EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MOTHERS AND CHILDREN LIVING IN URBAN, SUBURBAN, AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
BY
MEGAN NOEL

DISSERTATION ADVISOR: DR. PATRICIA CLARK

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
MAY 2011
Abstract

Poverty, specifically child poverty, has been an area of great concern impacting the United States for decades (Chen & Corak, 2008; Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008; Fajth & Holland, 2007; Germany, 2007; Raphael, 2005; Wight, Chau & Aratani, 2010; Wilson, 2010). This paper explores the differing views, experiences and perceptions of poverty through interviews with three impoverished families: one child and mother each located in an (1) urban (2) suburban and (3) rural community. By looking at children and parents living in impoverished homes in diverse neighborhoods I sought to investigate the societal, social, and emotional perceptions and experiences of children and parents living in urban, suburban, and rural poverty. Children between the ages of 6 and 7 years old were interviewed, as were their mothers, utilizing a qualitative, case study methodology. Research found parental themes of overall concern regarding child well-being due to past personal and peer experiences, a fear of the future, and the differences in variations of family, community, and financial support. Child themes included an awareness of the financial burdens of their families, knowledge of crime and violence and perceptions of wealth and home.
# Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction

A General Description of the Area of Concern .................................................. 10

Problem Studied ............................................................................................... 13

Major Research Question/Hypothesis ............................................................... 14

Why Poverty: How I Came to this Study .......................................................... 15

Definitions of Important Terms ....................................................................... 18

Significance of the Problem ............................................................................ 22

Basic Assumptions ........................................................................................... 22

Basic Limitations .............................................................................................. 23

Chapter II: Literature Review

Historical Background ...................................................................................... 25

The “War on Poverty” ....................................................................................... 20

Current state of U.S. poverty ................................................................. 28

Theory or Discipline Relevant to Research Question and Hypothesis ........ 30

Current Literature Relevant to Research Question and Hypothesis .......... 31

Implications of poverty ................................................................................. 31

Perceptions of poverty ................................................................................... 33

Societal perceptions ......................................................................................... 33

Perceptions of parents .................................................................................... 35

Gaining a child’s view of poverty .............................................................. 36
EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY

Geographic poverty ................................................................. 39

Urban poverty ........................................................................ 39

Rural poverty ........................................................................ 40

Suburban poverty ................................................................. 41

Summary of Literature Review .................................................. 42

Chapter III: Methodology

Restatement of Purpose .......................................................... 43

Research Design .................................................................... 43

Description of Participants ....................................................... 47

Participant selection ............................................................... 47

Participant recruitment ........................................................... 49

Data Collection ....................................................................... 50

Interview Procedures ............................................................. 50

Frequency and length ............................................................. 50

Mother interview procedures ................................................ 52

Child interview procedures ..................................................... 52

Overview of the interviews with the mothers ......................... 54

Interview topics ..................................................................... 56

Overview of the interviews with the children ......................... 56

Interview topics ..................................................................... 59

Data analysis .......................................................................... 59
Analysis of parent interviews………………………………………………59

Analysis of child interviews………………………………………………61

Protection of subjects…………………………………………………………61

Subject Stipend………………………………………………………………62

Summary………………………………………………………………………62

Chapter IV: The Families

Restatement of Purpose……………………………………………………63

The Kirkwood Family (Renee and Amya): Urban…………………………64

Renee’s responses……………………………………………………………67

   Neighborhood opinion……………………………………………………67

   Description of her children………………………………………………68

   Home life and family dynamic…………………………………………68

   Education: Personal and children………………………………………68

   Daily struggles and sources of relief……………………………………69

   Government assistance…………………………………………………69

Amya’s responses……………………………………………………………70

   Neighborhood……………………………………………………………70

   School: Strengths, weaknesses, and friends…………………………70

   Home……………………………………………………………………70

Family themes………………………………………………………………71
The Tillman Family (Grace and Kayleigh): Rural

Grace’s responses

Neighborhood opinion

Description of her children

Home life and family dynamic

Education: Personal and children

Daily struggles and sources of relief

Government assistance

Kayleigh’s responses

Neighborhood

School: Strengths, weaknesses, and friends

Home

Family themes

The Moss Family (Jeanette and Anthony): Suburban

Jeanette’s responses

Neighborhood opinion

Description of her children

Home life and family dynamic

Education: Personal and children

Daily struggles and sources of relief

Government assistance
Amya’s responses ........................................................................................................... 82
Neighborhood .................................................................................................................. 82
School: Strengths, weaknesses, and friends ................................................................. 83
Home ................................................................................................................................. 83
Family themes ................................................................................................................... 84
Summary ............................................................................................................................ 84

Chapter V: Analysis and Results

Examination of Parental Interviews and Identification of Themes ...................... 86

Care for the well-being of their children ..................................................................... 86
Past experiences ............................................................................................................ 87
Life events of peers ....................................................................................................... 89
Fear of the future ........................................................................................................... 91
Level of support ............................................................................................................ 93
Neighbors ......................................................................................................................... 93
Family ............................................................................................................................... 94
School .............................................................................................................................. 95
Government assistance ................................................................................................. 95

Similarities and Differences of the Mothers .............................................................. 97

Examination of Child Interviews and Identification of Themes ........................... 98

Burden of finances ......................................................................................................... 99
Bills ................................................................................................................................. 99
EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY

Assistance from others.................................................103

Knowledge of crime and violence...........................................107

Perceptions of family life......................................................110

Perceptions of wealth........................................................110

Perceptions of home........................................................114

Similarities and Differences of Children..................................119

Summary.............................................................................120

Chapter VI: Discussion

Themes of the Mothers.........................................................122

Care for the well-being of their children..................................122

Past experiences, peer experiences, and fear of the future........122

Support..............................................................................125

Outcomes based on societal perceptions.................................126

Themes of the Children.........................................................127

Burden of finances.............................................................128

Knowledge of crime and violence..........................................130

Effects of income on children.................................................131

Neighborhood Differences..................................................131

Urban..............................................................................131

Rural..............................................................................133

Suburban..........................................................................134
Chapter I: Introduction

A General Description of the Area of Concern

Poverty, specifically child poverty, has been an area of great concern impacting the United States for decades (Chen & Corak, 2008; Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008; Fajth & Holland, 2007; Germany, 2007; Raphael, 2005; Wight, Chau & Aratani, 2010; Wilson, 2010), yet we have given little voice to the children living in impoverished homes (Attree, 2003; Clark, 2005; Percy, 2003). The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) defines poverty through a set of thresholds; if a family’s income is lower than the official poverty thresholds then the family is considered impoverished. The 2009 Census reported 15.5 million children, or 35.5% of the poor population, were living in poverty in the United States (U.S Census Bureau, 2010). Children living in poverty are more at risk for social, emotional and behavioral problems, as well as a higher likelihood that they will be exposed to and participate in gang activity, violence and drugs (Anthony, 2008; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Costello, Keeler, Angold, 2001; Galster & Santiago, 2006). There have been a number of public policy initiatives including Head Start, Project Enable, and Upward Bound, which focused on utilizing parental roles and the education system to bring children out of poverty, yet none have been deemed successful (Germany, 2007; Olsen 1999).

Society has historically viewed poverty as an individual problem (Russell, Harris & Gockel 2008; Halpern, 1990), and false perceptions regarding a culture of poverty have been formed (Gorski, 2008). Research shows that upper- and middle-class individuals often feel that those living in poverty are unmotivated, lack work ethic, and are uninvolved parents (Reutter, Stewart, Veenstra, Love, Raphael, and Makwarimba,
EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY

2009; Russell, Harris & Gockel 2008; Goodwin, 1972; Gorski, 2008). These false perceptions lead to fewer social and employment opportunities for low-income families (Mickelson & Williams, 2008).

Children and parents living in poverty view the world differently than more affluent families (Crowley & Vulliamy, n.d.). Parents of children living in poverty experience stress during day-to-day tasks due to lack of financial means and lack of support (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Russell, Harris and Gockel, 2008). Parents feel that society views them as neglectful and lazy, therefore parents often experience depression due to self-blame (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Russell, Harris and Gockel, 2008). Galster and Santiago (2006) state that parental perceptions are very powerful and can alter a child’s experiences. For example, if parents believe their neighborhood is unsafe then they may choose to keep their child from going outside. Parents have also expressed concern that there is a lack of support from their local community and school (Heymann, 2000).

Child perceptions are just as important, if not more so, as there are limited studies utilizing child perceptions (Attree, 2003; Clark, 2005; Percy, 2003; Weinger, 1998). Studies interviewing children living in poverty have found that children are aware of their financial situation and place in society, and therefore believe they have limited social and educational opportunities based on their situation (Attree, 2003; Crowley & Vulliamy, n.d.; Kopezyska-Sikorska & Szyszko, 2001; Percy, 2003; Weinger, 1998). Moreover, child concerns, fears and insecurities regarding the acquisition of new clothes or objects, peer perceptions and life expectations have also been identified (Attree, 2003; Crowley & Vulliamy, n.d.; Kopezyska-Sikorska & Szyszko, 2001; Percy, 2003; Weinger, 1998).
While poverty may be more concentrated in specific areas of the country there is no doubt that poverty is widespread throughout most urban, suburban, and rural areas (Cushing & Zheng, 2000). Of all children living in poverty, 75% of them live in urban neighborhoods (Kiser, 2007). Children living in urban settings have a higher likelihood of attending failing schools and living in violent neighborhoods, as compared to their peers (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Kiser, 2007; Pandey & Zhan, 2000). In neighborhoods with high concentrations of urban poverty, children and families have experienced increased fear and social isolation, leading to emotional issues later in life (Galster & Santiago, 2006; Jackson, Langille, Lyons, Hughes, Martin, & Winstanley, 2009; Newman & Massengill, 2006; Wilson, 2010).

Suburban communities have historically been seen as exempt from poverty, yet research shows a changing face of American suburbs (Holliday & Dwyer, 2009; Murphy, 2007). With 29% of residents in suburban neighborhoods living in poverty, the suburbs are beginning to resemble many urban populations (Holliday & Dwyer, 2009; Murphy, 2007). Poverty in rural communities looks very different than poverty in urban and suburban communities, with a higher overall population of rural residents living in poverty than urban residents. Of rural dwellers, 13.4% live in poverty (Dayton, 2003). Due to societal stigmas and shame individuals living in rural poverty are less likely to take advantage of federal aid such as welfare and instead work hard to obtain a high moral standing in their communities (Sherman, 2006). Furthermore, studies have shown rural children living in poverty to be more socially adjusted and have more self-worth than children living in urban poverty (Mangus, 1948).
Bronfenbrenner (1986) theorized that influence in a child’s life comes most directly from those in his or her family and immediate community, including a child’s school and neighborhood (Brendtro, 2006). In this study I examined the perceptions of poverty from children and parents living in urban, suburban and rural communities to determine how perceptions and implications of poverty differ in varied geographical locations. There are great differences between the neighborhood structure and culture of urban, suburban, and rural communities (Holliday & Dwyer, 2009; Kiser, 2007; Murphy, 2007; Sherman, 2006), and by interviewing parents and children I sought to better understand how neighborhood location impacts daily life. General studies looking at child poverty tend to focus on the urban, inner-city child (Sherman, 2006). These studies, while valuable, cannot be generalizable to children and families living in different types of communities.

Problem Studied

In this study I investigated the perceptions of poverty in three families: one child and mother each located in an (1) urban (2) suburban and (3) rural community in order to explore how poverty affects each family differently. By looking at children and parents living in impoverished homes in diverse neighborhoods I examined the similar and differing opinions and experiences of families living in poverty. Additionally, by analyzing this issue through the lens of child perception, I sought to give this under researched population (Attree, 2003; Clark, 2005; Percy, 2003) a voice in research.

While there has been research in the areas of urban, rural, and suburban poverty conducted separately, there is little to no research that analyzes the differences and implications of poverty in the three different geographical areas. Thus, the motivation of
this paper was to further explore under investigated areas of poverty, with a focus on the differences and similarities in urban, rural, and suburban poverty. By providing a more thorough glimpse at the perceptions of children and parents living in poverty we can more accurately design community initiatives and school-based programs designed to alleviate the implications of poverty.

**Major Research Questions/Hypothesis**

While there is research surrounding the implications of poverty and geographical differences, there is very little research analyzing urban, suburban and rural communities in a single study, particularly employing child and parent interviews. Therefore, I sought to investigate the following question:

**What are the societal, social, and emotional perceptions and experiences of children and parents living in urban, suburban, and rural poverty?**

In an attempt to answer this question, I interviewed children and their mothers regarding their personal lived experiences as individuals living in poverty. I entered into the research process striving to examine the areas of deficits and strengths in community and school environments in order to better plan interventions and programs to address these issues. Additionally I hoped to learn more about the values, available opportunities, and life experiences of mothers and children living in poverty.

Discussion topics with each mother in this study varied, yet several major topics were addressed in each of the interviews with the mothers: (1) neighborhood opinion, (2) description of their children, (3) home life and family dynamic, (4) education, personal and their children’s (5) daily struggles and sources of relief and (6) government
assistance and community support. Due to the nature of the interviews with the children much more time was spent on fewer discussion topics. The children in this study tended to need more time to “talk out” their answers therefore fewer topics were covered in the duration of the interview than with the mothers. The topics addressed in each child interview were: (1) neighborhood, (2) school (strengths, weaknesses and friends) and (3) home. All other topics derived naturally from the stories and photographs utilized throughout the interviews. Photographs were utilized as support for discussions and topics initiated by the children, and to support themes in the stories.

Why Poverty?: How I Came to this Study

When I first began thinking about a topic for this study young children and poverty were aspects that I knew I must incorporate. While interested in poverty, I have never been personally poor. I grew up in an inner-city neighborhood and attended public schools. My neighborhood was very diverse with a number of different races and social classes intermixed, thus I was friends with children from many different backgrounds. As a white, middle-class child, I thought little about the finances of my family or the finances of other’s families until I began visiting the homes of my friends in later elementary school. I soon learned that everyone did not grow up the way I did, and money, or the lack thereof, was an important force in the lives of many of my peers.

When I went to college my awareness of the different experiences and perceptions of others was brought to my attention once again. I left my large, urban high school to attend a public, state university in a much smaller community. My peers came from all over the country and world, thus bringing together a mass of differing views and experiences. I quickly realized how unique the life experiences were of each individual.
Again, when considering this research project I knew that poverty and young children were aspects that I felt passionate about, and therefore had to include. When recalling my own experiences with differing opinions and perspectives I felt it would be valuable to conduct a study that examined the lived experiences of others, thus my justification for choosing case study methodology. I found the research focusing on child perceptions and experiences to be the most powerful and revealing, therefore I wanted to be sure I incorporated child interviews within my study. I found that these types of studies were able to present an angle of poverty that I felt were not common in societal presentations of the low-income individuals. Furthermore, when I took my position as a teacher at a school in an impoverished community I began to find even more value in the “voice” of young children in the research process, as I casually observed children sharing very different personal experiences and insights.

I initially began my research process with a mini-study examining middle-income children’s perceptions of poverty (Noel, 2010). While these children were not living in poverty I felt that they would be able to share their views on income and on individuals living in poverty. Following this study I realized that I would like to examine children and families living in low-income homes in order gain an even richer perspective on how children view income and poverty.

Prior to beginning this process I wanted to be sure that my own past experiences and beliefs about poverty were visible to myself and to the readers of this project. Therefore I attempted to make a list of the potential areas of bias I believed I possessed. Throughout the research and writing process of this study I often returned to this list to be
sure I was accurately separating my personal beliefs from the interpretation of each interview.

Personal beliefs identified were:

- Children and adults living in poverty are forced to think about their financial situation everyday due to their lack of financial means
- Individuals living in poverty experience a level of stress or “chaos” due to the struggle to obtain or maintain an adequate income
- Children and parents living in poverty often need more than what they have (this includes material things and emotionally)
- Obtaining money and financial assistance is in the forefront of the minds of individuals living in poverty
- Schools and communities don’t do enough for families living in poverty and they recognize that
- I often “feel bad” for low-income families

Furthermore, in order to combat these biases I kept notes following each interview in order to better identify when I was projecting my own thoughts onto the stories and experiences of the families I was interviewing. Throughout the interview process several additional personal beliefs were identified, including:

- Families would be uncomfortable talking about money due to the fact I was an “outsider”
- There would be differences between families living in urban, rural and suburban neighborhoods
By identifying my experiences with poverty, thus my own personal perceptions and biases, I hoped to be able to better analyze the perceptions of the mothers and children in this study. As a researcher I felt it was imperative to separate my own personal past experiences and beliefs from the experiences of the parents and children in this study. Bednall (2006) refers to conducting an audit on one’s feelings throughout the research process in order to successfully separate personal bias from research data. Just as Bednall (2006) suggests, I too kept notes reflecting on each interview. This was a way for me to attempt to identify any prior judgments, personal bias or otherwise on the process prior to data analysis. While challenging to accurately separate one’s experiences from the research process, I feel that this act of self-accountability aided in more accurately identifying themes from each interview.

Definitions of Important Terms

Children and families living in urban communities will, for the nature of this study, be living in a metropolitan area with a population of 778,749 and attend one of the city’s public schools. An urban area, as described by the U.S. Census Bureau, is an area that inhabits 50,000 or more people (U.S. Census, 2008).

The term suburban is defined in this study as living in a major outlying suburb of a large metropolitan area. In this study the child and mother reside in a suburban community of with 40,097 inhabitants and the child attends school within the same area. The U.S. Census Bureau calls these areas urban clusters, which designates a densely populated area that inhabits between 2,500 and 50,000 people.
Rural inhabitants, according to the U.S. Census Bureau are any area falling outside of an urban area or urban cluster. The family in this study resides in a community with 1,982 residents.

Terms such as absolute, relative, and subjective poverty are used when defining what it means to be poor. Absolute poverty is defined by persistent poverty and deprivation of basic needs, and is the most common form of poverty measurement in the US. Relative poverty is defined as the lack of financial means combined with other factors such as cost of and standard of living (Iceland, 2005; Kopezyska-Sikorska & Szysko 2001). One is living with subjective poverty when he or she perceives their income level as being insufficient (Kopezyska-Sikorska & Szyszko, 2001). In this study, the term poverty refers to absolute poverty.

A child living in poverty “lives in a household in which the householders (e.g. biological parent, foster parent, guardian) have less income, education, occupational status (e.g. manual laborer vs. manager of a large workforce), and so forth than in a case of a student whose SES (socioeconomic status) is ‘high’” (Harwell & LeBeau, 2010, p.120, ¶3). An individual defined in this study as living in poverty is one that is utilizing some kind of government assistance (i.e. free and reduced lunch, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children, etc.) and has a low paying job or is unemployed.

Poverty was officially defined in 1963, with Mollie Orshansky of the U.S. Social Security Administration establishing the initial national standards defining poverty (Iceland, 2005). Presently poverty in the United States is measured in two ways: by the national poverty thresholds and the national poverty guidelines (U.S. Census Bureau,
2010). The Census Bureau uses the national poverty thresholds to determine the number of individuals living in poverty across the United States. The federal poverty guidelines are updated each year and are the qualifying factor for federal assistance and aid such as Head Start, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Medicare (ASPE, 2010). The difference between these two tools is that the thresholds take other factors into consideration, such as age and number of children, and are mostly used for statistical reasons.

If a family lives within 100-200% of the federal poverty guidelines they are considered low-income, or living in poverty. The United States contains over 73 million children, of which 28.8 million are living in low-income families (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008). Of the 28.8 million, or 39% of all American children, living in a low-income home 15.5 million, live below the federal poverty line, meaning families of four people, making less than $22,050 a year qualify as impoverished, per federal guidelines (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to Wight, Chau, and Aratani (2010):

The official U.S. poverty rate is widely used as one of the nation’s primary indicators of economic well-being. The measure of poverty, which was developed in the 1960s, is determined by comparing a family’s or person’s resources to a set of thresholds that vary by family size and composition and are determined to represent the minimum amount of income it takes to support a family at a basic level. Families or people with resources that fall below the threshold are considered poor (p. 6, ¶2).
Each year these federal guidelines are adjusted in order to achieve more precise coverage for the poor, yet the accuracy of these guidelines are often contested, with an undue focus placed on income earnings (Cushing & Zheng, 2000; Iceland, 2005). In 2002, a family with two parents working full-time minimum wage jobs only earned $21,400, slightly above the federal poverty guidelines of $18,100 for a family of four (Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2002; Raphael, 2005). As noted above, of the 28.8 million American children living in poverty, approximately 60% of these children do not qualify as “poor” according to the federal guidelines. Instead these children live slightly above the federal guidelines, yet struggle financially, as research in the area of low-income families shows that a family of four needs to make $42,400 annually in order to financially “make ends meet” (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008; Raphael, 2005).

The United States has one of the highest child poverty rates among industrialized countries (Raphael, 2005) and the rate of improvement is practically non-existent, with a decrease of only 2.2% between 1997 and 2007 (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008). Of all children living in low-income and poor households, the largest population of children are between the ages of birth and four years of age, comprising approximately 9 million children or 43% of all U.S. children (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008). According to Wight, Chau, and Aratani (2010), the make-up of child poverty in the United States is as follows: 11% of white children, 15% of Asian children, 31% of American Indian children, 31% of Hispanic children, 35% of black children and 17% of children of other races. Additionally, 25% of children with immigrant parents are living in poverty.
**Significance of the Problem**

Poverty is an area of great concern in our nation today. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the perceptions of children and adults living in different impoverished communities in order to learn more about the areas of greatest success and concern in community and educational structures. Through this process a phenomenological approach was used to guide research by looking specifically at the perceptions of children and adults in order to better understand the world-view of this population. By interviewing children and adults living in urban, rural and suburban communities I sought to strengthen current poverty research by increasing the exposure to current strengths and weaknesses in community and school programs/assistance. Furthermore, I hoped that by examining the lived experiences of the families in this study I would be able to gain a rich insight into their personal successes and opinions.

