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# Growing Up Working Class in Southwestern Pennsylvania: How Class Impacts Career and Educational Decisions

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GROWING UP WORKING CLASS IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA:  
HOW CLASS IMPACTS CAREER AND EDUCATIONAL DECISIONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Brian James Farester

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2015

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This research explores how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals raised in working class families in a rural county in southwest Pennsylvania. Twenty individuals participated in semi-structured interviews sharing their experiences in the education system, career decision making, family life, and their connection to their communities.

Participants revealed how family, school, and community had a great deal of influence over their decision-making and perceptions of their futures. For example, parents' advice and guidance were made in response to structural conditions and constraints their families faced including a reliance on schools to guide their children's educational and career decision-making. Participants also suggested their school, located in an economically disadvantaged region that once thrived on manufacturing industries was ill equipped to guide them in a new economy. Finally, participants suggested they felt isolated and faced geographical barriers that limited their social/cultural capital, and shaped a worldview that made them feel constrained to their community.

This research contributes to social class reproduction literature by showing that education and career decision-making are shaped within the contexts in which people live. Individuals in this predominantly white, working class, rural, area devastated by deindustrialization, find difficulty navigating educational and career systems and parents lack resources and experiences to help them. Moreover, poorly funded, broken education

systems in economically deprived areas are modeled on past industrial jobs, not jobs available in a contemporary predominantly service sector. In many cases, individuals are limited in their education and career options. Many lack the resources they need to navigate career and education systems. Yet, most participants found ways to make ends meet, pursue their goals, and redefine their definition of success.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Every day I saw the worst in humanity while I served as an Army company commander in Iraq from 2003 to 2004. Each night, I marveled at the nighttime canopy of stars and one night while staring at the magnificent night sky I decided I would try to make myself and the community around me a better place. Looking to the heavens that one night in Iraq, I understood God was nudging me towards a greater purpose in life.

Soon after I returned from Iraq, I began the search for my greater purpose. The journey began with the Administration and Leadership Studies doctoral program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The doctoral journey helped to ease my emotional scars as an Iraq war veteran because I now believe I have a new purpose in life by offering my skills and experiences to facilitate positive change in my community.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This research explores how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County, Pennsylvania. Understanding how social class background influences the life chances of working class people in Southwest County has been my long time interest due to my connection as a resident of the area. This research provides a thorough and broad-reaching understanding of growing up working class in Southwest County and how individuals perceive life chances.

People make choices about their future and the contexts in which they live shape those choices. Family, school, and community have a great deal of influence shaping pathways to the future. For example, parents' advice and guidance are made in response to structural conditions and constraints their families faced including a reliance on schools to guide their children's educational and career decision-making. Schools in working class areas where local economies thrived on manufacturing and natural resource extraction industries are ill-equipped to guide young people in a new economy. Rural communities can be isolating and create barriers, limit social/cultural capital, and shape a worldview that keeps people constrained in their community. This study discusses how young people in a rural working class community perceived their education and career decision making given the context in which they live. Southwest County, Pennsylvania is not unlike other poor/working class rural places where deindustrialization has occurred. Rural communities that were once dependent on a limited number of economic sectors (i.e. agriculture, natural resource extraction, and

manufacturing) have faced declining economic opportunities and physical deterioration (Budge, 2006; Swanson & Luloff, 1990).

### **Overview of Southwest County, Pennsylvania**

Southwest County is located in southwestern Pennsylvania and is within 60 miles of Pittsburgh, which is the second largest metropolitan city in Pennsylvania. Southwest County consists of steep, rolling farmland and narrow river valleys. The Langwell River flows through the county towards Pittsburgh. Perhaps a lesser-known fact about Southwest County is that it is part of Appalachia. Appalachia is defined as a “200,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi” (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2013).

Woodbury is the county seat and is roughly in the center of this rural county. Major traffic routes provide east-to-west and north-to-south access, which intersect just outside of Woodbury. One state route provides access to Pittsburgh but all other state routes are mostly two-lane highways. The largest system of roads in the county consists of what is known as the Pinchot Roads. These back roads are poorly maintained and often turn to mud in the winter and spring. The Pinchot Roads are owned and maintained by either the state or township. The county has several other state-owned secondary two-lane highways that connect minor towns and incorporate areas to one another.

Transportation is critical for the economic health of Southwest County. Overall, the county has 1,820 miles of roadway, 36.9% of which fall under the authority of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and 63.1% under local municipal control. Flora and Flora (2008) identify four major problems with rural transportation systems, all of which hold true for Southwest County; rural transportation suffers from “inadequate

new construction, deferred or otherwise inadequate maintenance of existing structures, inadequate fiscal infrastructure to serve economic needs, and financing problems” (p. 230).

The significant acreage in the county is rural and ideal for hunting, fishing, and many other outdoor activities. According to a report from the Penn State University Extension’s School of Forestry, 60% of all land in the county is considered forestland.<sup>1</sup> The Southwest County Industrial Development Council (SCIDC) markets the county as an outdoor enthusiast’s playground. The SCIDC describes the county’s natural features in terms of waterways and lakes available for recreational boating and fishing and the vast acres of open and wooded lands for hunting, cycling, hiking, and horseback riding.

