-486.
- Garrett, Patricia. and Naurine Lennox. 1993. "Rural Families and Children in Poverty." In Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, *Persistent Poverty in Rural America*. Pp. 230-258. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 1992. "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor." *Signs* 18(1):1-43.
- Goode, William J. 1971. "World Revolution and Family Patterns." In Skolnick, Arlene S., and Jerome H. Skolnick (eds.), *Family in Transition: Rethinking Marriage, Sexuality, Child Rearing and Family Organization*. Pp. 112-122. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Gorelick, Sherry. 1991. "Contradictions of Feminist Methodology." *Gender and Society* 5(4):459-477.
- Gorham, Lucy, and Bennett Harrison. 1990. *Working below the Poverty Line: The Growing Problem of Low Earnings across the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute.
- Gorham, Lucy. 1992. "The Growing Problem of Low Earnings in Rural Areas." in Cynthia M. Duncan (ed.), *Rural Poverty in America*. Pp. 21-39. New York: Auburn House.

- Gottschalk, Peter, Sara McLanahan, and Gary D. Sandefur. 1994. "The Dynamics and Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty and Welfare Participation." In Sheldon H. Danziger, Gary D. Sandefur, and Daniel H. Weinberg (eds.), *Confronting Poverty: Prescriptions for Change*. Pp. 85-108. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Granovetter, Mark S. 1985. "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91:481-510.
- Gringeri, Christina E. 1994. *Getting By: Women Homeworkers & Rural Economic Development*. Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas.
- Hansen, Gary L. 1987. "The Effect of Community Size on Exchange Orientations in Marriage." *Rural Sociology* 52(4):501-509.
- Harding, Sandra. 1991. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Hareven, Tamara K. 1987. "Historical Analysis of the Family." In Marvin B. Sussman and Suzanne K. Steinmetz (eds.), *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Harris, Rosalind P., Jeffrey C. Bridger, Carolyn E. Sachs, and Suzanne E. Tallichet. 1995. "Empowering Rural Sociology: Exploring and Linking Alternative Paradigms in Theory and Methodology." *Rural Sociology* 60(4):585-606.
- Hartmann, Heidi I. 1987. "Changes in Women's Economic and Family Roles in Post-World War II United States. In Lourdes Beneria and Catharine R. Stimpson (eds.), *Women, Households, and the Economy*. Pp. 33-64. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Heaton, Tim B., Daniel T. Lichter, and Acheampong Amonteng. 1989. "The Timing of Family Formation: Rural-Urban Differentials in First Intercourse, Childbirth, and Marriage." *Rural Sociology* 54(1):1-16.
- Higginbotham, Elizabeth, and Lynn Weber. 1992. "Moving Up with Kin and Community: Upward Social Mobility for Black and White Women." *Gender and Society* 6(3):416-440.
- Hochschild, Arlie, with Anne Machung. 1989. *The Second Shift*. New York: Viking Penguin.
- Holstein, James A., and Jaber F. Gubrium. 1995. "Deprivatization and the Construction of Domestic Life." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*

57:894-908.

- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. 1994. *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hoppe, Robert. 1993. "Poverty in Rural America: Trends and Demographic Characteristics. In Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Poverty, *Persistent Poverty in Rural America*. Pp. 20-38. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Jarrett, Robin L. 1992. "A Family Case Study: An Examination of the Underclass Debate." In Jane F. Gilgun, Kerry Daly, and Gerald Handel (eds.), *Qualitative Methods in Family Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Jarrett, Robin L. 1994. "Living Poor: Family Life Among Single Parent, African-American Women." *Social Problems* 41(1):30-49.
- Jencks, Christopher. 1997. Foreword in Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low Wage Work*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Jensen, Joan M. 1991. *Promise to the Land: Essays on Rural Women*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.
- Jensen, Leif, and David J. Eggebeen. 1994. "Nonmetropolitan Poor Children and Reliance on Public Assistance." *Rural Sociology* 59(1):45-65.
- Jensen, Leif, and Marta Tienda. 1989. "Nonmetropolitan Minority Families in the United States: Trends in Racial and Ethnic Economic Stratification, 1959-1986." *Rural Sociology* 54(4):509-532.
- Johnson, David R. and Alan Booth. 1990. "Rural Economic Decline and Marital Quality: A Panel Study of Farm Marriages." *Family Relations* 39:159-165.
- Johnson, Kenneth M. 1993. "Demographic Change in Nonmetropolitan America, 1980 to 1990." *Rural Sociology* 58(3):347-365.
- Kingsbury, Nancy, and John Scanzoni. 1993. "Structural-Functionalism." In Pauline G. Boss et al. (eds.), *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach*. Pp. 195-217. New York: Plenum Press.
- Lichter, Daniel T. 1989. "Race, Employment Hardship, and Inequality in the American Nonmetropolitan South." *American Sociological Review* 54(3):563-584.
- Lichter, Daniel T., Lionel J. Beaulieu, Jill L. Lindeis, and Roy A. Teixeira. 1993.