Studies have shown that children bring a unique perspective to research (Attree, 2003; Clark, 2005; Crowley & Vulliamy, n.d.; Kopezyska-Sikorska & Szyszko, 2001; Percy, 2003; Weinger; 1998). By utilizing children in this study I hoped to potentially shed new light on the world of poverty. Moreover, due to a lack of research comparing and contrasting urban, rural and suburban neighborhood qualities, these topics were targeted for research in this study, as well.

**Basic Assumptions**

As a researcher, I understand that the issue of poverty may be a delicate topic for both children and adults; therefore I was as sensitive and tactful as possible when interacting with participants. I employed caution when proceeding with interviews, as I was aware that both children and adults might be guarded with their responses.
understand that all people have their own sense of reality, which changes with time depending on the current situation. I entered into this study with the understanding that one child or parent’s opinions are not the opinions of all individuals in similar financial situations.

**Basic Limitations**

Due to the nature of the small sample size (3 mothers and 3 children) and limited geographical location of the study (in only one urban, suburban and rural community), the results of this study are not statistically generalizable. However that was not the purpose of this study, as with qualitative research it is more important to examine a topic at great depth. The researcher in a qualitative study provides a thick description of the process utilized and data gathered, thus engaging the reader to determine applicability of the information gathered in specific studies. Furthermore, the qualitative data gathered in this study sought to add a description of the phenomena observed in three different community settings in order to shed light on previously unidentified issues, thus rendering follow-up research necessary, or, dissimilarly, by providing further support to previous poverty research.

Furthermore, due to the short duration of time spent with the participants of this study I was not able to fully immerse myself in the lives and communities of each mother and child. Because of this, some information and meaning surrounding the experiences of participants may have been left undiscovered. Due to the lack of true immersion intimate relationships may not have been formed with children and mothers, limiting how comfortable each felt disclosing personal information and experiences. In essence, I
could have potentially been viewed as an outsider or “stranger” thus limiting the comfort level of participants.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Historical Background

The “War on Poverty”.

The “War on Poverty” in the United States, began in 1964 (Raphael, 2005), to combat poverty and the growing divide between social classes, yet the rate of poverty remains virtually unchanged, with only a national decrease of 2.2% between 1997 and 2007 (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008). Children ages birth through age four are the largest population of US children living in poverty, with 9 million, or 43%, living below federal poverty standards (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2008). Child poverty rates in the United States are among the highest when compared to other industrialized nations. The United Kingdom (7.8%) and Canada (14%) both have significantly lower child poverty rates than the United States (Chen & Corak, 2008).

Education has been viewed as means of staying out of poverty, and through quality education systems and community opportunities children of any background should be able to rise out of poverty (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007). Yet the United States has not yet created a society where children from wealthy families and children from impoverished families have the same opportunities to succeed, and in fact, the inequalities of school quality between these groups adds to the growing divide in classes (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007). However, President Johnson’s instatement of Head Start was designed as an early intervention for children living in poverty that has proven to be successful (Campbell, Wasik, Pungello, Burchinal, Barbarin, Kainz, Sparling & Ramey, 2008; Duncan, 2007; Ou & Reynolds, 2006;
Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). Head Start’s purpose was to raise academic and social competence of students living below the poverty line. By raising academic competencies, the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income students would begin to dissipate (Lee, Brooks-Gunn, & Schnur, 1988). Studies have found that better on-time graduation and literacy rates, lower grade retention and drop out rate, as well as overall better school achievement were additional observed outcomes of early intervention (Campbell et al., 2008; Ou & Reynolds, 2006; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997).

The War on Poverty created other social programs such as the Jobs Corps, national food stamp program, and the Concentrated Employment program in order to better support impoverished adults. In addition, plans for urban revitalization of dilapidated neighborhoods in high poverty areas were developed (Germany, 2007). Improving poor neighborhoods may be the key to poverty alleviation, as research states that living in neighborhoods with a high concentration of poverty can cause both physical and emotional consequences (Galster & Santiago, 2006; Jackson, Langille, Lyons, Hughes, Martin, & Winstanley, 2009; Newman & Massengill, 2006; Wilson, 2010). Young children living in high poverty neighborhoods are particularly at-risk to the negative effects, as the development of certain social and emotional behaviors can be affected and early negative experiences can become entrenched in the formation of the brain (Duncan, 2007).

The War on Poverty developed a number of initiatives that “tried to reshape the market in the interest of poor people and their neighborhoods by repackaging the poor and their neighborhoods for the market” (Germany, 2007, p. 745, ¶2). Head Start began
as an attempt to better prepare young children for school, thus closing the achievement gap. Project Enable was designed to help the parents of young children raise more responsible and self-starting children. Additionally, a number of other programs such as Upward Bound (a program designed to link high school students with college opportunities), the Job Corps, the Concentrated Employment program (teaching adults workforce etiquette), the food stamp program, and urban renewal/Model Cities (programs designed to revitalize poor neighborhoods) were just a few of the programs enacted during the War on Poverty.

Despite the good intentions of many of the programs started during President Johnson’s time in office, shortly after it began, the War on Poverty was deemed a failure (Germany, 2007). U.S Department of Health and Human Services found no long-term benefits to those students who attended Head Start, the flagship program of the War on Poverty, thus considering it unsuccessful (Olsen, 1999). Initiatives combating poverty continued throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s yet after cutbacks in the 1980s (Wilson, 2010) poverty policies took a hit. During Reagan’s administration, he dramatically reduced the federal contribution to cities’ unrestricted funds, which were allocated for public transportation, local public works, job training and compensation, and a variety of grants that would contribute to community development and sustainment.

The programs specifically had an impact on families living with limited financial means. Prior to Reagan’s administration, the federal government was contributing 17.5 percent of a city’s budget; in 2000 the federal government was merely contributing 5.4 percent, which significantly impacted Midwest and Eastern cities (Wilson, 2010).
According to Germany (2007):

If history is any guide, until poverty and inequality threaten growth or become too much for the law enforcement—industrial complex to handle, the poor and marginalized will remain at the mercy of the market and the remnants of the welfare state. (p. 750, ¶3)

In 1970 President Nixon appointed Edward Zigler to the position of the first Director of the Office of Child Development (which is currently the Administration of Children, Youth and Families) and the Chief of the U.S. Children’s Bureau. These departments helped develop a number of initiatives beyond just Head Start, including the Child and Family Resource Program, Home Start, Education for Parenthood, and the Child Development Associate (“Edward Zigler,” 2010).

**Current state of U.S. poverty.**

Child poverty rates in the United States are historically among the highest of other industrialized nations, with rates escalating to 17% of the population in 2000. This is nearly 10 percentage points higher than the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Chen & Corak, 2008). With nearly 13 million children living below the national poverty level ($22,050 for a family of four in 2009) (Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2009), one can easily assume that poverty is the “greatest single threat to the well-being of children” (Rhodes, 2007, p. 1, ¶3).

In 1989 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was signed. This treaty outlined basic rights of children such as a right to life, family and culture. In 1993 President Clinton enacted the Family Medical Leave Act. The Family Medical
Leave Act (FMLA) protects one’s employment when they are away from work due to a serious illness or in order to care for the birth or adoption of a new child. Furthermore, in 1996 the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Recovery Act (PRWORA) went into effect, establishing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) fund. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) was developed to promote job acquisition and retention and assist the U.S. poverty population by providing aid for childcare, health services and transportation (Rodgers & Payne, 2007).

Several states have implemented rigorous measures for implementing PRWORA with the hopes of seeing a large decrease in families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). TANF assists families living in poverty with children under the age of 18 by providing additional funds in order to help sustain families when they are struggling to find employment. The PRWORA also established the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) in 1996, which is a block grant that helps pay for childcare for low-income children, as well (MaCurdy & Jones, 2008; Rodgers & Payne, 2007). Despite the meticulous implementation Rodgers and Payne (2007) found that these policies have no impact on child poverty.

Currently the Obama administration has proposed the Choice Neighborhood initiative. Although little data is available to measure its success, the Choice Neighborhood initiative proposes giving money, via competitive local grants, to communities and organizations for the purpose of revitalizing neighborhoods.
Revitalization includes the development of public transportation, increased job opportunities and early childhood education (Wilson, 2010).

**Theory or Discipline Relevant to Research Questions and Hypothesis**

This study investigated the implications of poverty from the perspective of young children and their parents, theorizing that the state of the community and the programs in place will impact perceptions differently. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model introduced the idea that learning and influence on a child extends beyond the home into schools, communities and even through the values and laws of our country. The systems of influence, according to Bronfenbrenner, are ever changing, and affect all people differently (Brendtro, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1986). A child’s family and school environment is the system of influence closest to the child (Gilstrap & Zierten, 2006). Interactions with people at this level carry the most weight, and can lead to the adjustment or maladjustment of a child (Tissington, 2008).

When there are deficits in certain levels of a child’s ecological systems, development suffers. For example, without a daily focus on parent-child interactions, a child may develop attachment issues leading to a number of behavior problems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). When there is a shortfall or deficit in development, the child looks for satisfaction elsewhere, and the costs are seen later in life through adolescence and adulthood (i.e. juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, etc.) (Addison, 1992). Children with disrupted ecologies experience a number of social and emotional problems and are subject to maladjustment, and possible loss of personal identity. Identity is defined as “the cumulative sense of one’s place relative to others” (Martin, 1984, p.90, ¶2). Martin (1984) states:
…the issues of identity and situated identity and the concomitant questions of "who am I" in terms of overall position and of others in specific teaching-learning situations are central to the processes of self and self-development as studied from the sociological orientation of symbolic interactionism. (p.90, ¶2)

In order to prevent these deficits from occurring, children need to be provided with a sense of belonging and be active participants in their communities (Brendtro, 2006). Additionally, poverty and financial distress sometimes causes parents to withdraw from parent-child interaction thus causing child maladjustment (Ceballo, Dahl, Aretakis, & Ramirez; Kiser, 2007).

**Current Literature Relevant to Research Questions and Hypothesis**

**Implications of poverty.**

Poverty is widespread throughout the United States, although two out of every three children living below the poverty line live in southern or western regions of the country. In the Northeast and Midwest families living in poverty are concentrated in urban areas, where in the South and West, families are concentrated in rural communities (Raphael, 2005).

Children living in poverty have many “daily obstacles” (Anthony, 2008, p. 6, ¶1) to contend with when living in high-poverty neighborhoods. These obstacles include poor schools and living conditions, lack of medical care and adequate nutrition, low birth weight, home environment, quality of parental interactions, condition of parents’ mental health, and neighborhood conditions, including school choice and crime/violence, and persistent exposure to drugs and violence. The effects of limited income on children can be widespread, causing prolonged poor health, developmental and cognitive delays,
lower school achievement and social, emotional and behavioral problems when compared to their peers, and social delinquency resulting in arrests or jail time, and failure in school (Anthony, 2008; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Galster & Santiago, 2006). Some have gone so far to suggest that living in poverty can lead to serious psychiatric symptoms including social and emotional maladjustment (Costello, Keeler & Angold, 2001).

Additionally, children from high-poverty neighborhoods have less success finding and maintaining a successful career and have a higher exposure to violence and gang activity (Galster & Santiago, 2006). Living in cities, and specifically neighborhoods, that have concentrated poverty can have serious physical and emotional effects (Galster & Santiago, 2006; Jackson et al., 2009; Newman & Massengill, 2006; Wilson, 2010). Social isolation due to joblessness, fear, and exposure to violence and drugs are just a few of the consequences of living in a neighborhood inundated with poverty.

There have been several initiatives to combat the effects of neighborhood poverty, one being the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program that attempted to break the cycle of poverty by moving low-income families from high poverty neighborhoods into neighborhoods with lower concentrations of poverty, yet were relatively unsuccessful (Jackson et al., 2009). With the hope of reducing the implications of poverty and halting poverty persisting through multiple generations, the Obama administration has proposed a second initiative, the Choice Neighborhood project, which instead hopes to use monies to revitalize neighborhoods in need (Wilson, 2010).
Perceptions of poverty.

Societal perceptions.

Over the years there has been a developing perception among Americans that there is an underlying “culture of poverty” (Gorski, 2008, p. 32, ¶6) shared by low-income communities. In 1961 Oscar Lewis wrote the book *The Children of Sanchez*, which coined the term “culture of poverty” initially feeding the myth. Lewis ethnographically studied small Mexican communities living in poverty and generalized his findings into a list of 50 common qualities shared among the inhabitants. The list included qualities such as lack of common history, increased violent behavior, and lack of future planning as commonalities shared by all people living in adverse economic conditions. While initially Lewis’ findings were generalized, studies in the following years found there was in fact no such thing as a universal “culture of poverty” (Gorski, 2008).

Poverty has been historically viewed as an individual problem (Russell, Harris & Gockel 2008; Halpern, 1990). Those individuals living in poverty may feel that there is a stigma surrounding their financial situation and are more likely to feel uncomfortable when talking to those they perceive to have more money than them (Garcia, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 2007). Furthermore, those living in poverty believe that others view them as lazy and irresponsible, resulting in confrontational actions or social withdrawal (Reutter, Stewart, Veenstra, Love, Raphael, & Makwarimba, 2009). Society does, in fact, stigmatize individuals living in poverty, blaming them for their financial situation. This leads to fewer social and employment opportunities, as well as labels of unworthiness (Mickelson & Williams, 2008). Over time, public support for poverty improvement has
decreased and changed instead into a castigatory condition, with factors such as single parenthood being viewed as personal choice (Russell, Harris & Gockel 2008). In addition, individuals living in poverty are perceived as unable to cope with difficult situations.

Perceptions of persons living in poverty often are unfavorable, and point to individual failures such as lack of motivation and self-discipline. Research has shown that middle-class people perceive themselves as fundamentally different than those people living in poverty. Research suggests that society views those people living in poverty, and seeking government assistance, as not having a strong work ethic (Goodwin, 1972). Gorski (2008) identifies common myths regarding poverty including a lack of motivation, detachment from their child’s education, a cultural or linguistic difference, and an addiction to drugs and alcohol. These false perceptions lead to teachers and communities setting low expectations for children living in poverty. The deficit theory derived from these negative perceptions results in low-income children being defined by their weaknesses instead of their strengths. Zigler and Berman (1983) attribute the 1960s’ fixation on child IQ scores as the root of the deficit theory, although they noted that Head Start was carefully planned to avoid placing blame on the child or family. Zigler and Berman (1983) state:

The deficit model embodied some paternalistic and erroneous notions that have had a long life in popular and practical forums. The notion of "cultural deprivation" or "cultural disadvantage" was a blatant assumption that the culture of the lower classes was inferior to that of the middle class. Since whatever was done in middle-class homes apparently worked, intervention programs were
intended to provide poor children with the learning experiences supposedly lacking in their impoverished environments. As early critics asserted, the effect of this model was to blame the victim. (p. 895, ¶2)

**Perceptions of parents.**

Parents living in poverty find the daily activities of raising a family to be very difficult due to their financial situation and lack of support (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Russell, Harris and Gockel, 2008). Money concerns and neighborhood stress plagued the minds of parents in Russell, Harris and Gockel’s (2008) study examining impoverished parents’ perceptions. Depression is common among parents living in poverty. Parents feel that society is judging them for being poor, therefore they blame themselves (i.e. lack personal competence, inability to manage tasks, education level, etc.) for their lack of wealth (Gockel, 2008). Parents feel disconnected from many opportunities more affluent persons may have access to, such as community and government supports (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Russell, Harris and Gockel, 2008).

Studies have found that many systems, such as education, disproportionately favor more affluent families. Parents living in poverty are less likely to have vacation time or paid leave, therefore less likely to be able to attend school events and meetings taking place during the day (Heymann, 2000). In her study, Heymann (2000) examines the perceptions of parents living in poverty. Those parents studied struggled to attend scheduled school events, such as parent teacher conferences, and stated that time with their child throughout the week was minimal due to work constraints. Parents expressed concern with their child’s well-being and safety, and often expressed doubt regarding
their welfare due to low quality childcare and lack of adult presence due to work obligations (Heymann, 2000).

Galster and Santiago (2006) examined the perceptions of parents of children living in high-poverty neighborhoods, explaining that it is the perceptions of parents that are sometimes the most powerful. They state, “Perceptions of low-income parents offer a valuable perspective here because it is, after all, their perceptions that will govern their behavior” (p. 202, ¶3).

**Gaining a child’s view of poverty.**

Our knowledge of the perceptions of low-income children is limited due to a lack of research, which is a result of the ethical debate regarding interviewing children. Therefore this has contributed to a lack of child voice in research, and children in general are underrepresented (Attree, 2003; Clark, 2005; Percy, 2003). Percy (2003) states, “Understanding the impact of growing up poor from the perspective of the child provides an insight into the problems and strengths of poor families” (p.67, ¶4).

Studies have found that there is, in fact, value when giving children an opportunity to contribute to research. Child-centered research approaches can add deeper perspective to a study for the reader, while giving the child involved in the research more awareness on a topic. Percy (2003) gave children cameras and had them take pictures of things in their community that mean the most to them. During the coding of the photographs, the researchers noticed an unexpected theme surrounding gang activity. Through interviews with the children it was apparent that neighborhood gang activity, drugs, and violence were an important component of their lives, which may or may not have been clear had a study like this had not taken place.
In the Australian Children in Families Study, children were interviewed in order to gain perceptions of their family life. Amato and Ochiltree (1987) found most children (89% of young children and 93% of adolescents) were eager to be interviewed about their experiences, and most were willing to discuss sensitive topics, such as family life, with the researchers. The study found that high quality answers from young children and adolescents are possible in interview situations. Moreover, in Weinger’s (1998) study, she found that by “seeing the world through poor children’s eyes” (p.101, ¶1) allows for interviewers to be more supportive and empowering.

Research utilizing the process of interviewing children identified common concerns among children living in poverty. Social insecurities, concerns over the possession and acquisition of items such as clothing and money, and the possession of limited life expectations and goals were a few of the subjects’ concerns (Attree, 2007; Weinger, 1998). Weinger (1998) found that children were aware of society’s perception of poverty, and assumed that nonpoor persons look down on those without money. Additionally, approximately half of the children surveyed (46%) were suspicious of affluent individuals (Weinger, 1998). Crowley & Vulliamy (n.d.) studied child perceptions of poverty living in urban and rural communities. They found that children had a feeling of social exclusion and were often bullied. Feeling of worthlessness, depression and fear were common feelings regarding their family’s financial situation.

Furthermore, in the Polish study of the United Nation Developmental Program (UNDP), conducted in 1997, researchers surveyed children in private and public schools concerning exposure to poverty, perceptions of the causes of poverty and possible solutions to poverty. While poverty in Poland implies a more broad definition (i.e.
misery and trouble), children noted similar causes of poverty, such as lack or money, accommodation, food and clothing that could be interchangeable in many Western nations. (Kopezyska-Sikorska & Szyszko, 2001).

While most of the time children give open and honest answers to interview questions (Nigro & Walpow, 2004), some research states that children younger than 8 years old cannot adequately distinguish between feelings and emotions and events that have truly occurred (Rebok, Riley, Forrest, Starfield, Green, Robertson, & Tambor, 2001). Studies have shown that young children do not recall even routine daily events consistently, and are highly susceptible to suggestibility (Parker, 1984; Rebok, et al., 2001). Research cites a lack of developed vocabulary as a potential reason for varying responses and recommends interviews with children younger than age 8 should incorporate some kind of visual support, such as a picture or a prop, to which they can refer (Clark & Clark, 1952; Nigro & Walpow, 2004; Rebok, et al., 2001). Using a prop, such as a doll, in an interview with a child could spark more conversation than simply questioning alone. Additionally, researchers should be aware of the feelings children may experience during the interview process (Clark & Clark, 1952; Nigro & Walpow, 2004). Feelings of uncertainty, fear or discomfort may inhibit answers (Amato & Ochiltree, 1987). Furthermore, Bushin (2007), who studied children’s perceptions of their family’s migration into rural homes, noted the importance of flexibility when picking a location in which to conduct a child’s interview, as all children’s homes are not locations that are without chaos.
Geographic poverty.

Urban poverty.

The population of children living in urban neighborhoods looks very different when compared to children living in suburban or rural communities, with some theorizing even the basic moral values of urban residents are different from those living in mainstream environments (Pandey & Zhan, 2000). Of children living in poverty, 75% live in urban settings (Kiser, 2007). Urban settings have higher populations of low-income residents and consequently, more children labeled as at-risk of school failure (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). Kiser (2007) found that children growing up in low-income urban environments grow up more afraid than children living in more affluent neighborhoods. Children who grow up in low-income, urban neighborhoods are likely to be exposed to a variety of trauma including family stress, neglect, neighborhood violence, drug-use, and other illegal activities (i.e. theft and gambling). Experiencing trauma, and therefore having fear, results in an increased likelihood for confrontational activities, thus encouraging the cycle of violence to continue (Kiser, 2007). Sampson and Laub state (1994) there is a direct connection between urban poverty and young male delinquency, yet strong family supports can mediate the likelihood for criminal behavior. Additionally, children in urban neighborhoods, particularly those that have high concentrations of poverty, are likely to have failing schools with under qualified or poor performing teachers and children are more likely to live and attend schools in poor conditions (i.e. lack of adequate heating and cooling, overcrowding, poor facilities, etc.)(Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Kiser, 2007).
Rural poverty.