The communities nestled within Southwest County’s rural landscape can trace their origins to mostly European ethnic groups. Towns in Southwest County like Keystone City still identify themselves as ethnic towns. Keystone City’s strong ethnic identity is due to the immigrant workforce in the late 1800s. Keystone City exists because a large industrial plant created the need to house workers for the plant. Although Keystone City and the rest of Southwest County celebrate their ethnic diversity, the racial makeup of the county has remained highly homogeneous for decades. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the racial makeup of the county is 98% White; 0.8% Black; 0.2% Asian; 0.1% American Indian and Alaska Native; 0.1% Some Other Race; and 0.8% Two or More Races (U.S. Census, 2013).

Although Southwest County has not experienced a change in its racial makeup over time, it has seen changes in employment opportunities. Southwest County has been impacted by deindustrialization. The effects continue to limit the number and types of

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<sup>1</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

employment opportunities. The Southwest County Department of Planning and Development provided a list of the top ten employers in the county (personal communication, November 7, 2008). In 2008, the top ten employers, by number of employees, included three public employers, one hospital, Wal-Mart, and five private companies. In 2010, the Southwest County Department of Planning and Development provided an updated list of the top ten employers (personal communication, April 29, 2010). The closing of two significant manufacturing plants put close to 800 individuals out of the workforce. While two companies closed, one a coal mining company the other a mineral extraction company increased their number of employees.

The composition of the top ten employers (public versus private) did not change but it is clear that if the hospital, school, and county government are excluded the remaining employers include two companies focused on mining and mineral extraction and Wal-Mart. Since mining and mineral extraction is a nonrenewable resource, these companies will cease to operate in the near future. After that, the public service sector will constitute the largest sector of employment in the county. The size of private employers is decreasing, due to the disappearance or departure of companies employing more than 200 employees.

The departure of employers and the decline in population in Southwest County has caused local stores, banks, and other services to fade away over the years. The downtown areas of Tennantport, Woodbury, Keystone City, and Torchwood have all but disappeared. A participant in the Tennantport Historical Society's oral history project recalls what downtown Tennantport used to be like in the first half of the twentieth

century and prior to the area's deindustrialization.<sup>2</sup> The small town of Tennantport had several grocery stores, three clothing stores, several restaurants, and banks. Today, downtown Tennantport, like most towns in Southwest County, is empty and in disrepair.

A housing and community development consulting firm conducted an economic revitalization study for Woodbury Borough in 2009. One section of the report included a photographic essay of downtown Woodbury focusing on Market Street. The 100 Block of Market Street is the core of the downtown business district. The report notes that the area has a "lackluster physical environment (deteriorated buildings and facades, lack of green space, storefront vacancies, etc.) [that] imparts a negative impression."<sup>3</sup> The visual impression of Woodbury presented to visitors is described as "harsh." The study's photographic essay presented pictures that clearly illustrate the core downtown area is no longer vibrant.

Maintaining and attracting business and industries in Southwest County is a critical focus of an economic development strategy, an equally important focus is the development and retention of skilled workers. The impact of deindustrialization in Southwest County has not only limited the number and types of employment opportunities it has also put Southwest County in a competitive disadvantage in educational attainment. The U.S. Census 2007–2011 American Community Survey reports the educational attainment of the Southwest County population over 25 years of age. County residents with no high school diploma make up 11.8% of the population. Slightly over half (51.7%) the county's residents are a high school graduate or the equivalency of a high school graduate. Those with some college but no degree constitute

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<sup>2</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

<sup>3</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

15.0% of the county’s population and those with some type of college degree constitute 21.5%. Table 1 provides a more detailed report of educational attainment among Southwest County residents.

Table 1

*Southwest County Residents’ Educational Attainment*

Highest Level of Education Completed	Southwest County Educational Attainment
Less than 9th grade	4.1%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	7.7%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	51.7%
Some college, no degree	15.0%
Associate's degree	7.6%
Bachelor's degree	10.0%
Graduate or professional degree	3.9%

*Note.* Population 25 years and over. From U.S. Census 2007-2011 American Community Survey.

The U.S. Census 2007–2011 American Community Survey provides information about Southwest County’s employed population. The Census pools employment types by industry and occupation. Industry occupation categories fall into management, business, science, and arts; service; sales and office; natural resources, construction, and maintenance; production, transportation, and material moving; and military. Table 2 provides a comparison of the participants’ occupation with Southwest County’s population.

More than one quarter (26.4%) of the population works in management, business, science, and arts occupations. Service occupations make up 17.7% of those employed and sales and office occupations encompass 22.2%. The natural resources, construction, and

maintenance occupations employ 13.9% of the county’s population. Finally, 19.8% of the population works in the production, transportation, and material moving occupations.

Table 2

*Southwest County Residents’ Occupations*

Occupation	Southwest County Population
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	26.4%
Service occupations	17.7%
Sales and office occupations	22.2%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	13.9%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	19.8%

*Note.* Population 16 years and over. From U.S. Census 2007-2011 American Community Survey.

Southwest County is a place that is rural with a significant amount of natural spaces and resources. The rural aspects of the county are prominently marketed as a place for natural recreation activities. The county’s tag line of “a little off the beaten path” is reflected in the county’s mostly underdeveloped transportation system. The county claims a diverse ethnic population but the county is overwhelmingly white. The major industrial plants and mills in Southwest County are distant memories leaving the hospital, school, county government, and a shrinking mineral extraction company as the county’s largest employers.