- "Human Capital, Labor Supply, and Poverty in Rural America." In Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Poverty, *Persistent Poverty in Rural America*. Pp. 38-67. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lichter, Daniel T., and David J. Eggebeen. 1992. "Child Poverty and the Changing Rural Family." *Rural Sociology* 57(2):151-172.
- Lichter, Daniel T., and Diane K. McLaughlin. 1995. "Changing Economic Opportunities, Family Structure, and Poverty in Rural Areas." *Rural Sociology* 60(4):688-706.
- Liem, Ramsay, and Joan Huser Liem. 1988. "Psychological Effects of Unemployment on Workers and Their Families." *Journal of Social Issues* 44(4):87-105.
- Liker, Jeffrey K., and Glen H. Elder, Jr. 1983. "Economic Hardship and Marital Relations in the 1930s." *American Sociological Review* 48:343-359.
- Lobao, Linda. 1996. "A Sociology of the Periphery Versus a Peripheral Sociology: Rural Sociology and the Dimension of Space." *Rural Sociology* 61(1):77-102.
- Lobao, Linda M., and Michael D. Schulman. 1991. "Farming Patterns, Rural Restructuring, and Poverty: A Comparative Regional Analysis." *Rural Sociology* 56(4):565-602.
- Lucal, Betsy. 1994. "Class Stratification in Introductory Textbook: Relational or Distributional Models?" *Teaching Sociology* 22:139-150.
- Lyson, Thomas A., William W. Falk, Mark Henry, Jo Ann Hickey, and Mildred Warner. 1993. "Spatial Location of Economic Activities, Uneven Development, and Rural Poverty." In Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Poverty, *Persistent Poverty in Rural America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- McLaughlin, Diane K., and Carolyn Sachs. 1988. "Poverty in Female-Headed Households: Residential Differences." *Rural Sociology* 53(3):287-306.
- McLaughlin, Diane K., and Lauri Perman. 1991. "Returns vs. Endowments in the Earnings Attainment Process for Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Men and Women." *Rural Sociology* 56(3):339-365.
- McLaughlin, Diane K., Daniel T. Lichter, and Gail M. Johnston. 1993. "Some Women Marry Young: Transitions to First Marriage in Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Areas." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55:827-838.
- McPherson, Mary Lou. 1997. *Michigan: A Rural/Metro Comparison*. *Rural Data Book*

1997. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Extension and the Rural Development Council of Michigan.
- Michigan State University Extension. n.d. *A Profile of [Name] County*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Extension.
- Mills, C. Wright. 1940. "Methodological Consequences of the Sociology of Knowledge." *American Journal of Sociology* 46:316-330.
- Moen, Phyllis, Edward L. Kain, and Glen H. Elder, Jr. 1983. "Economic Conditions and Family Life: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives." In Richard R. Nelson and Felicity Skidmore (eds.) *American Families and the Economy: The High Costs of Living*. Pp. 213-259. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Moen, Phyllis, and Elaine Wethington. 1992. "The Concept of Family Adaptive Strategies." *Annual Review of Sociology* 18:233-51.
- Mooney, Patrick H. 1983. "Toward a Class Analysis of Midwestern Agriculture." *Rural Sociology* 48(4):563-584.
- Moore, Joan W. 1988. "Is There a Hispanic Underclass?" *Social Science Quarterly* 70:266-284.
- Moynihan, Daniel P. 1967. "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." In Rainwater, Lee, and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*. Pp. 39-125. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Naples, Nancy A. 1994. "Contradictions in Agrarian Ideology: Restructuring Gender, Race-Ethnicity, and Class." *Rural Sociology* 59(1):110:135.
- Newman, Katherine S. 1988. *Falling From Grace*. New York: The Free Press.
- Newman, Katherine S. 1993. *Declining Fortunes: The Withering of the American Dream*. New York: BasicBooks.
- O'Hare, William P. 1994. "People with Multiple Disadvantages Live in Rural Areas, Too." *Rural Development Perspectives* 9(2):2-6.
- O'Hare, William P. 1996. "A New Look at Poverty in America." *Population Bulletin* 51(2). Washington, D.C.: Population Reference Bureau, Inc.
- O'Hare, William P. and Brenda Curry-White. 1992. *The Rural Underclass: Examination of Multiple-Problem Populations in Urban and Rural Setting* (Working Paper). Washington, D.C.: Population Reference Bureau.