While most research regarding poverty, specifically neighborhood poverty, has centered on urban poverty (Dehan & Deal, 2001), there has been compelling research outlining the implications of living in a low-income home in a rural setting. The percentage of people living in poverty in a rural community has in fact been higher that those living in poverty in an urban environment since the 1960s (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2004). One out of four non-white persons living in a rural community are living in poverty. Populations of Native Americans and non-Hispanic Blacks living in poverty are 10% higher in rural communities versus urban communities. Of those Native Americans living in rural poverty, 53% are living with incomes that are half of the federal poverty line (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2004). There are approximately 2.6 million children, 35% of the rural poor, living in poverty in a rural community, with almost half of all non-Hispanic Black children (46%) and Native American children (43%) living in poverty (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2004).

Less money is allocated per student in rural communities for education, and therefore many more rural schools are labeled inadequate, and failing. The majority of families in rural America do not own a car (and no access to public transportation), and 25% live without a telephone (Winston, 2003).

Rural poverty is different from urban poverty as research suggests the culture of rural poverty is more focused on moral standing while urban poverty is centered on economic standing (Sherman, 2006). In rural communities, those individuals are less likely to be on public assistance due to social embarrassment than those living in poverty in urban environments, yet children are still susceptible to safety and well-being issues.
EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY

(Belanger & Stone, 2008). Additionally, drug-use, family violence and mental health issues are still prevalent in rural communities, although access to services to alleviate these issues is not as readily available as urban communities (Belanger & Stone, 2008).

Rural communities, while less diverse ethnically and economically than urban communities, are significantly more cohesive. As mentioned previously, individuals living in rural poverty are more concerned with how they are perceived morally in their communities. Hard work, kindness and volunteering are moral acts that can be traded, in rural communities, for economic and social opportunities in the form of jobs and support. Stigmas of being unemployed, and therefore lazy, are more feared than the actual state of having little money. Qualities such as respect, pride and moral worth are valued in rural communities, which is why participation in federal programs such as welfare or illegal activities such as drug dealing or theft, are less common (Sherman, 2006).

Suburban poverty.

The suburbs have historically been characterized as opposite or in contrast to urban, inner-city living. Suburban life is often viewed as free of chaos, crime and poverty, when in reality suburban life has transformed over the years (Murphy, 2007; Holliday & Dwyer, 2009). The conditions of today’s suburbs are much more diverse with greater cultural, racial and socioeconomic diversity, taking on a make-up very similar to urban communities. Between 1990 and 2000 poverty has increased in American suburbs 21%, contrasted with only an 8% increase in American cities (Murphy, 2007). While the population of suburban neighborhoods is beginning to look similar to urban environments, there is still a stark difference in available social services in the suburbs. Suburban communities have far less social services than urban counterparts, as well as
fewer hospitals, universities and businesses (Murphy, 2007; Holliday & Dwyer, 2009). For example, in 2000 Chicago’s suburbs had 25% fewer social services than inner-city Chicago, yet saw 20% rise in poverty since 1990 (Murphy, 2007). Suburban neighborhoods have approximately 29% of their population living in poverty, with the largest percentage, 50%, of suburban poverty being concentrated in the South and West (Holliday and Dwyer, 2009).

**Summary of Literature Review**

History and research have shown that there are serious concerns with children living in poverty (Anthony, 2008; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Costello, Keeler & Angold, 2001; Galster & Santiago, 2006; Jackson, Langille, Lyons, Hughes, Martin, & Winstanley, 2009; Wilson, 2010). Research looking at neighborhood poverty (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Cushing & Zheng, 2000; Dayton, 2003; Holliday & Dwyer, 2009; Kiser, 2007; Murphy, 2007; Pandey & Zhan, 2000; Sherman, 2006) indicates that there are indeed differences in the impoverished communities in which a child resides. While independent research is present that looks at urban, rural, and suburban poverty, little to no research examines all three neighborhood poverty circumstances through the eyes of young children, thus supporting the basis and rationale for this study.
Chapter III: Methodology

Restatement of Purpose

Through interviews of children and adults, I sought to gain a rich perception of the implications of poverty in different types of neighborhoods. The guiding question in this study is “What are the societal, social, and emotional perceptions and experiences of children and parents living in urban, suburban, and rural poverty?” This question was examined through a qualitative design that utilized interviews with mothers and their children.

Research Design

This study utilized a multiple case study methodology including interviews with children and parents living in poverty. A case study approach aims to delve into a deeper understanding of the nature of human experience by examining the unique experiences of several groups of individuals and the interactions between those individuals (Tellis, 1997). Tellis (1997) states:

Case studies are multi-perspectival analyses. This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This one aspect is a salient point in the characteristic that case studies possess. They give a voice to the powerless and voiceless. (¶30)

Research utilizing case study is “expected to catch the complexity of a single case” (Stake, 1995, p.xi, ¶1). According to Stake (1995), case studies examine specific cases and the interactions between those cases “coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p.xi, ¶1).
As a researcher in a multiple case study, I structured the research process in order to construct meaning around each individual’s experiences. Stake (1995) stated that it is important to have a “strong advance plan” (p.64 ¶2) when structuring the interview process. Simply reporting the facts or telling the story of an individual is not enough. As a researcher I understood that I had to look at the meaning surrounding each of these stories and experiences in order to discover the nature of an experience. In this study, I was interested in the nature of poverty as perceived by parents and children in urban, rural and suburban neighborhoods, therefore the entirety of the research process was centered on this interest. I made sure I drove to each family’s neighborhood prior to our first meeting in order to better understand the culture and nature of the community in which the families resided. Prior to the interviews I evaluated my research goals and formulated my interview questions in order to best elicit the most authentic responses.

Additionally, in case study research the researcher is less concerned about generalizing one person’s experience to fit all other similar cases, but instead is interested at better understanding the experiences of those individuals being studied. In order to fully understand the individual experiences of the individuals I studied I had to be sure to objectively observe and record the stories, comments, and non-verbal actions of the participants in this study. This objective recording of data would allow me to properly identify meaning later when analyzing the data.

It is important in research to prevent previous bias or knowledge about a specific phenomenon, culture or experience from entering into the research process. As a researcher, I must be mindful to separate previous knowledge from the study participants’ own lived experiences. In this study I was very careful to document the experiences of
participants as authentically as possible, and construct meaning based on the conversations with parents and children, not on previous research or ideas regarding poverty. In order to ensure researcher bias was separated from the data collection and analysis process I began by identifying areas in which I recognized personal bias and recorded those in my research notes. During the interview process, I took notes during and following each interview in order to better identify interview themes and catch further instances of personal bias. A journal of these notes were compiled and then read and reread throughout the research and data analysis process. This procedure of data collection and self-reflection ensured that proper meaning was derived from interviews and researcher bias was minimized.

The interview process is designed to gather information regarding an individual’s personal experience in order to help derive meaning; therefore one must walk into the interview process with a strong sense of the guiding research question in order to elicit the most meaningful participant responses. My goal in this multiple case study was to “come to understand” (Stake, 1995, p.77, ¶1) the nature of each case. Interview material that is too “skimpy and that lacks sufficient concreteness in the form of stories, anecdotes, examples of experiences, etc., may be quite useless, tempting the researcher to indulge in over-interpretations, speculations, or an over-reliance on personal opinions and personal experiences” (van Manen, 1997, p. 67, ¶1). Yin (1994) states that interviews must be constructed of questions that are meant to elicit valuable subject responses and that the researcher must be a good enough listener to be able to interpret those responses. Structured and well-organized interviews lead to the most meaning-construction and enable a more clear identification of themes. Additionally, a clear research question and
specific questioning relating back to an individual’s concrete personal experiences (versus general ideas) will aid in producing the most beneficial and interpretive data.

Data analysis in a case study is ongoing (Stake, 1995) and can begin at the initial interview. By taking notes during and after each interview I was able to gather many types of data in order to create a more inclusive “picture” of each family in this study. According to Stake (1995) there are two types of strategies for analyzing data: (1) direct interpretation of single instances and (2) categorical aggregation. While some of each type of analysis was utilized, I mainly employed categorical aggregation as a means for interpreting themes. Categorical aggregation entails the identification of thematic occurrences and their frequencies, in order to determine importance and significance.

Case study analysis recommends that multiple sources of data collection are utilized (Tellis, 1997; Yin, 1994) therefore I took a number of notes during and after each interview documenting notable aspects of each interview including non-verbal cues and actions observed during each meeting. These notes also allowed me to continually check for researcher bias.

At the conclusion of the interview process, I examined all the data collected in order to determine themes. Themes attempt to pinpoint the structure of an experience and derive meaning. Themes transcend just one anecdote or personal story and attempt to pinpoint the core of an experience. The identification and isolation of themes in this study began with the interview process. During the oral exchange between researcher and parent or researcher and child the preliminary meaning-structures were identified. Following each interview, the audiotape was played back and transcribed, allowing for a further, more in-depth interpretation. When analyzing the transcribed interview data in
this study, all three approaches to theme-identification were utilized: (1) the
wholistic/sententious approach, (2) the selective/highlighting approach and (3) the
detailed/line-by-line approach (van Manen, 1997). The wholistic/sententious approach
looks at the text as a whole unit in order to derive meaning. The selective/highlighting
approach examines specific lines of the transcript looking for significance and meaning.
Lastly, the detailed/line-by-line approach looks at every line of the text and scrutinizes it
for meaning. Each of these approaches were utilized in the data analysis process.
Following the transcription, interviews were read and reread in order to identify themes.
Topics of significance were then highlighted, patterns identified and meaning was
derived.

Description of Participants

Participant selection.

The participants in this study consisted of a total of three children and three
adults. One child was interviewed, as well as their primary custodial parent, from each of
the three different neighborhood types identified as: (1) urban, (2) rural, and (3)
suburban.

All child participants were (1) between the ages of 6 and 7 years of age and (2)
resided permanently (at least 6 months) in the neighborhood type (i.e. urban, rural, or
suburban) in which they were currently residing. All adult participants were the primary
custody holder of the child and/or had the child living with him/her at least 50% of the
time, were female heads of household, Caucasian, and were between the ages of 23 and
28 years old. Additionally, each participating family included 2 or 3 children between
the ages of 3 and 9 years of age. All children in this study were attending full-day kindergarten at their neighborhood public school.

The following chart outlines the demographics for each family participating in this study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Demographic Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother, age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children, ages (study participant in bold)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment of Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Educational History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Type</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 All names have been changed to pseudonyms for confidentiality of participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of neighborhood residents living below the poverty level</th>
<th>17.2%</th>
<th>4.8%</th>
<th>3.2%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time in Residence</td>
<td>Approximately 14 months</td>
<td>Approximately 9 months</td>
<td>Approximately 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Residence</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
<td>House; living with her sister</td>
<td>Townhouse-style apartment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Assistance</td>
<td>Housing and cash assistance, food stamps, and medical coverage for herself and her children</td>
<td>Cash, food and medical assistance for her children.</td>
<td>Medical and child care assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant recruitment.**

I utilized existing neighborhood contacts (i.e. a school principal in an urban area, a community program organizer in a rural area, and an early childhood educator in a suburban area) to identify potential participants for this study. Qualifying families were receiving some kind of government support (i.e. housing vouchers, food stamps, medical assistance, cash assistance or child care assistance) and had children between the ages of 6 and 7 years old. Initially, the use of free and reduced lunch qualification was considered as a method for participant identification, yet there are a number of reasons why using free and reduced lunch qualifications are not an appropriate measure of poverty. Individuals not qualifying for the free and reduced lunch may in fact be living in a state of poverty, as poverty guidelines are unable to evaluate “the cost of earning income, child care costs, geographic variation in the cost of living, direct tax payments such as payroll and income taxes, differences in health insurance coverage, and the fact

---

2 The official U.S. poverty rate was 14.3% in 2009, up from 13.2% in 2008, and the highest rate since 1994 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

3 The 3-year poverty rate average in the state in which the families in this study lived was 14.1% in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
that poverty guidelines have not been updated since they were created in the 1960s to account for changing consumption patterns” (Harwell & LeBeau, 2010, p.124, ¶8). Additionally, by using free and reduced lunch qualification as the selection method for participants, researchers are less likely to “capture relevant dimensions of poverty, for example, the effects of concentrated poverty in a neighborhood” (Harwell & LeBeau, 2010, p.124, ¶9).

Instead of using the qualification for free and reduced lunch as the means for participant selection, this study utilized neighborhood contacts to identify potential participating families. Once potential families were identified and the details of this study were reviewed and consented to, information regarding household income and the utilization of federal aid programs, thus qualifying children to participate in this study, was obtained through a brief parent survey (See Appendix A). The parent survey incorporated questions that sought to evaluate several areas of socioeconomic status including household income, parental educational attainment, occupation, and questions regarding neighborhood conditions and resources. These areas are identified as being widely used measures of socioeconomic status (Harwell & LeBeau, 2010). Additionally, the parent survey gathered family demographic information, as well as several initial open response questions, in order to better form interview questions.

Data Collection

Interview procedures.

Frequency and length.

There were a total of four interviews with each of the children, and two interviews with each of the mothers. The parent interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and
the child interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed.

An initial meeting was held to meet each family and build rapport with the mothers and the children. This meeting lasted approximately 45 minutes and met at the neighborhood library. This meeting was not a formal interview, but more of a question and answer opportunity for parents, as well as a rapport building opportunity between families and researcher. The children colored pictures and read stories while we engaged in casual conversation. This meeting not only allowed parents to ask additional questions about the research process, but it also allowed children to ask questions, as well. Järvinen (2000) cites the importance of a positive rapport between interviewer and interviewee throughout the data gathering processes. By having a good rapport, the interviewer is better able to illicit emotional, and open responses from the interviewee. This rapport and formation of a relationship with the subject in an interview situation is especially important when interacting with children. The level of comfort a child feels in an interview situation will directly impact the amount he or she discloses or reveals about feelings and past events.

The first interview was devoted to delving into the personal experiences of each child and parent. During the first child interview the book Those Shoes by Maribeth Boelts was read and discussed. The second parent interview elaborated on data gathered during the first interview, clarifying facts and asking mothers to elaborate on previous opinions or stories. During the second child interview I read the story Tight Times by Barbara Shook Hazen. During the third child interview A Castle on Viola Street by DyAnne DiSalvo was read and discussed, followed by the reading of When Times are
Tough by Yanitzia Canetti in the fourth interview. Photographs were utilized to aid in discussion of the books, as well (See Appendix C). Following each interview, data were transcribed and examined to help determine the direction of future interviews. More detail about the specifics of each child interview is explained later in this paper.

Interviews took place in the neighborhood public library. For privacy purposes a private meeting room was reserved when available in order to aid in participant comfort and confidentiality. When a meeting room was not available, extreme care was taken to pick a secluded section of the library in which to conduct the interview. The mothers in this study were interviewed alone, as were their children.

Mother interview procedures.

Each of the interviews with the mothers began with a brief casual conversation reviewing some of the interview procedures (i.e. the ability to discontinue the interview at any time, the methods in which data would be collected – notes/audio recording, and confidentiality). I identified areas that I would like to address in each parent interview including neighborhood opinion, description of their children, home life and family dynamics, education (personal and child), daily struggles and sources of relief, and government assistance. These topics were divided up into two days, with additional follow-up questioning occurring on the second interview day.

Each interview with the mothers in this study took approximately 45 minutes and occurred approximately one week apart.

Child interview procedures.

Child interviews began with discussion about how each child was feeling, comments about their day or a joke in order to aid in making each child feel comfortable.
Follow up questions from the previous day or identified discussion questions (See Appendix B) were asked and a brief conversation occurred. The bulk of the children’s storytelling and discussion occurred during and after the reading of a picture book, where the issue of financial disparities is presented. The four books I used were: Those Shoes by Maribeth Boelts, When Times are Tough by Yanitzia Canetti, A Castle on Viola Street by DyAnne DiSalvo, and Tight Times by Barbara Shook Hazen. Throughout reading each story, I asked questions surrounding the themes in the book, such as “Do you know anyone like this?” and “What do you think that means?” Following the story, I asked children questions regarding the neighborhood in which they live, where they go to school and their friends. Through this process I was looking for areas where a child expressed a particular like or dislike, relatability, concern, or annoyance, and asked questions to follow-up on these emotions in order to better access each child’s experiences. Additionally, I utilized picture supports, in an attempt to illicit more in depth responses regarding their ideas about their neighborhoods, homes and school, as well as to follow up on topics present in the stories (See Appendix C).

Society has historically viewed the responses of the most competent or well spoken individuals as those with the most meaning. Järvinen (2000) states that societal rank and the speaking ability of interviewees tends to rate them as “authorized speakers,” (p.387, ¶2) giving more value to their statements over those who are less eloquent. Young children are not always the most articulate of interview subjects, yet it has been shown that even when responses are not clearly expressed, they have meaning. Through Järvinen’s (2000) interviews with alcoholics, she found that while not the most well expressed responses were given, a great deal of meaning and interpretation was possible.
Moreover, the voice of those individuals living in poverty has been viewed as less important due to their societal role, therefore preventing them from being authorized speakers. By looking at children from low socioeconomic backgrounds I sought to give voice to a category of individuals who are underrepresented in interview studies.

**Overview of the interviews with the mothers.**

The three mothers in this study each approached the research process willingly and fairly enthusiastically. One mother even stated that she had never “been picked to do something like this before.” Interviews took place in each neighborhood’s closest public library, in a meeting room or secluded corner of the building.

Questioning began with a review of the initial parent survey each mother filled out, with clarification being given when needed. From there, I began asking the questions outlined in Appendix B. Each mother appeared to be answering questions thoughtfully and honestly. Each woman was engaged in our conversation and I got the impression that they were eager to share their experiences with me. Throughout the interview process the interactions between the mothers and I was more like a conversation and less like a formal interview. I felt the stories each of the women shared were told as they personally remembered them, and with genuine emotion.

Renee, the mother living in the urban neighborhood, came to the first interview with her children and an older cousin, but attended her second interview alone. This older cousin read books and walked around the library with the children for the duration of the interview. Renee appeared confident in her responses and open about past experiences and, while visibly bothered when discussing disturbing past experiences, overall she exuded strength.
Grace, the mother from the rural neighborhood, came to her interviews alone. While also confident with her responses, Grace had a quieter demeanor than Renee. She spoke softly, yet when she began discussing topics of great interest her cheeks would become flushed and she would speak more rapidly. Of the three mothers in this study, Grace seemed the most unsure of what to expect from this process. She had the most questions for me as a researcher prior to beginning this study, and clearly cared a great deal about the protection of her children’s confidentiality and emotional well-being throughout the process of this study.

Jeanette, the mother from the suburban neighborhood, came to both interviews with her oldest child Anthony. Anthony sat at a table just outside of the room we were meeting in and looked at books. Several times Anthony interrupted us to ask his mother a question, and it was clear that Jeanette was very attentive to the needs of her child.

While an outline of topics was followed, I was surprised at the depth and length some of these topics consumed. Most topics were addressed at the first interview, however the discussion regarding the process of accepting government assistance took place in the follow-up/second interview. As a researcher, I felt it was important to properly “get to know” the mothers in this study before asking a question I felt could be not only personal, but potentially embarrassing. During the second interview the mothers mostly clarified any questions I had about the information they provided and stories they told in the first interview. The second interview was more relaxed, and each of the women seemed more confident in the research process than they had at the first interview. In all three of the mothers’ second interviews they asked me questions about my personal and academic life, as well as more in depth questions about the outcomes of
the data I was collecting. Each interview could be described as “easy,” comfortable conversation of which questions arose naturally.

**Interview topics.**

Discussion topics with each mother in this study varied, yet several major topics were addressed in each of the interviews with the mothers: (1) neighborhood opinion (i.e. the mother’s opinions regarding the neighborhood in which they live), (2) description of their children, (3) home life and family dynamics, (4) education, personal and their children’s, (5) daily struggles and sources of relief, and (6) government assistance.

**Overview of the interviews with the children.**

Following the conclusion of the interviews with the mothers, the child interviews began. Each of the child interviews took place in a public library, just as the parent interviews had. The children, all of kindergarten age, were enthusiastic to be working with me and seemed interested in the idea that I would be recording what they had to say. Amya, the child living in an urban neighborhood, was the most enthusiastic and talkative from the beginning of the interview process. Amya is 6 years old and has a 4-year-old brother. She was very friendly and asked many of questions about who I was and the equipment I was using. She made statements such as, “Why do you want to record what I say? I’m a kid!” Amya was cheerful and confident. Upon each meeting she seemed more and more comfortable with me, even bringing a drawing she had made for me on our last meeting.

Kayleigh, the child living in a rural neighborhood, was the most reserved and timid of the children I interviewed. Kayleigh, who is also 6 years old, is a middle child,
with one older brother who is in the third grade and a 4-year-old younger sister. She is currently living with her aunt, uncle and cousins in their home. She was thoughtful in her responses yet quite soft-spoken. She seemed comfortable talking with me, yet needed the most probing and questioning in order to elicit responses longer than one or two words.

Anthony, the child living in a suburban neighborhood, was friendly and talkative. He is 7 years old and has a 3-year-old younger brother. He particularly enjoyed the books we read together, always paying close attention to the pictures. He had watched his mother speak with me, as he attended both sessions, sitting outside the meeting space and watching us occasionally through the window.

There were a total of four child interviews. Each interview consisted of a general greeting and conversational period to put the child at ease, followed by the reading of a story. The first interview included the reading of *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts and focused on a preliminary theme of having “enough money” or “not having enough money.” In the story, a little boy covets a pair of sneakers because everyone else has the same pair. Unfortunately, the little boy’s grandmother could not afford to buy the new shoes for him so they instead went looking at a thrift store for the shoes.