**Statement of the Problem**

Social class plays a significant role in access to opportunities and options in life. Social class influences how an individual is characterized in society as a person, how the individual fits into the workforce, what life goals are possible, and how those goals can

be attained. Individuals learn what resources they have or do not have, when or when not to use them and how or how not to use them to achieve their desired ends. For instance, several researchers have found that parents and social institutions (e.g., schools) pass on an understanding of the type of post-secondary and career opportunities available to working class children and this understanding impacts the choices children make (Devine, 2004; Flora & Flora, 2008; Lareau, 2003). Understanding how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County will help provide insight to social class preproduction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore and better understand how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices.

### **Research Questions**

To explore and better understand how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices the following three research questions are addressed:

1. How do individuals who attended the Southwest School District perceive the district's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?
2. How do individuals perceive their family's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?
3. How do individuals perceive the Southwest County community's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant to the economic and cultural health of Southwest County and similar economic and rurally positioned areas throughout the United States. Over the past two decades, major businesses in the county have closed. At the beginning of 2010, Southwest County's unadjusted seasonal unemployment reached 12.2% leaving the community with significant economic development challenges. The Pennsylvania State Data Center (2011) projects the county's population will decrease to a pre-World War II level in just a few decades. The county can expect population and fiscal impairment, the latter due to a reduction in the tax base, as the baby boom generation starts to pass away in about twenty-five years.

According to a former Southwest County Commissioner, the aging population and the lack of jobs could be two reasons why the Southwest County population has decreased. As the baby boom generation ages, there is serious risk that the county's future generations will out-migrate en masse in order to find jobs and financial security. Exploring the county's economic and demographic challenges begins with how individual post-secondary educational and career choices are influenced by family, school, and community. The lack of jobs and the decreasing population may only be a symptom of the underlying issues of how family, school, and community influences future generations' post-secondary educational and career choices.

This study will also examine the role of Southwest County parents and school personnel and how they build capital and shape life chances of young adults. Capital is the different types of skills, assets, and connections acquired throughout one's life. People inherit tools from their parents or obtain them through social networks and

cultural training. Capital is the currency of power to compete in society. The more capital an individual wields, the more likely he/she will have more powerful and advantaged positions in their social and economic life.

One's habitus is made up of a lifetime accumulation of skills, and habits. It also includes a learned yet unconscious outlook on life. The habitus positions an individual to act, express, and think in socially acceptable ways (Bourdieu, 1990). The habitus provides "varying cultural skills, social connections, educational practices, and other cultural resources, which then can be translated into different forms of value (i.e., capital) as individuals move out into the world" (Lareau, 2003, p. 276). Habitus is everywhere, but it is not uniform in the way it operates in society. Habitus builds over time and is relevant only in the appropriate context of social history. For instance, an individual growing up in a working class environment in Southwest County would most likely develop a different habitus from someone growing up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Habitus accumulates over time and is based on location. It is the accumulation of our daily actions and interactions in our social environment. "In short, the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, p. 82).

McLeod and Yates (2006) argue habitus is not only formed through parents but also in schools. In their study of youth from four schools, they found habitus impacts youth in different ways based on physical geography and specific cultural differences presented in the schools. For example, students in an affluent Pennsylvania suburb will have different opportunities, resources, and networks than students in Southwest County. For instance, an affluent school may provide educational enrichment programs such as

art, fencing club, classical music instruction, high-tech equipment in classrooms, lower teacher to student ratio, and expanded instructional resources and materials. McLeod and Yates also find that habitus operates “through discourse, practices, and institutions, and through interactions with others in their environment, principles are set up for the individual about what matters, what is noticed, how one comports oneself physically, socially, emotionally, and much more” (p. 90). This means the culture in a school may influence how an individual who grew up working class will see themselves and what educational and career choices make sense and are obtainable.

This study can positively contribute to helping working class youth and those working with them to recognize the influences that help shape post-secondary and career choices. Understanding how youth make choices about their futures can help youth and those serving youth make more informed decisions about school-to-work transitions.

### **Chapter Summary**

This research explores how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County. This chapter provided an introduction of the problem and its significance. Chapter 2 explains how social class is embedded in the structure of society. The literature review is a synthesis of research examining human agency and family, school, and community structures. I will start with a brief review of the selected classical social class theories of Karl Marx and Max Weber. Then I discuss the work of Pierre Bourdieu and select modern writings of others who have researched how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices. Chapter 3 covers the research design including a personal identity statement,

research questions, methodology, population and sample, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, and ethics. Chapter 4 focuses on data analysis and the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 provides discussion, conclusions, and recommendations based on the findings of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This research explores how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County. I sought the individual's perspective to understand and explore the shared event of growing up working class in Southwest County.