- Ortiz, Vilma. 1996. "The Mexican-Origin Population: Permanent Working Class or Emerging Middle Class?" In Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr (eds.), *Ethnic Los Angeles*. Pp. 247-277. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Pederson, Jane Marie. 1992. *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1970-1970*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Perrucci, Carolyn C., and Dena B. Targ. 1988. "Effects of a Plant Closing on Marriage and Family Life." In Patricia Voydanoff and Linda C. Majka (eds.), *Families and Economic Distress: Coping Strategies and Social Policy*. Pp. 55-71. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ragin, Charles C. 1992. Introduction: Cases of "What is a case?" In Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker. 1992. *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ragin, Charles C., and Howard S. Becker. 1992. *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rank, Mark R., and Thomas A. Hirschl. 1988. "A Rural-Urban Comparison of Welfare Exits: The Importance of Population Density." *Rural Sociology* 53(2):190-206.
- Rank, Mark R., and Thomas A. Hirschl. 1993. "The Link between Population Density and Welfare Participation." *Demography* 30(4):607-622.
- Rapp, Rayna. [1992(1978)]. "Family and Class in Contemporary America: Notes toward an Understanding of Ideology." In Thorne, Barrie, with Marilyn Yalom (eds.), *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Redclift, Nanneke, and Sarah Whatmore. 1990. "Household, Consumption and Livelihood: Ideologies and Issues in Rural Research." In Marsden, Terry, Philip Lowe, and Sarah Whatmore (eds.), *Rural Restructuring: Global Processes and Their Responses*. Pp. 182-197. London: David Fulton.
- Reinharz, Shulamit. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rosenblatt, Paul C. 1990. *Farming is in Our Blood: Farm Families in Economic Crisis*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.
- Ross, Catherine E., and Huber, Joan. 1985. "Hardship and Depression." *Journal of*

Health and Social Behavior 26:312-327.

- Rubin, Lillian B. 1994. *Families on the Fault Line*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Rubin, Lillian B. 1976. *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Poverty. 1993. *Persistent Poverty in Rural America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Sachs, Carolyn. 1996. *Gendered Fields: Rural Women, Agriculture, and Environment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Saraceno, Chiara. 1989. "The Concept of Family Strategy and Its Application to the Family-Work Complex: Some Theoretical and Methodological Problems." *Marriage and Family Review* 14:1-18.
- Schein, Virginia E. 1995. *Working from the Margins: Voices of Mothers in Poverty*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Seebach, Michelle. 1992. "Small Towns have a Rosy Image." *American Demographics* 14(10):19.
- Sennett, Richard, and Jonathan Cobb. 1972. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. New York: Vintage.
- Singleton, Royce A., Bruce C. Straits, and Margaret Miller Straits. 1993. *Approaches to Social Research* 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Skolnick, Arlene. 1993. "Changes of Heart: Family Dynamics in Historical Perspective." In Philip A. Cowan, Dorothy Field, Donald A. Hansen, Arlene Skolnick, and Guy E. Swanson, (eds.), *Family, Self, and Society: Toward a New Agenda for Family Research*. Pp. 43-68. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Smith, Dorothy E. 1987. "Women's Inequality and the Family." In Gerstel, Naomi and Harriet Engel Gross (eds.), *Families and Work*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp. 23-54.
- Smith, Dorothy E. 1993. "The Standard North American Family: SNAF as an Ideological Code." *Journal of Family Issues* 14(1):50-65.
- Snipp, C. Matthew, Hayward Derrick Norton, Leif Jensen, Joane Nagel and Refugio I. Rochin. 1993. "Persistent Rural Poverty and Racial and Ethnic Minorities." In

- Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, *Persistent Poverty in Rural America*. Pp. 173-199. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- State of Michigan. 1989-1990 *School District Data Book*. [Online] Available <http://www.state.mi.us/dmb/mic/data/edu/sddb/data> (18 June 1998).
- Strategic Planners Alliance. 1997. *Annual Report Card: State of Michigan and 83 Counties*. Columbus, OH: Strategic Planners Alliance.
- Stacey, Judith. 1991. *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Stack, Carol B. 1974. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Thorne, Barrie. 1992. "Feminism and the Family: Two Decades of Thought." In Thorne, Barrie, with Marilyn Yalom (eds.), *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Thurow, Lester D. 1997. "Changes in Capitalism Render One-Earner Families Extinct." *USA Today*. 27 January, sec. A, p. 17.
- Tickamyer, Ann R. 1996a. "Sex, Lies, and Statistics: Can Rural Sociology Survive Restructuring? (or) What is Right with Rural Sociology and How Can We Fix It." *Rural Sociology* 61(1):5-24.
- Tickamyer, Ann R. 1996b. "Rural Myth, Rural Reality: Diversity and Change in Rural American for the 21st Century." Paper from NEC*TAS Rural Conference, Santa Fe, NM, July 15, 1996.
- Tickamyer, Ann, Janet Bokemeier, Shelly Feldman, Rosalind Harris, John Paul Jones, and DeeAnn Wenk. 1993. "Women and Persistent Rural Poverty." In Rural Sociological Society Task Force on Persistent Rural Poverty, *Persistent Poverty in Rural America*. Pp. 200-229. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Tickamyer, Ann R. and Cynthia M. Duncan. 1990. "Poverty and Opportunity Structure in Rural America." *Annual Review of Sociology* 16:67-86.
- Tilly, Louise A. 1978. *Women and Family Strategies in French Proletarian Families*. Ann Arbor, MI: Women's Studies Program, University of Michigan.
- Tilly, Louise A. 1979. "Individual Lives and Family Strategies in the French Proletariat." *Journal of Family History* 4(2):137-152.

- Tilly, Louise A., and Joan W. Scott. 1978. *Women, Work, and Family*. New York: Methuen.
- Torres, Andres, and Frank Bonilla. 1993. "Decline Within Decline: The New York Perspective." In Rebecca Morales and Frank Bonilla (eds.), *Latinos in a Changing U.S. Economy: Comparative Perspectives on Growing Inequality*. Pp. 85-108. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1972. *County and City Data Book: 1972*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table 2.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1983a. *County and City Data Book: 1983*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table B.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1983b. *1980 Census of Population: General Social and Economic Characteristics. United States Summary*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table 114.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1983c. *1980 Census of Population: General Population Characteristics. United States Summary*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table 46.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1992. *1990 Census of Population: General Population Characteristics. United States Summary*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table 2.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1993. *1990 Census of Population: General Social and Economic Characteristics. United States Summary*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table 33.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1994. *County and City Data Book: 1994*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table B.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1996a. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996* 116th ed. Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1996b. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996* 116th ed. Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table 642.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1996c. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996* 116th ed. Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table 617.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1997. "Poverty in the United States: 1996." *Current Population Reports P60-198*. Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing

Office. Table A.

U.S. Census Bureau. 1994 *County Business Patterns*. [Online] Available
<http://www.census.gov/epcd/cbp/map/94data> (2 Aug. 1997).

Vanneman, Reeve, and Lynn Weber Cannon. 1987. *The American Perception of Class*.
Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Vaughan, Diane. 1992. "Theory elaboration: the heuristics of case analysis." In Charles
C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker (eds.), *What is a Case?: Exploring the
Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Pp. 173-202. New York: Cambridge University
Press.

Voydanoff, Patricia. 1990. "Economic Distress and Family Relations: A Review of the
Eighties." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52:1099-1115.

Voydanoff, Patricia, and Brenda W. Donnelly. 1988. "Economic Distress, Family
Coping, and Quality of Life." In Patricia Voydanoff and Linda C. Majka (eds.),
Families and Economic Distress: Coping Strategies and Social Policy. Pp.
97-116. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Walton, John. 1992. "Making the theoretical case." In Charles C. Ragin and Howard S.
Becker (eds.), *What is a Case?: Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*.
Pp. 121-137. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Willits, Fern K. and A. E. Luloff. 1995. "Urban Residents' Views of Rurality and
Contacts with Rural Places." *Rural Sociology* 60(3):454-466.

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Chicago, IL: University of
Chicago Press.

Wilson, William Julius and Kathryn Neckerman. 1987. "Poverty and Family Structure:
The Widening Gap Between Evidence and Public Policy Issues." In William
Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Pp. 63-92. Chicago, IL: University of
Chicago Press.

Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban
Poor*. New York: Knopf.

Wolf, Diane L. 1990. "Daughters, Decisions and Domination: An Empirical and
Conceptual Critique of Household Strategies." *Development and Change* 21:43-
74.

Wolf, Diane L. 1991. "Does Father Know Best? A Feminist Critique of Household

Strategy Research." In Daniel C. Clay and Harry K. Schwarzweller (eds.), *Research in Rural Sociology and Development: Household Strategies*. Pp. 29-43. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Wolf, Diane L. 1992. *Factory Daughters: Gender, Household Dynamics, and Rural Industrialization in Java*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Wright, Erik Olin, David Hachen, Cynthia Costello, and Joey Sprague. 1982. "The American Class System." *American Sociological Review* 47:709-726.

Zaretsky, Eli. 1976. *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*. New York: Harper & Row.