During the second interview, I sought to follow up on the theme of the previous interview, thus eliciting more child responses regarding their personal feelings about people who have money and those who do not. In order to do so, I read the story *Tight Times* by Barbara Shook Hazen. In this story the main character wants to buy a dog, but his family is in “tight times.” His father loses his job, making their financial situation worse.
The third interview focused on each child’s home and neighborhood. I read the story *A Castle on Viola Street* by DyAnne DiSalvo, using the pictures and general themes of the story as a guide to discussion.

The fourth interview included the reading of *When Times are Tough* by Yanitzia Canetti, and discussed each child’s experiences at school and with their friends. This story focused on a number of issues one may experience when a family experiences a difficult financial period.

By the end of the fourth interview I felt it was a good place to conclude the research process, as each of the children’s stories became repetitive and conversations took more effort to maintain. The children became restless with the research process and despite follow-up questioning to previous stories, a different children’s book and the use of a variety of photographs to encourage conversation, the children seemed to be satiated with the topics I presented.

Each of the interviews utilized photographs as an aid to elicit child opinions and additional stories (See Appendix C). Appropriate photographs were chosen depending on the topic of the interview (i.e. when discussing having money or not having money photographs of money and an empty wallet were chosen for support). Both photographs and children’s books were beneficial in starting and maintaining conversation between the children and researcher, as sometimes conversation alone caused children to lose interest or become distracted. By utilizing books and photographs the children in this study maintained engagement in questioning and conversation, and their attention remained focused on the interview.
**Interview topics.**

Due to the nature of the interviews with the children, much more time was spent on fewer discussion topics. The children in this study tended to need more time to “talk out” their answers, therefore fewer topics were covered in the duration of the interview than with the mothers. The topics addressed in each child interview were: (1) neighborhood, (2) school (strengths, weaknesses and friends), and (3) home. All other topics derived naturally from the stories and photographs utilized throughout the interviews. Photographs were utilized as support for discussions and topics initiated by the children, and to support themes in the stories.

**Data analysis.**

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Once transcribed, the data were examined and coded for themes. Transcription and coding took place following each child and parent interview in order to adequately prepare follow-up interview questions.

It was important in this process that themes were properly identified during the data analysis process. Meaning was derived from the interviews with children and parents, and then common themes were examined. Throughout this process I was careful to identify where personal prior knowledge about, or experience with, poverty would impact the results of this study, thus providing influence and/or bias not directly coming from the participants.

**Analysis of parent interviews.**

During the interview process, initial meaning structures, or discussion trends, were identified and noted in the research notes. These initial thoughts and notes were
referred to during transcription, and used as support to clearly identified themes. Transcriptions were reviewed and themes were identified using a variety of methods.

Interviews were read and reread, utilizing a variety of strategies including the wholistic/sententious approach, and the detailed/line-by-line approach (van Manen, 1997). During this process initial potential themes were identified and questions for the follow-up interview were formulated. Following this process, the selective/highlighting approach (van Manen, 1997) was utilized in order to identify significant themes. The list of common themes was assessed for researcher bias by making sure that I was interpreting the stories and opinions of children and mothers correctly, not simply imposing my own thoughts or predispositions. In order to double check for bias I reread through the transcripts and consulted my post-interview notes.

Each of the interviews with the mothers began with an outline of potential interview questions (See Appendix B), although each quickly turned into more of a conversation between mother and researcher. Each initial interview covered all of the interview topics provided in Appendix B, yet there were key areas where the mothers seemed to be the most passionate. From areas of interest, more questions were formulated, both in the moment and following transcription, for use in the follow-up interview.

After rereading the transcripts of the mothers once again, and reviewing the commonalities and trends in each, I was able to identify several common themes. These themes emerged throughout my questioning on a variety of topics. Each of the themes was reoccurring and peppered throughout each interview topic that I initiated. Central
themes resulting from the parent interviews will be discussed later in the “Results” section of this paper.

**Analysis of child interviews.**

Following the completion and transcription of child interviews the data was analyzed and themes were identified. The transcription process was particularly helpful during the child interview process, as I found that I often missed some of what the children said the first time I heard it. I found that the children in this study did not communicate as directly and succinctly as their mothers, making it easy to miss important portions of the interview. Due to this fact, more follow-up questioning was required than had been initially anticipated.

Just as I had done previously with the parent interviews, a detailed examination of the transcripts was conducted. Transcripts were read and reread, with common themes being flagged. Additionally, my notes were particularly helpful in recalling specific moods or mannerisms of the children and these were considered as well in order to better construct meaning from the data. After all of this was considered several main themes were identified. These themes will be outlined in detail in the “Results” section of this paper.

**Protection of subjects.**

During the interview process extreme care and precaution was taken in order to properly protect the confidentiality of children and their mothers. While interviews took place in a public location, each of the interviews took place in a private meeting space within the library. This was in order to maintain the confidentiality of both parents and children in this study.
Prior to transcription pseudonyms were assigned to participants, and used throughout the remainder of the research process. Following transcription audio-recordings were destroyed (i.e. deleted).

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Ball State University accepted an application for research in order to ensure protection of subjects in this study (See Appendix D).

**Subject Stipend**

Each participating family received a $50 gift card to a local grocery store and a basket of children’s books. These items were donated to the study and funding was not required. Participants received the gift card at the conclusion of all parent and child interviews. After each child interview the children received a book to take home with them. At the conclusion of the interviews the remainder of the books (a total of 10) were given to the families.

**Summary**

Utilizing a case study design, I interviewed children and their mothers each living in an urban, rural, and suburban community regarding their personal experiences associated with living in poverty. The purpose of this research was to examine the different lived experiences of those individuals living in poverty and identify commonalities and differences present in each personal circumstance.
Chapter IV: The Families

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of three families living in poverty in urban, rural and suburban neighborhoods. While there have been a number of studies looking at the implications of poverty in urban, rural and suburban neighborhoods separately, there is little to no research examining these populations in one study. Additionally, by utilizing the voice of children I sought to shed further light on the life experiences of individuals living in impoverished communities.

This study examined the following guiding question throughout the research process:

What are the societal, social, and emotional perceptions and experiences of children and parents living in urban, suburban, and rural poverty?

Through an in-depth interview process of three parents and children living in poverty in each of these communities, a rich perception on the life experiences of these families was examined.

A preliminary parent survey was distributed to families in order to gather pertinent demographic information. Following this process, two parent interviews were conducted, audio taped and transcribed. After the conclusion of the parent interviews, a total of four child interviews were conducted in order to gather the perspectives of the children living in urban, rural and suburban communities. These interviews were also audiotaped and transcribed.
The purpose of this chapter is to present an in-depth overview of each of the families studied.

**The Kirkwood Family (Renee and Amya): Urban**

I met the Kirkwood Family through a principal in an urban school district. He gave me Renee’s name as someone he has come to know through some of the school’s community outreach and impoverished family assistance programs (i.e. recipient of canned foods and clothing/school supply donations). Upon choosing the Kirkwood family for this study I met Renee and Amya at the local library for an initial meeting in order to answer any questions and build rapport with the family.

Renee and Amya were warm, outgoing, and enthusiastic at the initial meeting. I noticed right away how young Renee appeared, wearing a brightly colored sweater and jeans with bejeweled pockets. I knew from her survey that Renee was 23 years old, but she looked even younger in person. When she walked in with her daughter Amya, 6, she looked as if she could have been her big sister instead of her mother. Despite her appearance, as I spoke to Renee I quickly saw a woman who was much more mature than her physical appearance suggested.

Amya is Renee’s oldest child whom she gave birth to during her junior year in high school. She stated that “things got rough and I had to grow up quick.” Dropping out of high school was due to the fact that, according to Renee, she “didn’t have no support from no one,” and felt compelled to find work to provide for herself and her child instead of continuing in school. Her second child, Bryon, 4, was born two years later. Shortly after getting pregnant with Bryon, Renee’s boyfriend, who was also Amya’s father,
“split” leaving her to support her daughter and continue through the remainder of her pregnancy with Bryon alone.

Renee grew up in an urban area of approximately 780,000 and states that her mother also got pregnant in high school, and had to drop out even sooner than she had, in her sophomore year. Renee’s father had graduated from high school and was in the workforce when Renee was born. She saw her father periodically throughout her childhood and adolescence but it was sporadic and inconsistent. When asked about her childhood socioeconomic status Renee states that her family “didn’t have much” and lived in an apartment complex similar to where she currently resides. A “couple of years” after she gave birth to Amya, Renee moved out of her mother’s house and into her own apartment. While she has moved apartment buildings and complexes (often times to “make rent” or “get somewhere better”) she states that she has lived in the same community since moving out of her mother’s apartment.

Renee has lived in her current apartment complex for approximately 14 months and seems indifferent about it. She says that it is “OK” and makes a face showing indifference. There are approximately six apartment complexes similar to the Kirkwood’s complex in the same area. They are within about one mile from a major city intersection that has a grocery store, gas station, and a number of fast food restaurants. When I drove past Renee’s neighborhood to meet her at the library I noticed a number of people walking along the street between the apartment complexes and the commercial intersection. The apartment complexes in Renee’s neighborhood looked older and were in need of basic maintenance such as paint, gutter repair and landscaping.
When discussing her employment, Renee stated that she is currently unemployed and has been for approximately five months due to lay-offs at her previous place of employment. She is currently accepting assistance for housing, as well as cash assistance, food stamps and medical coverage for herself and her children. Renee has worked a variety of “small jobs” since getting laid off yet has not been able to find a permanent replacement that meets the needs of her and her family. She tells me that when she was working, Bryon was cared for in a neighborhood in-home daycare. Her employment options are somewhat “limited” due to childcare for her children both during the day (since Bryon does not attend school) and in the afternoon after Amya returns from kindergarten.

I asked Renee how her current financial situation compared to her past financial situations and she replied that it was “better or about the same.” When asked to clarify she stated, “It’s better because I can be with my kids more” but “It’s the same because I still gotta worry about stuff like money…that don’t go away.” Through discussing what I would describe as difficult topics, Renee stayed upbeat and positive. She often looked over to Amya, who was busy leafing through a variety of books and doing a puzzle, with a smile.

When I asked Amya to come join us she enthusiastically came to the table. Amya’s bright blue eyes and blond hair made her look almost angelic. She had a big smile and was very talkative from the very beginning. She sat in the large wooden library chair with her feet up on the seat. Amya talked about some of the books she was looking at and was quick to bring me examples and show me some of her favorite parts. She had many questions for me and seemed genuinely interested in why I was talking to
her and her mother. She seemed to touch everything, from my notes, to the voice
recorder, to the posters on the wall of the library. Her eyes darted around the room and
she talked with ease. For a researcher, she was very easy to talk to and I anticipated
being able to gain a lot of insight from Amya due to her almost immediate ease with the
process. When it was time for Renee and Amya to leave, I reached out to shake each of
their hands and Amya shook it and then gave me a hug around the waist. I believe that
Renee’s outgoing nature had indeed rubbed off on the enthusiastic 6-year-old.

**Renee’s responses.**

Renee came to the first interview with both of her children and an older cousin
and her second interview alone. This older cousin read books and walked around the
library with the children for the duration of the interview. Renee seemed confident in her
responses and open about past experiences. While visibly bothered when discussing
disturbing past experiences, overall Renee exuded strength in her demeanor and when she
spoke. Renee was the youngest of the mothers, yet seemed to be the most confident.

**Neighborhood opinion.**

I began the interview process with the mothers by asking each about the
neighborhoods in which they resided, in order to truly “paint a picture” of where each
family lives. The Kirkwood family lived in an urban neighborhood, in an apartment
complex that accepts housing assistance. Renee had lived in the same neighborhood,
although two separate apartment complexes, for approximately 14 months. As noted
previously, Renee reported that she had lived in the same general community since first
moving out of her mother’s house “across town.” When asked to describe her
neighborhood Renee seemed indifferent, stating that it was “OK” and had “enough of
what we need”, but at the same time “ain’t no dream.” Her apartment complex could use “some love” but she stated she was happy with her family’s current residence. She described her neighbors as being an asset to her and her children, as she lacked family support. When asked more about her neighbors, she referred to many of them as friends and people she could rely on during times of trouble.

Description of her children.

Renee described her oldest child Amya, 6, as being “talkative, almost too much sometimes” and “spunky.” She also portrays Amya as a confident young girl who often acts like the “boss” when she’s around peers and with her younger brother, and is outgoing and quick to make friends, particularly around their neighborhood. Bryon, 4, is more reserved and “let’s his sister do the talking.” Since she is unemployed she is the primary caregiver for her son and remarks that he “may be quiet but he’s a smart one.” When asked about behavior or academic concerns for either of her children Renee stated that her children were “fine,” with the exception of Amya’s socializing getting her in minor trouble at school.

Home life and family dynamic.

Renee described her family dynamic as “normal” and was pleased with the relationship she has with her children. She stated, “I mean…I think I’m a good mom. I hope they do.” Since Renee is not currently employed she is satisfied with the amount of time she is able to dedicate to her children and their academic development.

Education: Personal and children.

Renee only completed some high school stating that she dropped out of high school during her junior year, citing pregnancy and family issues as the reason. She told
of a lack of family support and a mother who was “crazy sometimes,” causing her to seek employment and “make a life for herself.” She remembered school being difficult for her and “not something that really interested me.” That may have been true for Renee’s personal experiences with school, but not for the educational goals for her children. Renee hoped that her children would excel in school, stating she would do “everything in my power to help them.” She would love for them to attend college after high school.

**Daily struggles and sources of relief.**

Renee mentioned Amya’s school as being supportive of their financial situation and provided examples of several programs they had (i.e. free-lunch, discounted school supplies/book rental, food and clothing support throughout the year, etc.) that had been particularly helpful. She mentioned that she had a good relationship with Amya’s teacher stating that she talked to her teacher “all the time.”

Childcare, when necessary, was a challenge, as Renee “really doesn’t have the money for a babysitter.” Her neighbors in her apartment complex often aided in care of her children, alleviating Renee’s childcare concerns. Renee commented that her neighbors would help with small finances, as well, when needed. They have given her money for gas and for small purchases (i.e. prescriptions or if Renee “really needed something”).

**Government assistance.**

When the topic of government assistance came up, Renee was fairly quick to dismiss the topic. I asked what the process entailed and she stated, “You just gotta put in a bunch of stuff about yourself and then they tell you if you are able to get help. It was
Even when probed she provided short answers stating that she couldn’t recall or was unsure of what she had done.

**Amya’s responses.**

**Neighborhood.**

I asked Amya to describe her neighborhood to me. Having driven by her neighborhood on several occasions and after hearing her mother’s description of their neighborhood, I felt I had a basic idea of what Amya’s neighborhood looked liked. Amya describes her neighborhood as “nice,” and proceeds to discuss the many different things she does in her neighborhood. Amya states that she likes to ride her bike in her neighborhood and that there are “lots of kids around.” She tells stories about going over to a neighbor’s house and playing with their dogs, as well.

**School: Strengths, weaknesses, and friends.**

I attempted to engage Amya in a conversation about her school, teacher, friends and academic strengths and weaknesses. Most of the responses I received were short and simple, stating several things she liked about school. She struggled to come up with weaknesses in her abilities, finally settling on her handwriting as a weakness. She noted several positive aspects of the school day such as “stations” and “art,” and mentioned that her teacher was “really nice.” Beyond these comments, Amya and my conversation regarding her academic life was limited and labored.

**Home.**

Amya described her home as “the bottom is yellow and the top is gray,” but then elaborates about her living room and its configuration. The living room is her favorite because, according to Amya, “It has a TV, couch and a little table right there. And the
little table has a spot where you can put your drinks on it.” Later when reading a story about a child and his family who are helping another family renovate and improve their home, Amya expressed feeling that her home was “really little.” I told Amya that I had driven by her neighborhood on the way to our meeting and she was very excited. She wanted me to come over to her house and see her bedroom, even though it didn’t “have stairs.” She talked a great deal about her room and its contents, and even her brother, Colby’s, bedroom citing the “no girls” sign on his door. When I began transitioning to another topic of questioning Amya returned to the idea of me visiting her home asking me if I could “come today.”

**Family themes.**

Amya was the only child in this study that noted having neighborhood playmates. All of the other children did not report having friends near their homes or in their neighborhoods. Additionally, Renee was the only mother in this study to note neighbors as source of support and the only mother to reference having a positive relationship with her child’s teacher. She mentioned participating in the classroom and talking frequently with Amya’s teacher.

**The Tillman Family (Grace and Kayleigh): Rural**

I came to know the Tillman Family through a contact who is one of the directors of a community group that works directly with families via the schools. This community group partners teenage peers with younger school-age children in an after-school setting. The group is not exclusively for low-income children, yet identified the Tillman’s as potential qualifiers for this study.
Grace was the mother in this study who had the most initial questions for me prior to accepting participation in this study. She wanted to know who I was exactly and the details about my study. She was also the most concerned about her and her children’s confidentiality.

The meeting with Grace and Kayleigh was a stark contrast to the meeting I experienced with Renee and Amya. Grace is the oldest mother in this study at 28 years of age. Upon walking in to our initial meeting Grace and Kayleigh were soft spoken. Grace’s hair was pulled up in a ponytail, and in combination with her large knit sweater she came across as conservative. Her demeanor was quiet yet Kayleigh clearly had respect for her, following each of her instructions. During my time talking with Grace alone, Kayleigh sat quietly on the floor looking intently at books.

Grace had three children, Colby, 9, Kayleigh, 6, and Bailey, 4. Her son Colby is in the third grade, and attends the same local public school as his sister Kayleigh who was in kindergarten. She described Colby as the perfect child who excels in school, helps out at home, and rarely gets into trouble. Kayleigh, on the other hand, is a “firecracker.” Upon hearing this statement I looked over at the little girl crouched on the floor who couldn’t be calmer and I wondered how she was at home. Her mother appeared to read my mind telling me that she didn’t have any problems with Kayleigh at school, and her teachers often comment about how well behaved she is. She attributed that to being shy and eager to please, yet stated that when compared to Colby she was more outspoken. She commented that her youngest child Bailey “takes after her sister” and was a “pistol.” While Bailey was not in school, she anticipated that when she does attend school it would be a “whole different story,” as she was the most headstrong of the three.
Grace was separated from her husband who is the father of her three children. She had been living with her sister and her sister’s family in a rural community of about 1,982 for 9 months. When driving through Grace’s neighborhood I noticed a variety of different homes, some ranch-style older homes, some large newer builds, farmhouses, and a trailer park. There was a great deal more space in this community and I didn’t see anyone walking along the roads, as I did in Renee’s neighborhood. Additionally, all of the businesses and community activity seemed to be centrally located, with the homes located farther out. Grace described the neighborhood as being “nice and safe for the kids.”

Grace, as well as both of her parents, earned high school diplomas. While Grace would have liked to attend college, she cited a lack of money and then her first pregnancy as reasons for not pursuing higher education. Grace also grew up in an urban neighborhood in a large metropolitan city of 2,761,440 residents, and in a home where both parents worked. She described her childhood neighborhood as “rough” and her family as “hard working but we definitely struggled.” She recalled having to “skip Christmas” one year after her father had lost his job, and instead celebrated in February when their money situation was better.

Grace accepted cash, food and medical assistance and was working as a waitress. She was employed as a waitress and makes approximately $2.50 an hour plus tips. Grace estimated that she works between 25 and 30 hours a week, bringing home approximately $250-300 a week. Her hours were inconsistent and she worked “mostly nights” but “some day shifts too.” When she has to work, Bailey was cared for part-time by a babysitter and other times by her sister. She received child support on an inconsistent
basis from her estranged spouse, stating that he “pays for things when they’re together and sometimes gives us money for if there is something special.” She reported that he probably paid around $100 a month, yet not on a regular basis. She stated that he “does what he can” and “isn’t a bad guy” yet unstable employment equates to unstable child support payments. I asked Grace how she would describe her financial situation currently compared to when she was married and living with her husband and she replied, “Oh, way worse.” When asked to elaborate she said, “We were able to pay for stuff most of the time…and I mean…money was still tight, but it was better than now.” She said during the time she was married both her and her husband held a variety of different positions including retail and construction positions.

Throughout our conversation Grace remained soft-spoken and somewhat reserved, answering the questions I asked yet volunteering little else initially however I did notice her demeanor change slightly after I spoke with Kayleigh. What I had initially regarded as being soft spoken or shy, revealed itself to be a defense, as Grace seemed more open with her answers later in the initial meeting and then again throughout the interview process. This guardedness seemed to be a means to protect her family, as she proceeded into the interview process the most cautiously of all the interviewees.

Kayleigh was similar to her mother, proceeding with caution when answering some of my initial questions and attempts at getting to know her. Her mother had to push Kayleigh to answer some of my questions, as on several occasions Kayleigh would look at me and smile or look down. Finally, after giving Kayleigh a book to take home with her she began opening up, telling me she had read the same story at school. I took this opportunity to ask her about some of the things she likes to do and favorite TV shows.
As we talked she began to talk and open up more and more, looking directly at me with her brown eyes. I could see sparks of a “firecracker” as her mother described her, but mostly saw a young curly headed child who was sweet and soft-spoken.

**Grace’s responses.**

**Neighborhood opinion.**

The Tillman family live in, what Grace described as a “nice and safe” neighborhood, located in a rural community. While estranged from her spouse Grace had been living with her sister’s family for the past 9 months. She stated that she had always wanted to live in a rural neighborhood, as she believed they are “great for families and kids” and “safer than other places.” She also noted that she believed the school system in the rural community in which she lived is better than the urban district her children attended previously. When Grace was still married and living with her husband she reported that they lived in an urban community but it was “not nearly as nice as this.” She cited financial reasons for not moving to a rural community when she was married. Despite being happy with the safety and educational system present in her current neighborhood, Grace commented that she didn’t have many friends in the community. When asked why she believed that was, she attributed her focus on family and a hectic work schedule as reasons behind her feelings of community disconnectedness.