People make choices about their future and the contexts in which they live shape those choices. Family, school, and community have a great deal of influence shaping pathways to the future. For example, parents' advice and guidance are made in response to structural conditions and constraints their families faced including a reliance on schools to guide their children's educational and career decision-making. Schools in working class areas are ill-equipped to guide young people in a new economy. The rural community can be isolating and create barriers, limit social/cultural capital, and shape a worldview that keeps people within the community. This study discusses how young people in a rural working class community perceived their decision making given the context in which they live. This chapter provides an overview of the pertinent concepts of social class reproduction and human agency, focusing on the primary variables of family, school, and community.

#### **Social Class in American Society**

How to define social class is a subject open for debate. Wright (2008) states that confusion surrounding the definition of class is based on the issue that is examined. Even

when the same or similar issue is examined, class may be used to “identify attributes of a person, sometimes the nature of the positions they occupy, and other times the nature of the relations among positions” (Wright, 2008, p. 329). Class is associated to the aspects of the skills and traits of the individual, the social/economic position an individual holds in society, and the level of power an individual wields in the economic/political sectors in society. The definition of class can vary depending on, but not limited to, job status, property ownership, education, wealth, or power in the economic/political sectors in our society. To illustrate the ambiguity of social class, Ming-Liu, Rasheed-Ali, Soeck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett (2004) conducted a content analysis of 3,915 articles from three counseling journals looking for definitions of social class. They found 448 different words used to describe social class.

The confusion and role of class in our society is furthered by others who believe class is irrelevant or obscures social analysis of inequity and inequality in society. For instance, Pakulski and Waters’ (1996) in *The Death of Class* declare, “class has collapsed and is decomposing” (p. 7). They believe sociology has relied on the questionable concept of class for too long. In their view, if class were ever real and relevant it certainly is no longer in this modern era. Similarly, Kingston (2000), argues that American society is a classless society because groups no longer significantly share common economic position experiences that are distinct and “life-defining” (p. 1). Although some argue class is no longer relevant in American society, individuals still identify with, sort, and distinguish themselves from others.

There is a meritocratic ideal in American society that leads to the belief that individuals receive social and economic rewards through ability and not class advantages.

However, class mobility has declined in the past forty years resulting in a rise in class inequality (Gilbert, 2008). According to Gilbert (2008), the wealth of the richest 1% of Americans has increased; the income gap among Americans has continued to widen; individuals working full-time with poverty level incomes have increased; and the United States has made little to no progress in reducing poverty. The American meritocratic ideal and the outdated definition of what is a working class and middle class job has further complicated class identity.

Individuals view their job as the determining factor of self-identifying between middle and working class (Beeghley, 2008). Gilbert (2008) sees class structure as more of an art than a science due to complicated class definitions and how individuals identify with a particular class. The lines between working class and middle class jobs have changed. Gilbert (2008) defines middle class as individuals who need “significant skills and perform varied tasks...under loose supervision” by management (p. 230). The middle class worker earns enough income to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. On the other hand, working class are “less skilled...[and] highly routinized” jobs that are closely supervised by management and earns enough income to maintain a “living lifestyle” (p. 230). Just because an individual works in an office instead of a factory is no longer an accurate class indicator. Jobs in an office environment can be just as “less skilled” and “routinized” as a factory job (p. 14).

The two largest classes individuals identify with in the United States are the middle and working class (Beeghley, 2008; Gilbert, 2008). It is important to this research to understand why individuals may identify with one category of class over another. According to McLeod and Yates (2006), the idea of class is a subjective social construct,

which allows individuals to sort and distinguish themselves from others. Viewing the relationship of work with the individual is instrumental to understanding class because labor has changed in post-industrial America. Working class is often seen as a group engaged in industrial types of labor such as mining, steel mill manufacturing, and automobile production. Although the type of labor has changed from industrial to service based, the relationship between the capitalist and the worker has not changed. “Whether that is to be achieved by producing hamburgers or ideas rather than steel or automobiles is of little concern to capital, as is whether the labour it exploits wears blue, white, or pink collars” (Dunk, 2003, p. 6). Regardless of what is produced, the working class is paid a wage for their labor and that labor produces a profit for the company.

Social class reproduction is a process by which social category and division are created based on the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and prestige (Johnson, 2006, p. 285). Social class reproduction tells us how macro level influences such as school, family, and community might affect the life chances of individuals. The Bourdieuan view of understanding social class reproduction in American society is explored in this research. Since Karl Marx and Max Weber significantly influence Bourdieu, it is appropriate to briefly discuss their contribution to the theoretical understanding of social class.

### **Karl Marx (1818-1883): Sociologist and Economist**

Understanding Marx’s approach to social class helps frame how individuals in Southwest County perceive their role in society. According to Marx, social class can be summarized in the following way: What individuals produce and how individuals relate to each other is supported by the superstructure, which is such things as societal values,

law, religion, or politics. In Marx's own words, "As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and how they produce" (Marx & Engels, 1845/2001, p. 62). Capitalists benefit from controlling and manipulating the societal values, law, religion, or politics of society to nudge us into a social and economic role to support the economic base of society.

Marx says social class is related to employment types and a person relates to others in their community. This claim by Marx has helped shaped my understanding of people in Southwest County and how they make choices about their future and the contexts in which they live shape those choices. Southwest County is a working class area where manufacturing and natural resource extraction industries once thrived. Since our economy shifted to a new economy the lack of employment and isolation found in rural communities can create barriers that keep people constrained in their community.

### **Max Weber (1864-1920): Sociologist and Economist**

Weber complements Marx's view of economic structures by looking at the impact of social structures and institutions on the lives of people. According to Weber, class is not a community but a situation. Weber defines a class situation as a person's economic position in society. Weber developed a distinction between class and status groups. Status is different from class and class situations because it refers to communities and non-economic qualities such as honor or lifestyle (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004, p. 212). Status pertains to an individual's prestige, honor, or popularity in a society. There are differences in lifestyles between status groups. For instance how an individual who grew up working class person in Southwest County may conduct his/her life is different than how an upper class person in New York City conducts his/her life. The differences could

include such things as the type of vehicle driven, where one resides, what is eaten, types of hobbies, the choice of music, etc. Class and status have a complex relationship, which may not be causal.

In Weber's discussion of classes, he also brings the term "life chances" into the dialogue of class studies membership (Weber, 1921/1978, p. 927). Life chances have come to mean the available opportunities to individuals to achieve their goals. People from rural Southwest County make educational and career choices in context of perceived opportunities. Rural communities shape a worldview that can keep people constrained in their community due to isolation and limited social/cultural capital.

Social class in American society is difficult to define because there are many ways to explore class. We define ourselves and are defined by others by our type of work, what we value, how much power we have, and our opportunities in the future. We like to think we are masters of our own destiny but our life chances have a great deal to do with the economic and structural conditions in which we make choices. Although there is a debate about the definition or existence of class, it exists and is reproduced from one generation to the next.

### **Social Class Reproduction**

The American value of individualism purports that a member of American society can "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" through one's own labor, intelligence, and talent. MacLeod (2009) observed that Americans value the "achievement ideology" (p. 98). That is, much of the general American population feels that if you work hard enough in life you can achieve anything. However, social class reproduction theorists like Bourdieu argue that occupying an advantaged social class position has little to do with

merit or hard work and everything to do with the institutionalized advantages coupled with unequal experiences and training parents provide their children (Bourdieu, 1979/1984).

Bourdieu's concepts describe how parents, communities, and schools contribute to life chances in Southwest County. Bourdieu synthesizes Marx's economic impact on structures and institutions and Weber's status groups and life chances (Turner, 2003). In this study, Bourdieu's work guides my thinking about social class reproduction in Southwest County. Class is a social position defined in terms of wealth, education, status, and power. An individual's class shapes their education and career decision making given the context in which they live. In the next section, I explore key concepts used by Bourdieu including habitus, field, and capital, which help further an understanding of how class reproduces.

### **Habitus: Lifetime Accumulation of Skills, Habits, and Outlook on Life**

Bourdieu understood that people face conflict, change, and inequality in society but we all have the capacity to change or maintain our relation with the structural systems in our society (Lareau, 2003). Bourdieu identified three central concepts to explain class reproduction. These terms are habitus, field, and capital and assist us in understanding power relations in our social life.

Understanding habitus provides insight into the post-secondary educational and career choices of individuals who grew up working class. The habitus positions an individual to act, express, and think in socially acceptable ways (Bourdieu, 1990). One's habitus is made up of a lifetime accumulation of skills, and habits. It also includes a learned yet unconscious outlook on life. The habitus provides "varying cultural skills,

social connections, educational practices, and other cultural resources, which then can be translated into different forms of value (i.e., capital) as individuals move out into the world” (Lareau, 2003, p. 276). Habitus is everywhere, but it is not uniform in the way it operates in society. Habitus builds over time and is relevant only in the appropriate context of social history. For instance, an individual growing up working class in Southwest County would develop a habitus different from someone growing up elsewhere in America. Habitus accumulates over time and is based on location. It is the accumulation of our daily actions and interactions in our social environment. “In short, the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history” (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, p. 82).

McLeod and Yates (2006) argue habitus is not only formed through parents but also in schools. In their study of youth from four schools, they found habitus impacts youth in different ways based on physical geography and specific cultural differences presented in the schools. For example, students in an affluent Pennsylvania suburb will have different opportunities, resources, and networks than students in Southwest County. The affluent school may provide educational enrichment programs such as art, fencing club, classical music instruction, high-tech equipment in classrooms, lower teacher to student ratios, and expanded instructional resources and materials. McLeod and Yates (2006) also find that habitus operates “through discourse, practices, and institutions, and through interactions with others in their environment, principles are set up for the individual about what matters, what is noticed, how one comports oneself physically, socially, emotionally, and much more” (p. 90). This means the culture in a school may

influence how an individual who grew up working class will see themselves and what educational and career choices are available and obtainable.

It is possible for an individual to change his/her habitus, but the change should cause internal conflict because the newly learned habitus is different from that learned in childhood (Bourdieu, 2000). Individuals cannot easily unlearn the habitus they accumulated over the course of their life. Conflict occurs because “pedagogic work” is an “irreversible process... [producing] an irreversible disposition” which will influence the formation of any subsequent habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/2000, p. 42).