**Description of her children.**

Grace has three children, Colby, 9, Kayleigh, 6, and Bailey, 4. She describes her oldest as the “perfect first child”, as he has “always been a good kid.” According to Grace, Kayleigh admires her brother and often emulates him. Kayleigh can be a “firecracker” but can be “very shy,” as well. Like her brother she “never gets in trouble
at school” and has no educational issues that her mother observes at this time. Bailey, Grace’s youngest child, is “a whole other story” and she describes her as headstrong, confident and a “pistol.”

**Home and family dynamic.**

Grace described home life as “a little crazy,” citing her work schedule, the number of people living in their residence, and school obligations as reasons. She stated that she feels “blessed” to be living with her sister in her home as she had limited housing options, due to finances, when her and her husband separated. She recalled how her sister quickly took her in and they “squeezed” into her home. She worked mostly evenings and stated that she struggled with being separated from her children and felt uneasy about relying on her sister to watch her children while she works. Despite these negative feelings, she stated that she is happy her children are “so close” with their cousins and described a family situation that was quite supportive.

**Education: Personal and children.**

Grace completed high school and received her high school diploma. She recalls enjoying school and doing well, stating she received “mostly A’s and B’s.” She also said that she would have liked to attend college but shortly after high school she got pregnant and “we didn’t have the money.” Her children on the other hand “have to go to college…it’s not a choice,” although Grace has concerns about how she will be able to afford it. She reports that scholarships and “special programs” could help her children, which is why she believes in pushing them academically, yet is concerned because her hectic work schedule inhibits her from helping her children with their school work.
Daily struggles and sources of relief.

As mentioned before the daily struggles of the women in this study included financial stress and lack of time. Overwhelmingly the fear and trepidation about the well-being of their children dominated the conversation, specifically for Grace. Due to the evening hours of her job, Grace feels guilt for leaving her children and for missing so much of their “homework time.” Additionally, since her pay was based almost exclusively on customer tips, she felt anxiety about finances due to the discrepancy of financial intake week to week. She stated that she “just never know[s]” what she will bring home financially each week. Her biggest source of daily relief was in the relationship with her sister. She continually cited her sister’s assistance as being critical to her daily “sanity.”

Government assistance.

Grace had very little to say about the process of accepting government assistance and the positive/negative aspects of the experience. When asked about what the process was like Grace stated that, “A friend of mine told me about it and she helped me through most of it,” dismissing many of the details as forgotten or unknown. Even when probed about what she liked and didn’t like about the assistance process she simply stated, “You know…it is what it is.”

Kayleigh’s responses.

Neighborhood.

Kayleigh initially discussed the number of homes in their neighborhood when asked to describe where she lived. Kayleigh talked about the dogs in her neighborhood and one of her neighbors. She was fairly brief in her description of her neighborhood and
made statements like, “I like it” and “It’s fun.” When asked to elaborate as to why she felt this way she was unable or unwilling to elaborate further.

**School: Strengths, weaknesses and friends.**

When asked what she felt was her best strength in school Kayleigh named several areas such as “reading center” and “making books.” I also asked about areas of deficit she named mostly non-academic areas such as “cleaning-up.” When discussing the topic of friends at school, Kayleigh was quick to name several of her best friends. Kayleigh seemed to view school as a positive experience, yet it took a great deal of questioning to maintain the conversation about school.

**Home.**

I asked Kayleigh to describe her house to me and her response was that her house is “nice” with “flowers when it’s nice out.” When probed further, Kayleigh could not think of anything she disliked about her home. I mentioned to Kayleigh that I had driven by her house on the way to the interview. She smiled and said very little about my disclosure. I asked her if there was anything she would like for me to see in her neighborhood and her response was “I don’t know…not really.”

**Family themes.**

Grace was the only mother in this study who seemed to harbor guilt about the lack of time she was able to spend with her children due to work obligations. Her position, as a waitress, was the only job that took place in the evening, thus causing a different source of stress than the other parents in this study. She noted feeling upset that she missed so much after-school time with her children. Yet, she also seemed to be the mother who had the highest level of day-to-day support from her family, although she seemed to harbor...
guilt about this support, as well. Grace discussed feeling guilty for imposing so many of her prenatal responsibilities on her sister and that she was staying in her sister’s home.

**The Moss Family (Jeanette and Anthony): Suburban**

An early childhood teacher in Anthony’s school referred me to the Moss Family. This teacher was familiar with Anthony’s family through school events and in the community. Jeanette was a 26-year-old single mother who grew up in an urban neighborhood in a metropolitan area of approximately 780,000. She described her family’s socioeconomic status as “low middle class,” with both of her parents working throughout her childhood. Her father only completed “some high school,” dropping out during his senior year due to behavioral problems. Just like Jeanette, her mother earned her high school diploma yet entered the workforce immediately after high school. Jeanette stated that a new baby and lack of money post-high school postponed the pursuit of a college education. She said that she “got a good job a few years after high school and stuck with that.” Jeanette is currently employed by the state Department of Corrections and works at the county jail. Her annual salary is approximately $19,000.

Jeanette was single, had never been married, and was accepting medical and child care assistance. She lived in a suburban community of approximately 40,000, which appeared to be the quintessential suburban neighborhood. Driving through the area where Jeanette lives I noticed a number of nice, average-income, single-family homes. There was a mixture of single and multi-story homes, with most being fairly well maintained. All of the homes looked as if they were built within the last 15 or 20 years, and the apartment complexes looked equally as new. The apartment complexes in Jeanette’s neighborhood had a more pleasant overall appearance, with basic maintenance
such as paint and landscaping tended to. I asked Jeanette how she would describe her current financial situation in comparison to her financial situations of the past. To my surprise she commented that she was “doing better” than she had in the past. She described “almost” being homeless at several points shortly after Anthony was born. Jeanette stated that she struggled to pay her bills and “get enough money in” to pay her basic expenses. Prior to living in the suburban neighborhood in which she resided, she lived in an urban neighborhood similar to where she lived during her childhood. She reiterated that while where she currently was living wasn’t her, “or anyone’s,” ideal neighborhood she was significantly more satisfied with her current residence than her past one.

Jeanette’s youngest child, James, was 3-years-old and did not attend school. Jeanette’s next-door neighbor cared for James when Jeanette is at work. She had James in an in-home daycare until it became “too expensive.” Despite the fact that Jeanette’s neighbor cared for her youngest son, she reported often feeling “alone” in her neighborhood and isolated.

During the time that Jeanette and I were talking, her son Anthony often interrupted and acted as if he wanted to participate in the discussion. From where he was sitting, I would often look over and see him watching us, as if he were trying to figure out exactly what he was doing there and who I was. When I called him over to come join us he did so right away, and the first question he asked inquired about who exactly I was and why I was talking to them. He was very curious about why I wanted to record what he was saying and spoke several times directly into the microphone of my voice recorder. He was funny, almost charming, from the beginning, making jokes and being silly.
Jeanette’s responses

*Neighborhood opinion.*

The Moss family lived in a suburban, townhouse-style apartment for approximately a year. Jeanette described their home as “nice but a little small for all of us,” yet is happy with the neighborhood and stated it is “nice for kids.” While Jeanette was happy with the safety of her neighborhood she stated that she often feels isolated and alone. She does not report having a sense of community in her neighborhood and stated that her neighbors simply “come and go.”

*Description of her children.*

Jeanette became slightly emotional when talking about her children. Anthony, her oldest at 7 years old, came with her to the interviews and sat at a table just outside of the room we were in. When talking about him she would look over at him with both pride and concern. She described Anthony as “just like his father,” whom Anthony had not seen for several years and who currently lives approximately 3 hours south. She characterized Anthony as “smart yet mean,” but added that he “truly has such a good heart” and can be “so loving.” Academically, Anthony excels in school, yet she recounts a number of behavioral issues they are “working through.” James, 3, is “doing fine” but she had fears that he too will have behavior issues in school when he gets older. Jeanette added that her children “are my life.”

*Home life and family dynamic.*

Although Jeanette described her career as “demanding” at times, she said she was “lucky” to have stable shifts and evenings with her children. She felt that she was able to spend an adequate amount of time with her children in the evenings, but wished that she
“made more” so that she was able to provide more extensive experiences to her children, such as museum memberships or trips to the zoo. Jeanette stated that community experiences are “just too much” for her to afford.

**Education and personal experience.**

Jeanette received her high school diploma but stated that due to lack of money and a new baby shortly after high school she was unable to pursue a college education. She cited college “or even further” as a necessity for her children but cited lack of financial means as a concern, as well. Jeanette’s personal experience with school was described as “fine” but she stated that she “wouldn’t do it again.”

**Daily struggles and sources of relief.**

When asked if there were specific agencies of community organizations that aided in their stress or helped their families find relief emotionally or financially, Jeanette simply replied “no.”

**Government assistance.**

Jeanette provided very little information regarding the process of accepting assistance or the result the assistance yielded for her family. Jeanette stated that, “It wasn’t too bad. Mostly just took some time.” Overall it seemed that the process of accepting government assistance was time consuming and something she didn’t give much thought.

**Anthony’s responses.**

**Neighborhood.**

Anthony discussed the number of homes in their neighborhood, with Anthony stating if you “go this way and then around and then over here then you see more and
more of them.” Anthony commented several times about the number of cars parked on the street and the size of the buildings in his apartment complex. When asked if there was anything thing they didn’t like about their neighborhoods Anthony had difficulty coming up with a response. When the conversation shifted to Anthony’s home, his apartment, he continued to reference previously mentioned aspects of his neighborhood. As I had done with the other children, I informed Anthony that I had driven by his neighborhood prior to meeting with him and he wanted to be sure I went down his street to see “all the cars.”

School: Strengths, weaknesses and friends.

Anthony had surprisingly very little to share about his schools, even when probed. When asked to describe his school Anthony struggled to find the words. I then asked more detailed questions like “Tell me about your teacher” and received very simple responses like “She’s nice” or “I like her.” Overall Anthony described school as an enjoyable place with many people he would consider friends. Again, similar to the other children in this study, most of the information gathered was simply answers to questions and Anthony told almost no stories about school or friends.

Home.

Anthony stated that he likes where he lives but he “can’t wait to move,” but he can’t because his mother’s “got no money.” He reported that she needed to “save money” so that they were able to move. When asked about the positive aspects of his home, Anthony talked about the size of the buildings, the number of cars on the street, and how his complex winds around or is “windy.” I had to specifically ask him to describe the inside of his house in order for him to begin the conversation about his
personal apartment unit. Even when discussing his apartment he referred back to the exterior, commenting on the “big building across the street with the gray on it.” He reported the negative aspect of his home as being “noisy” and expressed a desire for it to be bigger. Despite Anthony’s wish for a larger home he never described it as being small, or “really little” as Amya had. Instead, when asked about his home he often referred to his apartment complex as a whole and not his individual apartment, and often commented about how big it was.

**Family themes.**

With the Moss Family, I noticed several things that distinctly set them apart from the other families in this study. Jeanette was the only mother who seemed to express feelings of guilt for not being able to provide for her family. She reported wishing that she could afford museum memberships and community outings to places like the zoo. Ironically, Jeanette was the mother with the most stable employment, holding a job at the state Department of Corrections.

Anthony was the only child who continued to refer to his neighborhood when asked about his home. He referenced the size of the buildings, the physical attributes and the cars on the street when asked to describe his home. Even when specifically asked about his individual apartment complex, Anthony continued to reference aspects of his neighborhood.

**Summary**

Three mothers and three children were interviewed in this study. Each mother and child were asked a variety of questions meant to provoke conversation, encourage participants to share personal experiences, and gain insight into the daily lives of children
and mothers living in poverty. The following chapter will examine the themes that were identified throughout the parent and child interviews and the meaning behind these common occurrences.
Chapter V: Analysis and Results

Examination of Parental Interviews and Identification of Themes

After the parental interviews were complete and transcribed, each was analyzed in a variety of ways in order to determine overriding themes. The themes were derived from a cross-case analysis of the individual parent cases. Throughout the interview process I noticed that these themes were present despite the topic of my questioning. The mothers in this study continued to return to each of these themes when explaining different situations, opinions, and experiences.

Two main themes resulting from the parent interviews were identified, with each having distinct origins in the lives of the three mothers. The themes are as follows:

- Care for the well being of their children influenced by:
  - Past experiences
  - Life events of peers
  - Fear of the future

- Level of support
  - Neighbors
  - Family
  - School
  - Government assistance

Care for the well-being of their children.

Each of the mothers in this study expressed a very strong desire to protect the social, emotional, and academic well-being of their children. During both interviews
with mothers, the theme of child protection and the desire for the best future for their children was strongly present. This feeling of protection derived from several different origins: (1) previous parental experiences stemming from childhood or other past experiences, (2) witnessing the life events of peers or family members, and (3) fear of the future.

*Past experiences.*

All three parents in this study noted some form of negative past experience that they wished to prevent for their children. Renee, the mother in this study living in an urban neighborhood, discussed physical and emotional abuse she and her sisters experienced at a young age from her mother.

My mama had a lot of issues. She didn’t know no better really, and she tried her best I think, but I just want to be better. She used to yell a lot…I mean a lot. She’d get all hot and chase us around and when we was bad we’d get hit in the mouth or back or butt. Not that we didn’t help none, we weren’t exactly angels. I think she was just frustrated because she didn’t have nobody either and had all us kids. But still I grew up thinking that I didn’t want to be like that to my babies. I didn’t want to go around hittin’ them and stuff just because I was mad about work or something.

Renee’s experiences as a child, with her own mother, seemed to affect how she wanted to raise her children. When asked more about her mother in the second interview she commented that her mother was also “real young when she had her babies,” like Renee, but that Renee had been more proactive in the raising of her own children. She reported that when she was pregnant with her first child she read a book “all about what was going
to happen at certain ages” and when choosing a place to live she purposely chose a complex that was “close to a park” and “seemed to have other families and kids around.”

Living in a rural neighborhood, Grace also reported past experiences that she wanted to change in order to better the lives of her children. While Grace reported that she lived in an urban neighborhood prior to moving in with her sister, she believed that rural environments are “safer” for children.

I grew up in the city and really we saw a lot of dangerous things. We had lots of break-ins and theft and then there was, of course, the drugs and dealers. I remember being able to get drugs from a bunch of different people basically anytime of the day. I really don’t want my kids to be exposed to that which is why I’m really happy we are where we are now. My old place wasn’t bad, but it wasn’t like this. I mean I don’t think my kids would be able to go out and get drugs easily at all.

Grace reiterated her comfort in living in a rural neighborhood in the second interview, stating that she was “really blessed to be living here. It’s not anything I’d be able to afford on my own. The schools are so much better and I really don’t have to worry much when they walk out the door.” Grace’s experiences growing up in an urban neighborhood caused her to seek to avoid them for her children, yet due to “money and my husband’s job” she was not able to move to a “safer” suburban or rural neighborhood as she had wished. Moving in with her sister allowed her to avoid the fears of her childhood, and protect her children from what she believes are the dangers of urban neighborhoods.
Jeanette, on the other hand, did not express neighborhood fears for her children. Instead, she felt passionate that her children not repeat some of the mistakes she made as a young adult.

I didn’t do much right when I was growing up. I didn’t listen much to my mom or dad and I surely didn’t take my education a serious as I should have. I cut school, I messed around with drugs…nothing too serious, just pot but still got myself into all sorts of trouble there…and boys. Boys were trouble early on. Makes me wonder what my mother was thinking sometimes she let me run around. I was bound to get into trouble. Excuse me, but hell no my kids will do that. My kids will be under lock and key compared to me. I don’t need them getting no one pregnant or arrested. They’re going to finish school and be something big.

Furthermore, all three women reported that they grew up in an urban neighborhood, attending inner-cities schools. Renee and Jeanette both grew up in and around the same large metropolitan area of approximately 770,000 residents and Grace grew up in a large urban area of 2,700,000. So while current living arrangements and experiences differed, past experiences, in terms of neighborhood and financial history, were similar.

*Life events of peers.*

Parental past experiences, whether they be childhood or otherwise, stood out as important when prioritizing the desires for their children, but peer influences and their personal experiences also played a part. All three women described situations and events that impacted the lives of friends and extended family members that they wished to
prevent or encourage in the lives of their children. These external experiences influenced what they hoped for their own children’s futures.

Renee describes her desire to push her children in school, as she is aware that there are financial aid opportunities for higher performing students.

My friend’s kid did real good in school and they gave him a scholarship that paid for all his college. My kids are real smart and I know if they work hard they’ll be able to get a scholarship, too.

While mothers were uplifted by the experiences shared by peers, as in Renee’s example, the experiences of the children of peers seem to create a fear for the future of their children, as well. This fear seemed to cause the mothers in this study to be more protective of their children or concerned for their futures. All three women shared concerns regarding the trouble their children may get into as they get older. Renee referenced her nephew that dropped out of high school during his sophomore year due to failing grades, truancy and overall behavior issues in school. Grace also discussed the behavior and emotional issues present in her sibling’s children.

Ronnie’s boy always had a lot of trouble in school. He was always getting suspended and I figure probably didn’t do great with his grades. He managed to graduate – that was a miracle – but he ain’t going no where. He still runs with a lot of kids he went to school with and doesn’t have a job. Just parties a lot.

The experiences of friends impacted Jeanette, as she described her girlfriend’s daughter who had a child during high school and abused alcohol and cigarettes.

She got pregnant when she was 15 and she was horrible when she was pregnant - drinking and smoking all the time. I can’t imagine. She was like smoking a pack
a day – a pack, I don’t even do a pack - when she was pregnant with that baby – ended up having it early. Now Shelly’s got her and her girl’s run off again with who knows what.

Just as their own past experiences had affected their view of parenting, and lifetime goals for their children, the past experiences of peers, friends and family also seemed to greatly influence the parents in this study.

_Fear of the future._

Both the childhood and personal experiences of the mothers in this study, as well as the experiences of those close to them contributed to the overall fear of the future these parents had. All three women exhibited an overall care for the well-being of their children, both currently and in the future. The mothers all seemed to feel confident in their control over the everyday lives of their children presently, yet exhibited concern over the futures of their children. When asked the question “Do you worry about your children?” the mothers answered:

*Renee:* I’ve seen too much not to be worried.

*Grace:* Of course I worry. I worry all the time.

*Jeanette:* Yeah, I worry about them every time they walk out the door.

While it is anticipated that most mothers would worry about the general welfare of their children, each woman in this study cited past personal experiences and peer personal experiences as the reasons for their worrying. When asked to clarify, the mothers seemed to exhibit less concern with the present and near future.
Renee: I’m very involved in her school – I talk to her teacher all the time and get to go in for stuff. So I’m not real worried because I know she’d say something if she was acting up or whatever.

Grace: I got nothing to worry about ‘cause they so little – except for getting sick and stuff. But I’m not worried about them getting into trouble now or nothing.

Jeanette: I’m not worried about now because I can watch him. He don’t go no where except ‘round my house.

When probed further, the mothers revealed that they are in fact quite concerned with factors such as educational attainment, drug use, behavioral issues, and teenage pregnancy. Jeanette stated:

We’ve had some behavior problems with Anthony in school, which has made me really worried…because you know he can’t just go doing things like that. He has to be able to take school and academics and teachers seriously or he’ll really have a hard time. I don’t want him to get kicked out or have teachers talking about him before he’s even with them about how bad he is. No way he’ll succeed then.

All of the women in this study shared similar sentiments about fears of the future, with the exception of Renee, the urban parent in this study, who added that she also feared neighborhood and gang violence as possibilities in her children’s futures.

They got all sorts of crazies around here. I don’t want my kids getting mixed up with stealing or shooting…killing…and getting locked up. Some of them kids…trouble.
Level of support.

Another theme present throughout the interviews with each of the parents was that of support. Each mother discussed the importance of and, for most, the lack of support they currently have in their lives. This support, or lack there of, appeared to directly impact the day-to-day functioning of the families in this study. Several of the women noted feeling “frustrated,” “alone,” and “a mess” with the amount of support they received. On the other hand, when support was positive, the mothers reported feeling “saved,” “in the loop,” and even referred to their support systems as “lifesavers.”

Neighbors.

Renee referred to others in her apartment complex that were willing to “step up and help” if she was in a difficult situation or needed assistance. The types of assistance these people in her apartment complex have provided include giving her money for gas and watching her children if she had errands to run or had to go to work. Renee states:

Oh man, what would I do, I don’t even know. I mean it can be rough sometimes and all it takes is a little help from a nice person…and I remember that…and try to do it back when I can…we just all gotta look out. Lookin’ out is what’s real important because everyone needs it. The people around me have saved me a number of times when I was stuck. Hope they feel like that about me.

Conversely, Jeanette remarked feeling “alone” and “on my own” stating that she couldn’t “depend” on any friends or family members, at least those that live in the greater metropolitan area.

There’s just no one around. I got to take on my own burdens, you know? It’s too bad and…but…I really think it would be nice, though. To have like a group or
something. Just to cry on and complain to. I don’t want money or nothing, just maybe someone I can talk to and get a favor from once and awhile and, I mean, sure I’d do the same. Sure. People just mind their own stuff…go about their days, which I get, too. But sometimes it’s rough going at it like this.

**Family.**

Both Renee, the urban parent, and Jeanette, the suburban parent discussed their lack of family support. When asked why they believed they did not have a strong family support system the mothers replied:

*Renee:* My mom got her own issues to deal with…she don’t need mine, too…and that’s been clearly said.