Individuals from Southwest County may experience internal conflict when moving into a different habitus. For instance, Southwest County has an abundance of natural resources such as open farmland, woods, lakes and rivers. Hunting and riding four-wheelers are popular recreational activities in Southwest County. Additionally, many residents live in homes that are acres or miles from each other. An individual who grew up in Southwest County may have a difficult time moving to a metropolitan city where they cannot keep a gun or ride a four-wheeler and houses almost touch each other. Although not the case for everyone growing up in Southwest County, an individual might perceive the prospect of pursuing educational or career opportunities in an environment that conflicts with their habitus as untenable.

Habitus affects siblings in different ways just as it does among unrelated individuals. Siblings that grow up with the same social class background can share many of the same formative influences such as parents, class, and school but form different outlooks on life. MacLeod (2009) provides an example that “illustrates the interplay among family, school, and peer groups” and these factors show the “importance of

mediating variables in the habitus and the complex relationships that exist among the various factors” (pp. 148-149). MacLeod (2009) suggests there are factors of habitus that siblings may not share. Schooling and peer associations are variables that may influence habitus. Equate this to navigating with a compass and map. Two individuals may start at the same point on the map and travel in a straight line, but if the compass readings are just the smallest fraction different; the two will end up miles apart. Lareau and Conley (2008) support MacLeod’s findings by suggesting that although family background is important, habitus is influenced more by a set of factors like parents, class, and school.

### **Field: Competing for Resources**

McLeod and Yates (2006) describe fields as “structure contexts of institutions’ rules and other relations that form a differentiating hierarchy that shapes these processes and practices and determines what counts as valuable capital” (p. 90). Fields are social institutions and economic markets that include such areas as art, politics, religion, law, and education to name a few. Fields can overlap but also remain distinct (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). An example from Southwest County illustrates one study participant’s frustration trying to obtain funding through an organization that controls the field of art and entertainment in Southwest County. This participant believed groups and organizations in Southwest County excluded artists like himself from grants and other economic opportunities. In this case, the field of art and entertainment is also an economic market because money is made from art. In Southwest County various groups control funding for arts and entertainment in Woodbury and other venues in Southwest County.

Fields are structured with internal power relations that are maintained by the habitus of both the individual and collective group. Bourdieu equates fields to arenas where the struggle for various resources occurs. An artist seeking funding would have to navigate and compete for power for funding within this specific field in Southwest County. In the case of the art field in Southwest County, one organization is the gatekeeper to the art and entertainment funding and marketing resources. Groups maintain powerful positions, which often define advantages and disadvantages in society. The field is defined and maintained by individual and collective habitus. The Southwest County artist may find it near impossible to obtain funding for a project not in line with the tastes of the organization with the power of decision making and funding. In this study, I explore the field of education as a site where students use various forms of capital to pursue their educational and career goals.

### **Capital: The Tools You Inherit and Obtain**

Within a field individuals use capital to compete. Capital is a toolbox filled with different types of skills, assets, and connections acquired throughout one's life. People inherit tools from their parents or obtain them through social networks and cultural training. Capital is the currency of power within fields meaning the more capital an individual wields, the more likely they will have a more powerful and advantaged position in their social and economic life.

Bourdieu identifies four types of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Economic capital includes money and financial resources and is the accumulation of property and financial assets. For example, a parent can use their economic capital to send their child to a private school. Social capital includes

friends, groups, memberships and social networks within the community who one draw upon to help them achieve goals. A parent involved as a volunteer coach with the school district may have greater access and influence in the school district than a parent not involved in the school district. Cultural capital is an individual's knowledge, experience, and connections and includes such things as traditions, spirituality, habits, and heritage (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 18). Cultural capital includes our perception of our social world and the symbols that create a collective identity and position of power within a group. A parent with a college degree can help his/her children navigate the steps to seek financial aid and apply to college better than a parent without college experience. Symbolic capital is the use of the other forms of capital to communicate an individual's position of basis of power, honor, prestige or recognition (Turner, 2003). A high school counselor may devote more time to the child of a highly respected physician. Although the physician may not ask for the additional attention, the counselor may feel inclined because physicians have respected positions in society.

Flora and Flora (2008) expand on other types of capital important to understand and explore the shared event of growing up working class in Southwest County. Natural capital sustains life. It is our environment and the diversity of plants, sea life, and animals. Natural capital can be consumed or extracted for profit or protected as a resource (Flora & Flora, 2008). An example of the importance of natural capital as a form of economic resources is the marketing of the abundance of open spaces, rivers, lakes, and woods in Southwest County. Marketing the natural recreational opportunities in the county could attract visitors who would in turn spend money in the county. Human capital covers the skills and abilities of an individual. Skill development in a general

workforce could attract economic investment and development. Political capital is the ability for an individual or group to influence the laws and enforcement of the laws in the economic, political, and judicial fields (Flora & Flora, 2008). The right amount of political capital could influence the distribution of economic development resources. Built capital is the infrastructure of our society to include such things as industrial complexes, roads, sport stadiums, and airports (Flora & Flora, 2008). Built capital can influence other forms of capital. For instance, economic development and development would be stagnant in a county with a poor system of roads or lack of industrial complexes.

How one possesses and uses capital matters in their social mobility. Individuals and groups often marginalize and dominate others in American society. This symbolic violence is a process that occurs when the holder of symbolic capital uses his or her power to regularly marginalize and dominate those with less power in our society. This type of violence is considered a “soft” form of “*violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*” [emphasis in original] (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 167). That is, subjugated individuals see their domination as a natural part of life. The school is one place in American society where reproduction occurs through symbolic violence. The school is the agency commissioned by the state to wield “pedagogic authority and the relative autonomy” (Bourdieu, 1970/2000, p. 12). The school is a field with relative autonomy from other fields and creates its own markers of achievement that can help groups dominate other groups.

This section describes how parents, communities, and schools contribute to life chances. School districts contribute to the formation of habitus. The availability and use

of beneficial capital that is defined by the group who holds power in a particular field can provide advantages for some students over others. The next section will explore how the school contributes to social class reproduction.

### **Education as an Agent of Restraint**

In this section, I continue the exploration of social class reproduction and provide insight into the process of how opportunities and options in life are visible or hidden, and accessible or denied, within an educational setting. First, I review how authors have explored modern education systems and their assessments of how schools shape educational and career outcomes of students differently based on social class. I also review research on the influence of family and community on post-secondary educational and career choices. Finally, I visit recent literature on the impact of structural forces such as family, school, or societal values on individuals.

### **Meritocracy of Education**

Many individuals in American society believe that if one works hard and obtains an education, they can accomplish anything. However, American schools offer different resources based on the tax base and resources of a particular district. In their study of the relationship between education and work in America, Carnoy and Levin (1985) explore two neighboring schools and ask, “How could two schools operating under the same state laws and existing so close to each other show such different patterns?” (p. 134). In American society, the school is generally believed to be meritocratic and offer parity to all students regardless of class, gender, or race. Carnoy and Levin (1985) make a case that schools exist and operate as a paradox in that the American educational system can be an institution that simultaneously reproduces inequality and offers avenues for social

mobility. However, other researchers such as Brantlinger (2003) do not believe schools are meritocratic because equal education requires a neutral and level playing field.

Instead, the educational system hands the best chances to individuals that already have advantages continuing a “long-acknowledged cycle of poverty and failure” (p. 191). The idea that the school is a place to alleviate economic inequity and create equality is a misnomer.

According to Bowles and Gintis, education has never been a tool for economic equality. The “free-school movement and related efforts to make education more conducive to full human development have assumed that the present school system is the product of irrationality, mindlessness...Rather, the structure of the educational experience is admirably suited to nurturing attitudes and behavior consonant with participation in the labor force” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 9). In other words, within the American capitalist system, schools function to produce workers, not equality. Schools accomplish this function through the “correspondence principle,” which refers to the structuring of the school environment so that social interactions and individual rewards mirror the workplace. The school prepares youth to assimilate into the social order through citizenship and learning to labor (Aronowitz, 2004). The school structures “social interactions and individual rewards to replicate the environment of the workplace” (Bowles & Gintis, 2001, p. 2). The explicit curriculum may focus on the so-called reading, writing, and arithmetic, but there is a “hidden curriculum” that indoctrinates the student for the workplace. The next section discusses the hidden curriculum and how it differentially prepares children of different backgrounds for the adult labor force.

## **Hidden Curriculum in Education**

The idea of a “hidden curriculum” is best described through the work of Jean Anyon, a leading American critical thinker and researcher in education. In an ethnographical study of five elementary schools in New Jersey, Anyon provides contrasting examples of the type of work students were assigned (Anyon, 1981). In the working class school, the work assigned was procedural in nature with an emphasis on following steps and instructions. In the middle class school, Anyon found work was centered on getting the right answer. Students followed directions to complete the assignment. Students were required to make some choices and decision making to correctly complete the assignment. Next, in the affluent school, she found the students’ work to be creative and independently carried out. Students were free to apply ideas and concepts to complete the assignments. Finally, in the executive elite school, she found the work was focused on developing analytical and intellectual capacity. The main goal of the work in the elite school was inspiration and conceptualization.

Anyon’s research demonstrates what other researchers such as Carnoy and Levin (1985) and Finn (1999) observe that schools—through hidden curricula—help to maintain social stratification between working class, middle class, affluent, and elite youth. Schools are pathways where youth learn their place in the economy. Youth “internalizes the cultural messages of the school” through official discourse and “the messages embodied in the ‘insignificant’ practices of daily classroom life” (Giroux, 2001, p. 39). Giroux sees schools harboring a hidden curriculum through every interaction between the school and the youth. Within traditional curriculum the hidden aspects serve to indoctrinate “unstated norms, values, and beliefs” through the school’s

structure, norms, and rules in the classroom (Giroux, 2001, p. 47). The message the school sends to a youth serves not only as a means of socialization but also as social control that benefits the maintenance of schooling for different types of economic and social classes.

In this study, I explore how individuals perceived their education in Southwest County schools and how they mediated school culture to gain understanding of individual agency. Through this research I explore how individuals educated in Southwest County interpreted the messages the school may have transmitted. Families also transmit messages to youth and in the next section, I explore how families contribute to social reproduction.

### **The Impact of a Family Legacy**

Parental understanding of capital and their use plays an important role in creating and shaping the life chances of a child. A child's inheritance from his or her parents encompasses more than material goods. Parents pass on a habitus to their children, which is a learned yet unconscious outlook on life. Parents "pass on an understanding of society and their role in it, speech, dress, and ways of being—cultural capital—that in turn affect the choices their children make" (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 55). The habitus, that is, a way of viewing the world and your place in it, is passed to the next generation through the family.