*Jeanette:* Ha. That’s a great question. I don’t know. I just don’t.

On the other hand, Grace noted a great deal of family support, as she is currently residing with her sister. She refers to her sister’s support as “a lifesaver for me and my kids.” According to Grace, she would have been living in a shelter or in a hotel had it not been for the generosity of her sister. Her sister is able to provide not only shelter, but also a social level of support, minor monetary help, and assistance with childcare. This level of support is similar to the support Renee experiences in her community through the help of her neighbors.

**School.**

While Grace had a great deal of family support, she was the mother in this study that seemed to struggle the most with lack of support from the school. She stated:
They really don’t understand what we’re going through over here. I mean I’m sharing a house with my sister and her family, I don’t have any money and I work nights – I can’t put everything on my sister. She’s got kids, too. Sometimes I just can’t get around to homework or notes or helping with stuff and I know I forget but I’m trying the best I can. I feel bad my kids sometimes get in trouble ‘cause of me but what am I supposed to do?

Conversely, Renee felt that her child’s school was supportive of their financial and family situation, referencing opportunities to participate in the classroom, as well as free-lunch and discounted school supplies/book rental. She reported that the school does have food/clothing support for families in need several times a year, and while she applied, her family was not chosen. Additionally, she noted having good communication with her child’s teacher and the ability to comfortably participate in her child’s classroom. She commented that she felt “in the loop” when it came to the educational needs of her child. Jeanette referred to “special programs for people who need help” that are available at her child’s school. She said she hadn’t participated in many (with the exception of the free/reduced lunch program) but she knew another parent who had and was happy with the helpfulness of the school.

**Government assistance.**

When asked about the process of and experience with government assistance, I was surprised that the mothers in this study did not have more to contribute as far as opinions or experiences. I asked the mothers to explain the process of gaining government assistance and each was minimally responsive, even when probed. When
asked to describe the process of seeking and gaining the government assistance they are currently receiving the following responses were given:

*Renee:* You just gotta put in a bunch of stuff about yourself and then they tell you if you are able to get help. It was OK.

*Grace:* A friend of mine told me about it and she helped me through most of it.

*Jeanette:* It wasn’t too bad. Mostly just took some time.

When encouraged to elaborate further, the basic processes of filing and, in some cases receiving assistance was discussed. Overall it seemed that the process of accepting government assistance was time consuming but not much of a thought even though each of the women were accepting multiple forms of government assistance, significantly contributing the to the day-to-day well being of their families. I assumed that financial assistance would have the most impact on the mothers due to their socioeconomic status. Instead it is possible that government assistance programs, while important, were not in the forefront of the minds of these mothers. Perhaps the reason for this was that the mothers in this study did not feel comfortable discussing the specifics of their financial situation with me due to a lack of a developed relationship. They may have also viewed me as an “outsider” in the world of poverty, thus did not feel comfortable discussing the specifics of their personal finances with me.

Similarly, when discussing types of support each of the families received, not one of the mothers mentioned support from social service or community agencies. If they are in fact receiving support from these agencies the mothers did not rank that support as important as the support provided from friends, family or even the school.
Similarities and Differences of the Mothers

While the women in this study shared many similar characteristics such as race, sex, the acceptance of government assistance, and marital status, there were still a number of areas in which these women were dissimilar. Even within their own socioeconomic status as “low-income” the women differed substantially, with one mother being unemployed, another working a restaurant job with fluctuating hours, and another with a more stable government position. The women differed in educational attainment, family support, age when becoming a mother, and number of children, all in addition to the fact that each woman lived in a completely different neighborhood location and environment. Yet, despite these differences, the mothers all shared similar stories detailing fears based on experiences. These common experiences with abuse, neighborhood violence and delinquency are the driving forces behind the hopes and fears for their children.

The mothers shared a number of commonalities, yet the area that stood out to be the most diverse and impactful on the day-to-day lives of the families was that of support. Each of the women reported varied levels of support from their community, their families and their children’s school.

Renee felt she could rely on her friends and neighbors in her community when times are tough. These people offered some small monetary assistance, but mostly the emotional support of having someone to relate to and the donation of time (through the supervision of Renee’s children when she is unavailable) was the most meaningful in Renee’s life. In contrast, Jeanette reported feelings of loneliness and solitude due to social isolation and the lack of peer relationships.
The social support system in Renee’s life seemed to make up for the lack of family support, yet still leaves Jeanette without a person in which to depend. Grace, whom reported little community and school support, had the most supportive family life, calling her sister a “lifesaver.” Just as Renee had discussed the benefits of having her neighbors as a source of aid, Grace relied on her sister in the same manner, almost more so due to the addition of housing assistance.

Grace was the oldest mother in this study and the only one currently residing with family members. Grace, like the other mothers in this study, grew up in an urban neighborhood but stated that she is happy living in a rural environment, as she believed they are “safer” for children. She went so far as to say that she felt “blessed” to being living in the home with her sister due to both the neighborhood and the quality of the schools.

Jeanette was the mother in this study that was speculatively the most comfortable in her neighborhood and in her home. She felt that her neighborhood environment was safe and “nice for kids”. She was the mother that had the most stable employment in that it was regular, daytime working hours.

**Examination of Child Interviews and Identification of Themes**

Just as I had done with the interviews with the mothers, I took notes throughout the child interview process, audiotaped each of the interviews, then listened to and transcribed each session. Following transcription, I read and reread each interview searching for themes. The identification of themes for the child interviews were conducted slightly differently, as more information was derived at the initial interviews with the mothers. At the interviews with the children I found myself noting body
language and disposition more often than actual meaning from the stories they told. Only after the transcription process was complete was I able to fully examine the child interviews. Due to the less articulate conversational manner of the children in this study, I found myself often catching aspects of the interviews in the review of the transcripts that I had missed during the live interviews.

After a cross-case analysis of each child interview was complete, several main themes were identified which included:

- **Burden of finances**
  - Bills
  - Assistance from others
- **Knowledge of crime and violence**
- **Perceptions of family life**
  - Perceptions of wealth
  - Perceptions of home

**Burden of finances.**

*Bills.*

While all three children lived in different communities, each shared similar experiences and knowledge about poverty. Throughout the interviews and the discussions surrounding the stories in the interviews, the topic of “bills” came up several times. The word “bills” and/or the concept of bills were not used in the first three stories or in my questioning with the children until they initiated the topic. The discussion of
“bills” and the debt of money to others were entirely organic and initiated by the children, yet a common topic for Amya and Anthony.

When talking about a particular character in one of the books we had read who had lost his job, Amya, the child living in an urban neighborhood, discussed her experience with bills and family expenses.

*Researcher:* He really wants a dog. Do you think the daddy is thinking about a dog?

*Amya:* No I think he’s thinking about his job and bills and stuff.

*Researcher:* Bills and stuff?

*Amya:* Yeah, I spy on my mommy on the phone because she really don’t want me to hear what she’s talking about. So I spy on her. So we have this bathroom and I go around and I look around the door and I peek. Then when she looks this way I go back into the living room so I don’t let her see me.

*Researcher:* What do you think she’s talking about?

*Amya:* I think she’s talking about bills and stuff. We have a lot of those.

*Researcher:* Oh really? What kind of bills?

*Amya:* We have to pay for food and for bread and lights. If the light man doesn’t get money they go off. I don’t know why’d they do that. Everyone needs lights. They should just give us lights. Oh and gas…for the car. That’s a big bill.

Amya added later that “sometimes my mommy cries about them,” referring to the bills.

When probed further about why she believed her mother was upset she responded that she did not know.
Similar to Amya, Anthony, the child living in a suburban neighborhood, also discussed bills and their importance in his everyday life.

*Researcher:* Do you like where you live?

*Anthony:* Yeah except I can’t wait to move.

*Researcher:* Why?

*Anthony:* ‘Cause I want to move but I still want to go to my school.

*Researcher:* Why do you want to move?

*Anthony:* ‘Cause I like the house that my mom is in but I just want to move so bad. Mom said we can’t though.

*Researcher:* Why not?

*Anthony:* She’s got no money. We have to stay in our house ‘till she’s got some more. It all goes out to stuff.

*Researcher:* Like what?

*Anthony:* Like bills and other bills. Lots of bills. They come in the mail.

*Researcher:* Oh, in the mail.

*Anthony:* Yup, and you have to put money in them or you get in trouble. My mom gets in trouble sometimes and she can’t answer her phone.

*Researcher:* Why can’t she answer her phone?

*Anthony:* Because they call. Because she’ll get in trouble more!

*Researcher:* Who calls?

*Anthony:* The bill men.

Anthony went on to talk about how the “bill men” will keep calling until “mommy’s money comes.” When asked where his mother gets the money for bills he
didn’t know for sure but speculated “someone nice gives it to her so she doesn’t get in trouble.” Kayleigh, on the other hand, did not discuss “bills” but instead blamed parental control on the reasoning behind purchases.

*Researcher:* Yeah, he really wanted to buy the dog, but because of those “tight times” his daddy keeps talking about he can’t. What do you think that means?

*Kayleigh:* I think maybe his dad’s allergic or just doesn’t like ‘em.

*Researcher:* Hmmm…maybe. You know, one time I really wanted a pair of shoes…. 

*Kayleigh:* Like in the other book

*Researcher:* Yeah, like in the other book. But like the little boy in the other book, I didn’t have enough money to buy them. Do you think the dad in this story is like that? Do you think maybe he doesn’t have enough money to buy the dog? Or feed him, maybe?

*Kayleigh:* Umm…[thinking] well…um…well see here [pointing to book] the dad looks sad like he’s had a bad day so maybe he just doesn’t like dogs and they would make his day worse.

*Researcher:* Maybe. But I think he’s had a bad day because he lost his job, remember? And remember you said that when you lose your job your food will get “all empty”?

*Kayleigh:* No…he probably just doesn’t want him to have it. Like my mom won’t let me get a hamster like Destiny R.

*Researcher:* But dogs, and hamsters cost money, right?
Kayleigh: [shrugs] Yeah, but moms are the bosses. If they say no, it means no.

Well unless we really bug her.

As a researcher, I attempted to probe Kayleigh to be sure she understood my questioning, yet she held firm. While she agreed that a dog does cost money, she was adamant that financial means alone would not hold someone back from purchasing something. This is a stark difference from the other children in this study, whose awareness of the need for money for daily tasks such as buying food and paying for utilities is apparent.

Assistance from others.

Just as the children were aware of the financial needs of their mothers, they were also aware of when their families were receiving help from friends and family members. While several of the mothers in this study noted a lack of family support, the children in this study in fact reported support from their family financially, particularly from their grandmothers.

Of the three children in this study, Amya was the most vocal about her family’s financial experiences, elaborating about a time her family had to borrow money from her grandmother. Once again talking about the character in one of the children’s books that had lost his job Amya recalls a time when her mother was given money when her family was struggling.

Researcher: What will happen now? He lost his job and like you said he won’t be bringing any money home? What will happen?
Amya: Well maybe somebody has a job for him and will come and tell him then give him a job. Like my grandma got a job and then gave some money to my mommy.

Researcher: She did?

Amya: Yeah because we didn’t have no money to get some stuff.

Researcher: Why not?

Amya: Because we ran out. ‘Cause when me and my mommy went shopping that’s all we had.

Researcher: What were you shopping for?

Amya: Some milk and bread and stuff.

Researcher: So why did grandma give mommy money?

Amya: Because we needed to buy some cards and birthday stuff for my brother because his birthday is coming up.

To follow-up on Anthony’s previous statement regarding “someone nice” giving his mother money for bills, I asked him several questions encouraging him to elaborate further. He discussed visiting his grandmother’s house for dinner and while this type of assistance is more subtle than Amya’s account of family support, it is a form of support, nonetheless.

Anthony: Yeah, I don’t know who gives my mommy money for bills. Maybe my grandma or grandpa who died? They give us clothes and toys and stuff a lot…even when it’s not my birthday.

Researcher: Yeah, my grandparents do that, too.

Anthony: Do you go to their house? For dinner and stuff?
Researcher: Sometimes, but my grandma and grandpa live far away. Do you go to your grandma’s house for dinner?

Anthony: Oh yeah! We eat chicken…the mushy kind…other stuff…ice cream. And potatoes and pie.

Researcher: Sounds yummy!

Anthony: Uh huh! And we always get to bring some home because we don’t have dinner like that. Grandma gives us extra sometimes. And pancake mix so we can make some on not school days.

Of the three child participants, Kayleigh, the child living in a rural community, again, had the least to say about the finances of her family, although did seem knowledgeable about expenses and the result of having a lack of money. Once again, utilizing the children’s books as a conversation starter, we discussed a character in the story that had lost his job. During the conversation Kayleigh described what she believed would occur if someone lost his or her job.

Researcher: So he lost his job, what does that mean?

Kayleigh: They won’t be able to buy nothing and their food will get all empty.

Researcher: Their food will get all empty? Wow.

Kayleigh: Yeah and they’ll get hungry and have to borrow food from their grandma or from the store.

Researcher: Do you know anyone who has had their food all empty and had to borrow food?

Kayleigh: We had to once. From my grandma…and before from a store.

Researcher: What did you borrow?
Kayleigh: I don’t know really…bread…and stuff…cereal but not the kind I like.

And some other stuff.

Kayleigh was unable to explain the situation surrounding why her family had “borrowed” food from her grandmother and the “store.” She stated that her mother had not lost her job, as the character in the story had, simply that their food was “all gone.” Soon after this probing Kayleigh began responding with many “I don’t know” statements, communicating to me that she was uncomfortable continuing with the questioning, therefore I returned to reading the story in order to restore Kayleigh to her original comfort level. In a follow-up interview, I attempted again to engage Kayleigh in a conversation about wealth and money. While it was clear that she had knowledge regarding the financial status of her immediate and extended family, she was the unable to articulate why these financial situations were reality.

Researcher: Do you know anyone who doesn’t have a lot of money?

Kayleigh: Uh, yeah, my aunt. She doesn’t have any money at all. She’s broke.

Researcher: How do you know?

Kayleigh: I don’t know.

Researcher: What’s broke mean?

Kayleigh: No money.

Researcher: How do you know she’s broke?

Kayleigh: I don’t know.

The different experiences of the children in this study varied, yet Amya seemed the most connected with the assistance her family was receiving. This was interesting, since Amya’s financial and home situation had the most potential for chaos, as Renee
was unemployed, the youngest of the mothers in this study, and the mother who accepted
the most government assistance. While this is true, Amya’s account of the assistance her
family received was stated as fact, without a feeling of guilt or recognition that she was
potentially different from anyone else.

Another interesting aspect of this theme was that the children did not mention the
process of accepting government assistance, other than Kayleigh’s mention of
“borrowing” food from the store. The mothers in this study had a limited amount to say
regarding the acceptance of government assistance, as well, which may have had an
influence on why this was not a topic the children discussed.

**Knowledge of crime and violence.**

Children living in neighborhoods with high populations of poverty are likely to
experience incidences of crime, drugs or violence (Wilson, 2010; Jackson et al., 2009;
Galster & Santiago, 2006; Newman & Massengill, 2006), yet it was still startling to hear
the familiarity of the stories the children in this study recalled regarding personal or
family crime/violence. While more notably, and vividly recalled by Amya and Anthony
(the urban and suburban children), even Kayleigh was able to account circumstances of
violence. These stories of violence developed naturally, with no mention of violence or
crime in any of the stories or questions presented during the interview process.

When discussing Amya’s home and her neighborhood, she brought up a vivid
story about arson in her apartment complex.

*Amya:* It’s better now since we moved.

*Researcher:* Yeah? Why?

*Amya:* Yeah, we’re way safer now. We had to move to be in a safer apartment.
Researcher: Was your old apartment unsafe?

Amya: Oh yeah. We had this person...a bad person...who set a chair on fire...all way up on fire in a hallway and we had to go out when the alarms went off and everyone did because the firemen came. And we had to stand off away so the firemen can work on our apartment and there was fire in the roof and they sprayed water and a girl died. And her baby. They died because of the fire.

Researcher: Oh my goodness! That’s awful! That is so sad!

Amya: Because bad people set the chair on fire the girl and her baby died. They had to hide in a bathtub.

At the conclusion of the interview with Amya the day she told this particular story, I spoke with her mother about its accuracy. Renee confirmed that Amya had indeed told a true story, and while the fire was not in their direct apartment building it was in their complex and they had to evacuate as Amya had described. The section of buildings that Amya’s family had been residing in had sustained fire damage therefore they were transferred to another section of the complex. The police had ruled the crime arson, and unfortunately, Amya’s description of the death of a mother and her child was correct.

Anthony, also told a vivid story of violent crime which surfaced when discussing the loss of employment, as experienced by one of the characters in one of the children’s books read during an interview.

Researcher: What does that mean?

Anthony: It means he’s not going to work no more.

Researcher: Do you know of anyone who lost their job?
Anthony: Yeah, the first time my grandpa he was going at work and then when he went to work was doing stuff he’s not supposed to do then they fired him. Then he can’t go to his job no more. Then the last time when he was going to work then they said he can’t go. Then the last time a person came out when he was inside of his car. The person told him to put his hands up, and then to roll his window down and then they shot him and now he died and I don’t have a grandpa no more.

Researcher: Somebody shot your grandpa? Why?

Anthony: ‘Cause they were being mean to him and didn’t want him to go to work.

Researcher: The people he worked with?

Anthony: No the other people, the people that robbed stores and stuff. Like bad guys.

Researcher: I’m sorry that happened. That is very sad.

Anthony: And then after it happened I cried by myself and then I thought I’d never have a grandpa.

Just as I had done with Amya, I wanted to be sure that Anthony’s story was accurate and so I verified it with his mother, as children under the 8 years of age may not always recall information correctly and confuse reality and fantasy (Rebok et. al, 2001). She confirmed that, sadly, Anthony’s grandfather was shot and killed in his car due to a conflict with co-workers.

In contrast with the other two children in this study, Kayleigh did not bring up or discuss any crime or violence to her knowledge. When asked about her neighborhood and her home she mentioned all positive aspects of her residence. She mentioned that
her neighborhood “has a lot of houses and people in the neighborhood gots dogs and they’re cute” and when asked if she like living there she said that it was “cool.”

**Perceptions of family life.**

More than any other area of influence, family and home life stood out as the most important and relevant aspect of the children’s lives. When asked about their homes and families the children had a number of stories to tell and experiences to share. The children had more to say about their homes and families than they did about their school or friends, which was an unexpected outcome of this study. Due to the amount of time each child spent in school, it was surprising that school did not have more of a presence in the conversations in this study. When asked specifically about their school life the children were ambiguous and brief, even when probed. Instead family and home experiences were prominent throughout the interviews, dominating the stories told by the children. Two main themes regarding these home life experiences emerged: (1) perceptions of personal wealth and (2) perceptions of home.

**Perceptions of wealth.**

While each of the children in this study come from low-income homes, their perceptions on the financial status of their own family differed greatly. Amya, who lives in an urban neighborhood, felt strongly that her family didn’t have a lot of money. She easily related to many of the photographs that were shared and, on several occasions, compared her family with the struggling characters one in of the stories we read. When asked if she knew of anyone “in real life” like the characters in the story Amya replied: “All I know is just my family.” When asked why she believed her family was similar to the low-income family in the story, Amya stated:
Amya: Because…I don’t really think we have enough money to buy some stuff. And I don’t understand them why they’re not going to get more money. Like just get some more, you know? So I was peeking on her to tell her to just go out and get some more money if she’s sad and she was talking about stuff like bills and stuff so when the bills come she can pay more money so she can get my brother some cards.

Researcher: Where do you think she can go to get more money?

Amya: She can get some at the bank or get someone to give her some.

Researcher: But what if she can’t get anyone to give her money? And there’s not any in the bank? What then?

Amya: Well that’s why I said we was like them [pointing to the book]. Because there’s a lot of times where she won’t ask no one. Just go get some more money! Then we can be rich.

Amya’s perception of her family’s wealth was not necessarily shared by all the children in this study, despite their similar socioeconomic status. Anthony and Kayleigh were both familiar with others who were experiencing financial hardships, yet they did not necessarily see themselves as being in that category. When discussing why someone would not be able to buy an object that they desired or why one would choose the lesser quality or quantity of an item both children believed it was due to personal choice or parental choice. As mentioned previously Kayleigh was adamant that parental choice was to blame. For example, when discussing a character in one of the stories and why he couldn’t have a dog for a pet, had to eat the foods he didn’’t like (versus the more
expensive foods) and couldn’t go on a vacation the children all stated that it must have been because he didn’t really “want” any of those things.

*Kayleigh:* He maybe just wanted something else. If he really wanted that one kind of cereal he would just have to get his mom to buy it.

*Researcher:* Well, what if his mom didn’t have the money to buy it? I think he has to eat this one because it doesn’t cost as much as the other one.

*Kayleigh:* No, he was probably bad. Moms can get what they want…she just doesn’t want to give it to him. Maybe he didn’t tell her he wanted it.

*Researcher:* Do you always get everything you ask mom for?

*Kayleigh:* [laugh] Yeah right. I’m not good all the time and sometimes forget to tell mom, too. Maybe his mom forgot? Or maybe she was just in a bad mood. That happens to grown ups.

Throughout further discussion on the topic Kayleigh held to her opinion, just as before, that surely the character in the story didn’t get the food he desired or the pet, simply because his mother had forgotten, made the choice not to get it for him, or because the little boy had misbehaved or had forgotten to properly ask for it. Kayleigh even stated that maybe he didn’t “use please and thank you” when asking for the more expensive cereal. Additionally, in later interviews when discussing homes, Kayleigh insinuated that one must be rich in order to buy a house. She was then asked if she believed she was rich since her family lived in a home, to which she replied: “Yeah, we are. Because my mommy has lots of money she spends.” As noted earlier, Kayleigh was able to identify her aunt as “not having a lot of money” yet was unable to pinpoint why it was she believed her aunt was lacking financially. Interestingly enough, Kayleigh lived with an
aunt, upon whom her family relied a great deal. I was unable to gather from Kayleigh if the aunt she was referring to, whom lacks money, was the aunt with whom she currently resides.

Anthony, on the other hand, was better able to articulate why he believed someone he knew lacked financial means.

*Researcher:* Do you know anybody who doesn’t have a lot of money?

*Anthony:* Yeah, like my grandma and my grandma’s friend.

*Researcher:* How do you know they don’t have a lot of money?

*Anthony:* ‘Cause when her friend came over and then my grandma asked him can he buy some candy for her and he said he don’t have very much money.

Anthony was able to describe what it means to not “have very much money” yet did not view himself or his family as being in that situation.

*Researcher:* Have you ever wanted something, like this boy, but you couldn’t get it because mommy didn’t have enough money?

*Anthony:* No…I mean I was bad and wanted to get this car…but I wasn’t really bad, mom just thought I was and we were at Walmart and I saw this car I wanted and said to my mom “Can I get this?” and she said “No, you were bad” even though I wasn’t.

*Researcher:* Was there a time when you were being really good and wanted something but mom said no because it was too much money?

*Anthony:* Umm…[pauses] I don’t really think so. Sometimes she’s not in the mood.

*Researcher:* Not in the mood?
Anthony: Not in the mood to buy stuff – only boring things.

Researcher: What boring things?

Anthony: Toilet paper. And chicken.

Despite the variety of situations that were presented during the interviews, Anthony never revealed that he saw his family as lacking in financial means, despite their socioeconomic status.

**Perceptions of home.**

Lastly, each of the children in this study had differing views of their own homes, despite what their homes actually look like or provide. During the interviews we read a story that focused on homes and neighborhoods. In the story the family helps renovate a larger home, nicknamed a “castle” for another family in need. The family in the story hoped to one day have the favor returned so they can move out of their small apartment.

Even prior to this interview, the topic of home and neighborhood was common among the children. Each of the children talked fondly of their neighborhoods, often mentioning their neighbors and the layout. Amya, the child living in an urban neighborhood, lives in a two-bedroom, one-story apartment. Her mother described their home as “enough for right now but it ain’t no dream.” Additionally, she stated that she’d like to move soon in order to have more space and live in a “nicer place.” Amya’s mother Renee was unable to estimate how many square feet her apartment was, but stated it was “little”. Amya on the other hand described it as a “fun place to ride my bike,” and mentioned living down the street from a friend at school, and her neighbors’ dogs who had puppies. Similar to her description of family wealth, Amya had the most articulate and matter-of-fact response regarding her perception of her home.
Amya: Didn’t I tell you we live in a really little house? Really little.

Researcher: Oh really? What do you mean?

Amya: It’s tiny. Super tiny with like no rooms and there are no stairs. It’s not big and we have to share where we put stuff and where we sleep and there’s no room. Not like a big house.

Researcher: Yeah? Would you like to live in a big house?

Amya: Yeah, because big houses have stairs and our house doesn’t have stairs and I really want stairs.

Researcher: Why do you want stairs?

Amya: Because they have upper rooms like if we had stairs then we could like climb up to our bedrooms. Like go up the stairs and into our bedrooms. But if we had stairs my brother could have stairs going up that lead to his room and I could have stairs that lead to my room.

Furthermore, Amya had the strongest opinion regarding who should live in a big house versus who should live in a small house. Amya insisted that only people with a lot of people in their family, “big people,” or “people with lots of stuff to store” should live in big houses. In response to Amya’s opinions I told a story about two people that I know who live in a large house, with “lots of bedrooms.” She replied that they “should really live in a little house” because “if you live in a big house you have to have a big family.” Following the story I showed Amya a variety of photographs of different homes, with the final photograph being a homeless person sitting on a sidewalk.

Amya: When I was going to my great, great, great grandfather’s house I saw this little boy who was living out on the street.
Researchers: Really?

Amya: He had this bucket of money. He needed it for stuff…maybe to buy a house? Just a bucket of quarters. And me and my mom we passed by him and then my mom backed up so we could see what he was holding and we gave him some money like a dollar because all he had was just quarters.

Researcher: Do you think you’d ever live outside like that guy?

Amya: No! Then if it rained I’d get rain on me.

Researcher: Do you think you’ll ever live in that big castle?

Amya: Yes! Yeah, because I want to.

Researcher: You do? Well, if that guy who lives outside on the street doesn’t have any money, just quarters, do you think the people that live in big huge houses have money?

Amya: No, if you live in a big house you have to have a big family.

Researcher: But what about if they have lots of money?

Amya: Then they could store it in boxes on shelves.

Researcher: But do you think they’d use their money to buy a big house?

Amya: No…they can put it in boxes and since they probably have lots of shelves they can store it on shelves or in the basement.

Researcher: Not spend it?

Amya: If they spend it then they won’t have enough. They won’t have their money anymore. But if they have kids they can spend it for toys if they don’t have toys.

Researcher: Yeah. Not on a house though?
Amya: No, not on a house. That’s just silly.

Similar to perceptions of wealth, Amya was the only child in this study who perceived her family as having a small home. Anthony, the child living in a suburban neighborhood, also lived in an apartment complex. Anthony’s mother Jeanette described it as “nice but a little small for all of us.” It is a two-bedroom townhouse-style apartment that Jeanette described as being “probably about 800 square feet.” When asked if his apartment was “big or little” Anthony stated:

Anthony: Big and small. It’s sometimes noisy with the TV and my mom talking on her phone…the speakerphone…and the food cooking and the stove.

Researcher: So it’s loud?

Anthony: Yeah especially when she makes hot dogs. When the bubbles are in the water it goes pop, pop, pop, pop and I hate that noise.

Researcher: But do you feel like your house is small like these people in the book?

Anthony: No it’s big. Just noisy.

Once again, following the story I showed Anthony the photographs of different types of homes (i.e. an apartment complex, a double-residency home, a larger home, etc.) and the photograph of the homeless man on the sidewalk. When asked if he had ever seen anyone like that he responded that he had not. Furthermore, when asked why a person would have to live on the sidewalk, or would not have a home to live in, he replied that the person was “probably crazy” because they “have to know that they could get runned over…get smushed by a car if you slept on the street or on the sidewalk.”

Going further, I suggested that maybe the man in the photograph didn’t have enough
money to buy a house and that’s why he was on the street but Anthony didn’t agree stating: “Everyone who wants a house get one…it’s not money.”

Kayleigh, the child living in a rural neighborhood, had a very different perspective on homeownership. Kayleigh’s immediate family currently resides in the largest of the homes in this study. While the home itself may be larger, she has the most people living in the residence as she lived with her aunt and cousins. Kayleigh lived with her mother, two siblings, aunt, uncle and two cousins. She, her mother and sister all shared a bedroom in this three bedroom rural home. Her brother slept in his oldest cousin’s bedroom, with her aunt and youngest cousin in the final bedroom. Grace was unable to estimate the square footage of the ranch home, but said it would be “plenty big if it wasn’t for us.”

When Kayleigh was asked why she believed the characters in the story lived in a small apartment she responded: “Because they couldn’t find a big one.” Again, following the story Kayleigh was shown the photographs of different types of homes, and the photograph of the homeless man on the street.

*Researcher:* Why do you think this man is living on the sidewalk like this?

*Kayleigh:* There wasn’t no more houses.

*Researcher:* But I’ve seen houses that are for sale, I know there are ones out there to buy. Why do you think he didn’t buy one?

*Kayleigh:* He probably just didn’t want one.

*Researcher:* Hmmm…

*Kayleigh:* Or maybe he’s not rich.

*Researcher:* Do you have to be rich to buy a house?
Kayleigh: Yeah.

Researcher: Are you rich? You live in a house?

Kayleigh: Yeah, we are. Because my mommy has lots of money she spends.

Researcher: What does she spend it on?

Kayleigh: Food.

Similarities and Differences of Children

As stated previously, the mothers in this study clearly shared more common experiences and views than the children. While the mothers all have very different neighborhood experiences now, as children they grew up in more similar impoverished urban neighborhoods thus creating a mutual source of experiences. The children in this study did not share common neighborhood experiences; but rather they shared the experience of living in poverty, alone. This is important, as this study had the potential to identify significant differences present in impoverished urban, rural and suburban poverty.

Amya and Anthony, the children living in urban and suburban neighborhoods, exhibited a number of similar experiences, such as an awareness of parental financial stress, awareness of the assistance provided by others and experience with personal violent crime. Amya stated knowing her mother was in financial distress therefore spying on her when she was on the phone to learn more about what she was discussing, speculating that it must have been “bills”. She was also the only child who viewed their family as needing money or not having enough money. She stressed that her mother needed to “just go get some more money” so that they could “be rich”. Although, despite Amya’s description of her home as “really little”, she did not relate the size of her home
to the income level of her family. Regardless, Amya’s connection to the financial status of her family was by far the furthest developed of all the children in this study. It can be speculated that this might be due to neighborhood type, age of her mother (Renee was the youngest mother in this study at age 23), or true socioeconomic status of her family, as Renee was the only mother in this study who was unemployed. The true reason for Amya’s in depth insights on her family’s financial status are unknown, and picking just one would be speculation, but one can assume it is attributed to at least one of these factors.

Anthony understood that money must be saved in order to pay the family bills and easily explained the process of sending money in order to pay each bill. He sensed the urgency and the need to pay these bills or else “you get in trouble”, and, in his mother’s case, won’t be able to answer the phone due to the calls from the bill collectors. In both situations the knowledge and awareness of their family’s financial struggles and the stress that puts on their mothers is witnessed and easily recalled by both Amya and Anthony.

**Summary**

The account of experiences by the parents and children provided a valuable insight into their lives. With the mothers in this study I was able to identify themes centered on the care and well-being of their children and the level of support which they receive. After examining the transcripts of the women’s interviews it was clear that past personal and peer experiences dominate where they derive any hopes and fears they have for their children and their children’s futures.

Furthermore, it was initially theorized that neighborhood differences would impact feelings and opinions significantly, but in the case of the mothers in this study that
did not appear to be the case. Past and childhood experiences seemed more important than current neighborhood location. Additionally the level of support each woman felt from her community, family, and school affected each family’s ability to cope.

Amya and Anthony, the children living in urban and suburban neighborhoods, carried the heaviest burden of their family’s financial situation, being the most aware of bills and debt and the assistance provided by others. Kayleigh, on the other hand, was the most oblivious to her family’s socioeconomic status. Amya and Anthony felt more than just the burden of their family’s finances; they each had first-hand experience with violent crime.

Lastly, child perceptions of their family’s wealth and home were areas in which the children of this study differed, as well. Amya alone believed that her family was struggling financially and articulated that throughout the interviews. Conversely, Anthony and Kayleigh were each able to identify those individuals they believed were struggling financially, yet they did not necessarily see themselves as lacking financial means.
Chapter VI: Discussion

This study sought to investigate the implications of poverty from the perspective of young children and their mothers, theorizing that the community in which each family lived would cause differing impacts on child and parent perceptions. Specifically, I sought to investigate the societal, social, and emotional perceptions and experiences of children and parents living in urban, suburban, and rural poverty. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model theorized that a child’s system of influence extends beyond the home and into the community, thus causing a positive or negative impact (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Brendro, 2006). Additionally, research has shown that interactions in the community, home and school can lead to proper adjustment or maladjustment of a child (Tissington, 2008). The level to which community difference impacted the perceptions and experiences of impoverished children and their mothers was the focus of this study.

Themes of the Mothers

By examining the Kirkwood, Tillman, and Moss families I was able to identify a number of similarities and differences between the children and adults in this study. In some ways the families were very similar, with common issues and concerns being present in each family.

Care for the well-being of their children.

Past experiences, peer experiences, and fear of the future.

The mothers in this study were each overwhelmingly worried about the futures of their children, despite the neighborhoods in which they live. This fear is common among low-income parents, as Heymann (2000) found that parents living in poverty were
concerned with their children’s well-being and safety. While immediate safety did not present itself as a concern during this study, the mothers overwhelmingly expressed a concern for their children’s well-being. Beyond childhood and personal experiences of the mothers was the power of peer experiences. These peer experiences were a significant influence in the maternal hopes for the well-being of their children. Just as personal experiences were powerful, personal experiences of those individuals in similar situations were almost as important. The mothers drew hope about the potential of their children’s futures, as well as additional fears or anxieties, all from the experiences of their friends and family members.

Parental fears/concerns were grounded in past experiences and peer experiences. While these experiences may not have directly affected the families, the mothers may have valid reasons for believing that such experiences could have an influence. Research has found that developmental shortfalls, magnified by the effects of poverty, can cause children to seek out resolution to these deficits later in their adolescent and adult lives, resulting in behaviors such as delinquency or teenage pregnancy (Addison, 1992). The mothers in this study specifically hoped to prevent drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, school delinquency, safety, jail and crime, due not just to general fear, but to specific fear. These specific fears are derived from the childhood, family and peer experiences in their own lives, thus creating very powerful feelings of protection for their young children.

The impact family has on the mothers is evident when they describe their experiences growing up with their own mothers. The lack of guidance or structure growing up has caused all three women to state that they desire more rules, supervision,
and direction for their own children. These past experiences, particularly childhood past experiences, show that while current neighborhood location and financial situation has weight and meaning, past neighborhood, financial and family experiences may hold more importance and substantiate the need for appropriate childhood interventions, particularly for children living in poverty. The impact of these past experiences has undoubtedly influenced the decisions and opinions of the mothers in this study.

Russell, Harris and Gockel (2008) found that low-income parents were overwhelmed with thoughts money, yet in this study that did not appear to be true. Instead the issue that appeared to concern the mothers the most was that of the success of their children. Throughout each interview the mothers continued to mention problems stemming from school achievement, and the societal and social behaviors of their own pasts or from the stories and experiences of their peers. In fact, the mothers rarely mentioned finances, with the exception of Grace whose job instability (i.e. hours and pay) seemed to cause more financial stress. Money may have been a concern plaguing the minds of the mothers in this study, however they did not reveal it to me. This may be attributed to the fact that they did not feel comfortable with me due to my position as an academic researcher or due to the lack of relationship between the mothers and myself, as they may not have fully “trusted” me (Hannabuss, 1996; Punch, 2002).

Although the neighborhood where each woman currently resides differs, each stated that they grew up in urban neighborhoods, thus these similar childhood experiences may have influenced each woman’s goals and fears for their children. Whilst more research would be needed in this area, it appears that this commonality of childhood neighborhood experiences may contribute more to their common attitudes towards their
children’s current and future well-being than current neighborhood experiences. Conversely, whereas the women in this study have many similar experiences and opinions, the children in this study showed more variation in their personal beliefs and experiences in neighborhood and family experiences.

**Support.**

Renee was the only mother in this study to report a sense of community within her neighborhood and reported feeling as if she could “rely” on her neighbors in a time of need. She has utilized her neighbors for their time (i.e. watching her children when childcare was needed) and money (i.e. for gas and small bills).

Jeanette on the other hand reported feelings of loneliness and solitude in her community. This is in keeping with existing research that states that suburban neighborhoods possesses fewer social services than urban neighborhoods (Murphy, 2007; Holliday & Dwyer, 2009). Jeanette’s situation is common among poor parents (Russell, Harris and Gockel, 2008) and disheartening since it is apparent that a social community can enhance the emotional well-being of struggling parents, as in the case with Renee.

Grace, on the other hand possessed a great deal of family support, unlike Renee and Jeanette. Research has found that low-income parents often struggle with daily activities pertaining to raising a family due to their lack of support (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Russell, Harris and Gockel, 2008). By living with her sister, Grace seemed to be able to combat some of those daily struggles, such as childcare and housing costs, with which Renee and Jeanette had to contend.

Both Renee and Grace possessed forms of support (neighborhood and family), which appear to counteract some of the negative effects of poverty such as depression.
and isolation that is so common with low-income parents (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Russell, Harris and Gockel, 2008). Cumulatively, Jeanette was the mother in this study who reported little to no form of support, whether it be in the form of friends, family or her children’s school. She mentioned being happy with the available programs at her children’s school, but had not participated in them, thus leaving her isolated.

It is common for low-income parents to feel a level of disconnection from their peers (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Russell, Harris and Gockel, 2008). Jeanette felt feelings of disconnection, even more so than Renee and Grace. This may be due to the fact that Renee lived in a neighborhood where she was surrounded by peers who were also low-income, thus creating a sense of community. Grace was able to rely on her sister and brother-in-law as a means of support, also providing a sense of community or, in the least, a peer group she was able to rely on. However, Jeanette, who lived in an area of town without a high rate of poverty, may have felt isolated due to a lack of relatable peers. Furthermore, she was the mother in this study that was most aware deficits influenced by finances. These deficits included the inability to provide experiences for her children such as trips to the museum or the zoo.

**Outcomes based on societal perceptions.**

Surprisingly, the women in this study did seem unified in one aspect of support and that was regarding the support provided by government assistance. Beginning this study, I believed that due to the socioeconomic status of the participants in this study, a high importance would be placed on the acquisition of money and assistance needed to obtain basic needs. While this may be truly an important aspect in the lives of these women, clearly the most pressing and important matters on the forefront of their minds
was the social, emotional, and academic needs of their children. The women talked with me briefly and matter-of-factly about the process of accepting assistance. This did not convey a lack of appreciation for the assistance, nor a lack of knowledge of its importance in each family’s day-to-day lives, but instead was more of an afterthought, a regular part of life, not necessarily an “important” topic to discuss. This idea of money and government assistance being a general part of daily life again contradicts the idea that money is the primary concern for parents living with limited financial means (Russell, Harris & Gockel, 2008). At the same time, I wonder if the reason the parents did not discuss government assistance with me further was due to our relationship as researcher and research participant. Research has shown that individuals living in poverty may feel that there is a stigma surrounding their financial situation, thus would be more unlikely to openly share the details (Garcia, Hallahan & Rosenthal, 2007). The mothers may have felt uncomfortable discussing their finances with me because, potentially, they may have perceived I had more money than they did (Garcia, Hallahan & Rosenthal, 2007) or would judge them as being lazy or irresponsible (Reutter et al., 2009).

**Themes of the Children**

Just as Amato and Ochiltree (1987) found that children were enthusiastic participants and eager to be interviewed, the children in this study were also enthusiastic and appeared to feel comfortable with the interview process soon after beginning the research. Similar to Amato and Ochiltree’s (1987) findings, Amya, Anthony and Kayleigh were very open about personal and family experiences, making further questioning and therefore high quality responses, possible. Some research has found that children younger than 8 years of age may not accurately recall past events correctly.
(Rebok et. al, 2001), therefore when appropriate, possible, and without tainting future interviews, I checked facts and particularly disturbing stories with the child’s mother. I found that despite the age of the children in this study (6 and 7 years old) that they were fairly accurate with their recollection of information, thus giving value to the family and social perceptions these children shared.

**Burden of finances.**

In a previous study conducted examining the perceptions of urban and rural middle-income children’s views on poverty it was suggested that children living in “middle class” homes do not think about their socioeconomic status or the financial responsibilities of their parents (Noel, 2010). When middle-income children were interviewed it was found that they were not only unconcerned about the acquisition of money, but that they had little concept of its use or need (Noel, 2010). This study provided a stark contrast to the previous research regarding middle-income children, as the urban and suburban low-income children in this study were very aware of the financial needs and concerns of their families. The burden of finances felt by Amya and Anthony was evident throughout the interviews. Knowledge of family finances, particularly that of bills, was common for two of the three children. Each seemed to exhibit some of their parent’s financial burden and stress.

Research has found that money concerns plague the minds of low-income parents (Russell, Harris & Gockel, 2008) and this research shows that not only does money plague the minds of adults, but also their children. The burden of living with limited financial means was ever-present in the lives of the Amya and Anthony. Amya specifically notes spying on her mother while on the phone, perhaps out of concern or
curiosity, but knowing with confidence that she must have been talking about “bills.” She notes the stress level of her mother when she mentions seeing her cry about the debt they owe, and can specifically explain what bills need to be paid. Kayleigh understands that they must pay for “food and for bread and lights” and of course fuel for their car.

This awareness of financial stress and the burden of “bills” is a topic that was not present in middle-income children (Noel, 2010). This lead me to believe that somehow the socioeconomic status of the low-income children’s parents in this study and/or the stress they feel due to a lack of money is felt and absorbed secondhand by their children. While a burden of finances was present, the children in this study did not seem to exhibit any negative social consequences due to their socioeconomic status. Attree (2007) and Weinger (1998) found that poor children often possessed social insecurities associated with money. The children in this study never brought up the socioeconomic statuses of their friends at school or in their neighborhood.

Furthermore, research has shown that often children living in low-income homes are suspicious of more affluent peers (Weinger, 1998). These findings were not consistent with the data in this study and it may be that the children in this study view themselves just like “everyone else.” In the study of middle-income children’s perceptions of poverty one child made the assumption that all children are like him, therefore could not fathom not being able to afford a piece of clothing (Noel, 2010). These perceptions could also be present in the thinking of the low-income children in this study. The children may not have social insecurities because they do not realize yet that their family is different from any other, which may be attributed to the young age of the children.
Kayleigh, the child living in the rural neighborhood was the one who, while exhibiting some of the common experiences of the other children, seemed to have a distinctly different perspective. Kayleigh attributed her mother’s parental control or desires to the reasoning behind what is purchased and why. There was little realization of her family’s financial status and the need for money was not something Kayleigh expressed as being terribly important, compared with Amya and Anthony.

**Knowledge of crime and violence.**

Numerous past studies have found that children living in poverty are more susceptible to exposure to crime and violence. Anthony (2008) found that children living in poverty are more likely to witness or personally experience crime and violence. Similarly, Galster and Santiago (2006) found that children from high-poverty neighborhoods were more likely to have exposure to gang activity and violence. Percy (2003) gave low-income children in his study cameras in order to capture those aspects of their neighborhoods and lives that were most important to them. In his study Percy (2003) inadvertently discovered a prevalence of crime and gang activity present in the children’s neighborhoods. Similar to that study, the theme of violence and crime organically came out of this study, as well. When discussing topics unrelated to crime or violence, both Amya and Anthony recalled vivid accounts of violent crime.

Anthony (2008) found that children living in poverty are more likely to have exposure to crime/violence than their peers, yet it seems to, as in this study, more specifically pertain to the children living in urban and suburban poverty, Amya and Anthony. Each told graphic and horrific stories of violent crime and death witnessed in their own personal lives. Amya recounted a story of arson in her apartment building in
EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY

which a young mother and her child perished. According to her mother the story was not only true, but surprisingly accurate in its details. Similarly, Anthony described the murder of his grandfather by two of his coworkers. Again, Anthony’s story was correct, accurate and vividly told.

Effects of income on children.

Anthony (2008) listed a number of challenges or “obstacles” (p. 6, ¶1) that children living in low-income homes experience, including poor schools and living conditions, lack of medical care and nutrition, poor home environments and parental interactions, parental mental health issues, and poor school choice, although none of these challenges were evident at the conclusion of this study. Overall the children in this study seemed happy, healthy, comfortable and safe within their neighborhoods, and appeared to have good relationships with their parents.

Negative effects, such as failure in school or social and emotional maladjustment are common in low-income homes (Anthony, 2008; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Costello, Keeler & Angold, 2001), yet the children in this study exhibited little to no negative impact that I could detect during my time with them. Throughout the interviews and the interactions with the children, I noted no social or behavioral concerns. While the children seemed uninterested in talking about the specifics of school, cumulatively it appeared that all the children enjoyed school and were strong academically.

Neighborhood Differences

Urban.

Kiser (2007) found that children living in urban environments are more likely to be exposed to family stress and neglect, yet Renee, drawing on the past experiences of
her own childhood was almost overly cautious when choosing the neighborhood and home in which her family lived, as well as how she chose to raise her children. Of the three parents in this study, Renee seemed to be the most proactive in the lives of her children, not neglectful as research as shown (Kiser, 2007), mostly out of an attempt to prevent the past from repeating itself. She reported that her own mother had her children at a young age, was often frustrated, yelling often, and exhibiting other signs of stress. In order to attempt to prevent some of her mother’s frustrations, Renee reported educating herself by reading baby books prior to the birth of her children. This shows more than just a casual approach to parenting, as Renee is pursuing educational opportunities.

Furthermore, Renee’s awareness of potential future problems that could arise portrays a mother who is not only concerned about the present safety and well being of her children, but one who is actively looking towards the future in hopes of setting her children up for success. In a contradiction of research stating that low-income children tend to have less involved parents and poor schools (Anthony, 2008; Kiser, 2007), Renee discussed feeling quite supported by and active in her child’s school. She felt connected to her daughter Amya’s education and is even beginning to make herself aware of future opportunities, such as scholarships, that her child will be able to take advantage of. All of these qualities paint an entirely different picture of low-income parents than the societal perceptions of lazy and uninvolved parenting (Garcia, Hallahan & Rosenthal, 2007). Renee not only wanted to be active in the educational life of her children, but she sought opportunities to participate.

Renee was the only parent in this study that mentioned having the support of her neighbors in times of need. She reports that her neighbors are willing to watch her
children or loan her small amounts of money when needed. This sense of community was not present in the lives of the other women in this study, with Jeanette even stating that she felt alone and secluded. This sense of community in an urban neighborhood is a stark contrast from previous research that has stated living in cities often caused feelings of social isolation due to fear, joblessness and exposure to drugs and violence (Galster & Santiago, 2006; Jackson et. al, 2009; Newman & Massengill, 2006).

**Rural.**

Even though it is common not to own a car if you live in rural America (Winston, 2003), Grace did possess a vehicle and used it to get to and from her waitressing job in the evenings. Her job, in addition to her financial stress made it difficult for Grace to feel connected to and participate in Kayleigh’s education. She described the frustration she felt at the lack of understanding that she believed schools has regarding parents in her “position.” In Heymann’s (2000) study, impoverished parents struggled to attend their children’s school events and actively participate in the academic success of their children due to work constraints. These findings are consistent with Grace’s situation, as she was unable to volunteer in her children’s classrooms and struggles to help her children with homework assignments and projects. Despite previous research finding that rural communities are more cohesive (Sherman, 2006), Grace reported having little connection to her child’s school and the other members of the community.

Furthermore, although inhabitants of rural communities are less likely to be accepting government assistance (Belanger & Stone, 2008), Grace accepted cash, food and medical assistance. This may be attributed to Grace’s limited time in residence in a rural community. Research has found that rural poverty is different from other
neighborhood poverty types as it is more focused on moral capital, such as volunteer work, community contributions, and neighborly aid, versus simply the acquisition of money (Sherman, 2006). While this may be true, in this study I did not notice any moral differences between the three mothers in this study.

Additionally, despite living in a rural community where low-income children often have feelings of social exclusion and are victims of bullying (Crowley & Vulliamy, n.d.) Kayleigh seemed to be living a socially appropriate and satisfying 6-year-old experience, as she noted positive feelings about school and her friends.

**Suburban.**

Jeanette’s main concerns were with her children’s social and educational goals, citing her own past tribulations with truancy, drugs, and “boys.” Research has suggested that living in poverty can lead to social and emotional maladjustment including behavior problems and social delinquency (Costello, Keeler & Angold, 2001; Anthony, 2008; Galster & Santiago, 2006; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997), which would validate Jeanette’s concerns. Jeanette mentioned that indeed her child Anthony was having behavior problems in school, which therefore caused more fear for his academic future.

Suburban neighborhoods are beginning to look more and more similar to urban neighborhoods (Murphy, 2007), therefore it makes sense that the urban and suburban children in this study shared similar characteristics. Similar to Amya, Anthony was also aware of the financial status of his mother. He discusses the “bill men” who call to make his mother pay their bills, citing if she doesn’t that she will “get in trouble.” Amya and Anthony are similar with their experiences with and exposure to violence, as well. Amya recalled an account of violent crime in her neighborhood, causing her to relocate to
another unit in her apartment. Anthony, on the other hand, was able to recollect a personal violent crime, which occurred in his family, with the murder of his grandfather.

Jeanette, similar to Grace, also noted little connection to her community even stating that she feels isolation and loneliness. Previous research has shown that despite increasing poverty in the suburbs, outlying areas continue to lack social services (Murphy, 2007). This may be one reason why Jeanette feels isolated from her peers and her community, as there are no programs that would bring her group of peers together.

Implications

This study sought to examine the societal, social and emotional perceptions of low-income children and parents living in urban, suburban and rural neighborhoods. This research, while focused on learning about the specific lived experiences of three children and their mothers, ultimately yielded several possible implications for schools and community organizations.

Entering into this study, I was interested in the differences between the current neighborhood residences of the families and how living in each of the neighborhoods impacted the experiences and opinions of mothers and children. While the experiences and perceptions varied slightly within the group of children, the mothers in this study had surprisingly similar viewpoints across the board. They shared the same hopes and fears for their children, which derived from similar personal and peer experiences. Each mother grew up in financially struggling homes, in urban areas. When discussing their hopes and concerns for their children each mother referenced their childhood experiences or the experiences of their peers. It was notable that none of the mothers associated current neighborhood issues with the hopes/fears for their children. These similar past
and peer experiences imply that childhood family and neighborhood experiences potentially have more of an impact on perceptions than current neighborhood experiences for these mothers.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the implications that living in different neighborhoods had on low-income families. While there are differing effects of living in specific neighborhoods, the question remains whether it is truly the neighborhood that has the biggest impact or is it instead the level of support each family is provided? This support comes in a number of ways including neighborhood and community support, family support, school support, and that support gained from accepting government assistance. The mothers in this study did differ on the level of support the received, with Renee reporting greater neighborhood support than any of the other mothers. This sense of community and support from her neighbors assisted Renee in feeling less burdened with concerns regarding childcare and minor expenses. Jeanette and Grace, while living in areas with significantly less overall neighborhood poverty, did not feel that sense of neighborhood community.

Neighborhood associations and apartment complexes should strive to foster a sense of community and connectivity in their neighborhoods, as this could provide a strong sense of support for families similar to the ones in this study. The information provided from this type of research could inform future community and school programs. If childhood family and neighborhood experiences are the most significant then community and school organizations should have programs to service children in dilapidated and high crime areas. Furthermore, early childhood agencies should strive to implement school-to-home initiatives in order to aid low-income families.
The children living in urban and suburban neighborhoods had personal experiences with violence and crime. Schools servicing children living in poverty should be sure they are aware of the hardships their families are facing financially, socially, and emotionally. Teachers and administrators should be prepared to deal with issues of childhood “overexposure” to not only family stress, but also violence and crime. School personnel could assist in counseling children and relieving the anxiety surrounding traumatic events such as exposure to violent crime, but teachers also need to be trained in how to deal with the everyday stress low-income children could potentially be harboring. Teachers who are well-trained in the needs of their students and their student’s parents are imperative for ensuring success.

Additionally, during the interviews the children in this study reacted very well to the stories and photographs utilized to elicit conversation throughout the interview process. The children were eager to share their experiences and talked freely about many different topics including family financial stress and violent crime. This reveals that children living in poverty may need more opportunities to discuss experiences common to their family’s financial status. Classroom teachers could incorporate stories, such as the ones used in this study, into the regular curriculum in order to promote discussion of stressors and give children an outlet for their feelings.

Renee’s experiences as an urban, low-income mother shows that our misconceptions about the willingness or availability of low-income parents may be inhibiting an entire population of parents from participating in the educational lives of their children. In Renee’s case, she had her children when she was very young, yet despite that fact actively pursued educational opportunities in order to better her
children’s lives and better her abilities as a parent. She took the opportunities provided by her child’s teacher to visit the classroom, and felt confident that her child was doing well due to the communication she had between herself and the teacher. This stresses just how important parental education opportunities and communication can be, particularly to low-income, urban families.

Renee’s experiences show that low-income parents are not lazy or irresponsible (Garcia, Hallahan & Rosenthal, 2007) but instead want to be involved in the educational lives of their children. Administrators and teachers need to take the initiative to reach out to low-income parents in order to encourage family participation in each child’s educational experience. By reaching out to parents and providing opportunities for them to become involved at their children’s school it can assist with educational achievement due to increased awareness of classroom academic standards and grade-level expectations. Furthermore, by welcoming low-income families into the school community, teachers may gain more awareness about the individual needs of the children they are teaching thus having a greater rate of success.

With increased parental participation comes an increased opportunity to provide parents with information regarding strategies for success. Parent enrichment and education programs would provide low-income parents with effective approaches to educational achievement and school success for their children.

While Renee’s experiences speak to the idea of providing more opportunities for parents to be involved in school, Jeanette and Grace’s experiences speak to the need for flexibility within those opportunities. Examining Jeanette and Grace’s experiences shows us that while parents want to be involved there are situations that inhibit these
opportunities. Mothers who work during the day are unable to participate in school-day activities, and those mothers working at night may struggle to help with homework for long periods of time or bring their children to after- or out-of-school activities.

Flexibility is needed to aid parents in best helping their children succeed, as well as adapted means of communication or opportunities to contribute to the school community. Schools and teachers should provide instances for parents to participate in their children’s education outside of the regular school day. This may include chances to “volunteer in the classroom” at home (i.e. by assisting the teacher through tasks that can be completed outside of the classroom such as office work/lesson preparation) and opportunities to extend learning at home. These home-learning opportunities will need to be flexible for working parents and may include longer completion deadlines and/or combination assignments incorporating adult assistance and child independence.

Furthermore, community organizations could work with local businesses to help provide more flexible leave opportunities for parents with school-age children. By working with the employers of low-income parents, we would best be able to support the educational needs of the children who theoretically need it the most. I believe a community-based emphasis on the importance of parental involvement in child school success is imperative to higher achievement for all students.

Moreover, both schools and community organizations can do more to help support single parents living in poverty. Low-income parents, as noted in this study, often have varying levels of family, peer and financial support, thus creating varying levels of stress in the home. When a mother is burdened with difficult financial matters and then forced to bear the weight of that burden alone, the children in the home can feel
this stress, as well. Creating programs and opportunities for parents to connect with their peers, thus forming mutually supportive relationships, could prove beneficial for the well-being of both parents and children, alike. Additionally, schools and community organizations should consider creating or adopting programs that give young children living in poverty an outlet for possible stress and frustration, in order to prevent social delinquency, academic or school-based problems and emotional deficits.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Although this study was effective in obtaining valuable information about the lives of three families living in poverty, I feel there are a number of areas where further research is needed. The purpose of this study was to examine the societal, social and emotional perceptions and experiences of mothers and their children living in poverty. While this was the intent of the study, each of these are areas were not adequately addressed due to the research design of this study. However, I do believe I adequately addressed aspects of each child’s emotional and family perceptions and the mothers’ family and social perceptions of living in poverty. Had this study been more immersive in the cultures of the mothers and the children it would have yielded even more in-depth results, and addressed sensitive issues of societal perceptions. A longitudinal study would have allowed for more information to be gained about the process and feelings surrounding accepting government assistance. Parents in this study may not have felt fully comfortable with me, thus may not have been willing to expose themselves emotionally on the matter of personal finances and the process of accepting government assistance. By spending more time with the families in this study, by getting to know the details of their daily lives and by fully investigating the strengths and weaknesses of their
communities I believe I would have been able to fully answer my original research question.

Moreover, this research could have been even more valuable had the children’s siblings been interviewed, as well. Having the perspective of two or three children of varying ages in the same family could have provided an interesting and more well-rounded perspective.

It is necessary to conduct further research in order to determine if indeed childhood family and neighborhood experiences have a lasting impact into adulthood. The information provided from this type of research could inform future community and school programs. If childhood family and neighborhood experiences are the most significant then community and school organizations should have programs to service children in dilapidated and high crime areas. Furthermore, early childhood agencies should strive to implement school-to-home initiatives in order to aid low-income families.

The children living in urban and suburban neighborhoods were well informed about the financial status and needs of their family. This awareness of finances leads me to question the level of stress children in low-income homes are exhibiting due to this awareness. How much stress are the children experiencing? Additionally, this awareness of family finances leads me to question what other areas of poverty are children aware of? Are these other areas sources of stress or fear? This study did not determine if this awareness in early childhood has a long-term impact on children, therefore supporting the need for further research.
The children in this study did not talk a great deal about their experiences in school, despite being asked in several different ways. This may have been due to the age of the children in this study, as each were only in their first year of formal education. A similar study should be conducted utilizing older children in order to gain a better perspective on the influence school and the educational system has on children living in poverty. Moreover, this type of study could be used to compare and contrast how a child’s age affects the experiences and perceptions of urban, rural and suburban children living in poverty.

Additionally, further qualitative, interview-based research should be conducted focusing specifically on the interactions between teachers and children, and children and their school environments. In this research, children and parents living in poverty should be included, as well as their teachers. The voice of the community and/or of the school is a valuable piece of research that is missing when comparing/contrasting the experiences of low-income families in urban, rural and suburban neighborhoods. This could be achieved by tracking the children in this specific study longitudinally in order to see how their perceptions and experiences change over time.

It would be beneficial to replicate this study with a different demographic, altogether. In this study white, single mothers in their twenties and their children, aged 6 and 7, were studied. It would be interesting and potentially yield different results if black or Hispanic families were studied. Furthermore, the study of single fathers, two-parent households, parents over the age of thirty, or minority parents would also be beneficial and provide a more well-rounded perspective of the differing lived experiences of individuals living in poverty.
Conclusion

This study sought to examine the societal, social and emotional perceptions and experiences of children and mothers living in urban, suburban and rural poverty by utilizing a qualitative, multiple case study, interview-based approach. Percy (2003) states that interviews and the interpretation of the impact of growing up in an impoverished home “provides an insight into the problems and strengths of poor families” (p.67, ¶4). This study effectively examined the lived experiences of impoverished mothers and their children in order to better inform future planning for school and community programs, and identified the need for further research in the areas of impoverished urban, rural and suburban families.
Appendix A

Introductory Survey

Name:

Child’s Name:

Your Age: _______________ Race: _______________________________

Gender: M or F

How many children do you have? __________________________

Please list the names, ages and grade levels (if applicable) of your children.

Name: _______________ Age: _______ Gender: M or F Grade: _______

Name: _______________ Age: _______ Gender: M or F Grade: _______

Name: _______________ Age: _______ Gender: M or F Grade: _______

Name: _______________ Age: _______ Gender: M or F Grade: _______

Name: _______________ Age: _______ Gender: M or F Grade: _______

Are you…. (circle one) Single Married Widowed Divorced

What is the highest level of schooling you have completed? (circle one)

a. Less than high school
b. Some high school
c. GED
d. High School Diploma
e. Some College
f. Associate’s Degree
g. Bachelor’s Degree
h. Master’s Degree or higher
Were there factors that prevented you from going further in school than you did? If so, what were they?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is the highest level of schooling your MOTHER has completed? (circle one)

a. Unknown  
b. Less than high school  
c. Some high school  
d. GED  
e. High School Diploma  
f. Some College  
g. Associate’s Degree  
h. Bachelor’s Degree  
i. Master’s Degree or higher

What is the highest level of schooling your FATHER has completed? (circle one)

a. Unknown  
b. Less than high school  
c. Some high school  
d. GED  
e. High School Diploma  
f. Some College  
g. Associate’s Degree  
h. Bachelor’s Degree  
i. Master’s Degree or higher
Do you accept any of the following types of assistance? (Circle all that apply)
   a. Housing vouchers (i.e. Section 8/Housing Choice)
   b. Food Stamps
   c. Medical assistance (i.e. Medicaid, Hoosier Healthwise, HIP)
   d. Cash Assistance (i.e. TANF)
   e. Child care assistance (i.e. CCDF)
   f. Other:

__________________________________________________________________

Are you currently employed?  Yes or  No
If you are currently employed, what do you do?
__________________________________________________________________

If you are not currently employed, how long have you been out of work?
__________________________________________________________________

What was your reason for leaving?
__________________________________________________________________

If you are currently employed, what is your personal yearly income? (If unknown, complete the information below.)
Annual yearly income __________________________

   OR

How many hours a week do you work? __________________________
How much do you make an hour? __________________________
If you are married or living with your significant other, how much does he/she contribute financially?

Annual yearly income ________________________

OR

How many hours a week does he/she work? ______________________

How much does he/she make an hour? ______________________

Do you receive child support or any other means of income? If so, how much per month do you receive?

Child support: ___________________________________________

Other: ___________________________________________________

How would you describe your neighborhood?

a. Urban
b. Rural
c. Suburban

Please describe how you feel about your neighborhood. Why?
Please use this space to describe any other situations/circumstances you would like to share.
Appendix B

Parent Interview Questions

Tell me about your neighborhood.

   Why did you choose this particular neighborhood?

   Are you happy with your neighborhood? If not, what would you change?

Tell me about your house.

Tell me about your children.

   What are our hopes for them?

   What are your fears?

   How do you feel about the school they attend?

I see that you indicated that you receive _______________ (government assistance). Can you tell me about this process?

   What struggles and/or successes have you found with the system?

Child Interview Questions

Tell me about your neighborhood.

   What does it look like?

   What kinds of things do you have in your neighborhood?

   Where is your favorite place to hang out?

   Do you wish there was anything else in your neighborhood?

Tell me about your school.

   What are your favorite things to do?

   Do you like school?

   What areas do you think you struggle with? Why?
What is your best subject? Why?

Do you like your teacher? Do you think your teacher likes you?

Tell me about your house.

What does it look like?

Who lives at your house?

After reading a book:

Do you know anyone like this?
Appendix C

Photographs for Use in Child Interviews

The following photographs are taken from: http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/
The following photographs are taken from: [http://www.everystockphoto.com/](http://www.everystockphoto.com/)
The following photographs were taken from: http://www.flickr.com
Appendix D

Institutional Review Board

DATE: February 9, 2011
TO: Megan Noel, BS, MAE
FROM: Ball State University IRB
RE: IRB protocol # 200183-1
TITLE: Examining the Implications of Poverty from the Perspective of Parents and Children Living in Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities: A Dissertation Proposal
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED
DECISION DATE: February 9, 2011
EXPIRATION DATE: February 9, 2012
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

The Institutional Review Board has approved your New Project for the above protocol, effective February 9, 2011 through February 9, 2012. All research under this protocol must be conducted in accordance with the approved submission.

As a reminder, it is the responsibility of the P.I. and/or faculty sponsor to inform the IRB in a timely manner:

- when the project is completed,
- if the project is to be continued beyond the approved end date,
- if the project is to be modified,
- if the project encounters problems, or
- if the project is discontinued.

Any of the above notifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (http://www.bsu.edu/irb). Please reference the IRB protocol number given above in any communication to the IRB regarding this project. Be sure to allow sufficient time for review and approval of requests for modification or continuation. If you have questions, please contact Chris Mangelli at (765) 285-5070 or cmangelli@bsu.edu.
References


http://infotrac.galegroup.com.proxy.bsu.edu/itw/infomark/0/1/1/purl=rc1_BRC_0_A13401081?sw_aep=munc80314