The habitus a child inherits depends in part on parents' understanding and interaction with the numerous institutions in which a child interacts including most prominently, the school. Working class parents frame their aspirations for their children

in the boundaries of their financial, social, and cultural capital, including their exposure, or lack thereof, to higher education (Lareau, 1987).

Fiona Devine's (2004) *Class Practices: How Parents Help Their Children Get Good Jobs* provides insight into how middle class individuals achieved their socioeconomic status and how they maintain their status. She interviewed middle class parents and their children from Manchester, United Kingdom and Boston, Massachusetts and found that parents used their economic capital to help increase the probability of their children's success directly and indirectly. Families with financial resources created educational advantage through private education or public schools located in affluent communities, they used money to buy their children social capital enrichment experiences and college-preparatory support. Families living in less affluent communities and lacking financial capital could not afford a tutor if one was needed or the time to manage emerging talents and interests.

Devine (2004) found regardless of social class background, most parents promoted education and wanted their children to obtain the maximum level of education possible but middle class parents' messages to their children were stronger and more meaningful. The effectiveness of middle class parents' messages was due in part to greater communication with their children and monitoring and controlling the activities of their children. On the other hand, working class parents were more likely to have accepted their children's educational aspirations so long as it was enough education to obtain a good paying job. Devine found working class parents did not expect but hoped their children would do well in school whereas middle class parents had clear expectations for their children's educational and occupational success. In this study, I

also explored how the messages participants received from their parents and how these messages were based in parents' habitus and access to capital.

Social capital refers to the people we know to help us reach our goals in life. Social capital takes many forms: school friends, peer pressure, professional contacts, and mentors. Social capital is commonly known as the "helping hand," "pulling strings," "good old boy network," or "who you know" (Beagan, 2005; Brantlinger, 2003). For example, in Royster's (2003) research, white men experienced better chances for school-to-work opportunities than their African American peers because of the differences in social networks. She argued white men had more opportunities than African American men because the gatekeepers of trade work were predominately-older white men.

Social networks provide contacts for critical information on where to attend school and how to take advantage of opportunities in the educational system. Social networks are passed on by parents but young people can also build their own social capital in their peer groups, by making important contacts in their schooling. As Devine (2004) suggests, American interviewees "were conscious of how teachers and, perhaps most importantly, their own networks of friends and acquaintances shaped their early lives and beyond" (p. 122).

While all individuals have economic, cultural, and social capital, many researchers argue that varying levels of capital are developed among working and middle classes in such a way that working class children are disadvantaged in school and career. Since middle and upper class parents are aware how teachers and friends helped shape their own lives, they want to manage their child's experiences growing up. "Concerted cultivation" is the term used by Lareau (2003) to describe how middle class

parents manage the development of their children through organized activities and experiences. She suggests middle- and upper-class youth lead busy childhoods by way of their managed development. Parents manage their child's development by managing their children's free time. From sports, travel, cultural pursuits, to volunteer work or any number of other co-curricular activities, the life of a middle or upper class youth is often booked with capital-building activities. Parents generally heavily manage the time spent outside the classroom for middle class children. In other words, middle class parents cultivate children and by doing so, children learn to "question adults and address them as relative equals" (p. 2). Middle-class parents are often able to devote the time and financial resources to provide their children the cultural, social, and human capital resources necessary to maintain or increase their class standing. Middle class parents are more likely than working class parents to challenge institutions—such as schools—that exclude their children from beneficial forms of capital development (Lareau 2003). For instance, a middle class parent may demand or argue with a teacher or school administrator to let their child take a class for which the child is marginally qualified.

In contrast to middle and upper class, Lareau and other researchers found the working class and the working poor socialize their offspring through "natural growth". Working class parents are as capable of devoting the considerable time and financial resources as middle class parents. However, working class and poor parents are occupied by work and feel more pressure to provide food, housing, clothing, and health care for the family. Moreover, parenting styles vary between working and middle class parents. Working class children are not seen as equals to adults and parents do not elicit "their children's feelings, opinions, and thoughts. Rather, they see a clear boundary between

adults and children” (Lareau, 2003, p. 3). Working class parents raise children who may not learn to question adults and address them as equals. Working class parents rely on the school and give deference to the educators to help their children reach educational and career goals (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). The differential parenting styles often lead middle class youth to see themselves as equals to adults and question institutions, whereas parents and children of the working class and poor often accept their situation of powerlessness, which may lower their aspirations and expectations. Yet individuals who grew up working class are not merely victims of their environments and class status. Instead, as individuals make choices in their constrained environments, they vacillate between being disadvantaged by structures and asserting their own agency to overcome barriers.

### **Understanding Structure and Agency**

Several researchers (MacLeod, 2009; McLeod & Yates, 2006; Sullivan, 1989) address the interaction of structure and agency theories of social class reproduction. Put simply, these researchers help to illustrate how sometimes individuals are constrained by economic, social, and cultural barriers and cannot locate or utilize the resources they need to plan and prepare for the future, sometimes despite constraints individuals use their own agency to overcome barriers, building the capital they need to reach their goals. Still other disadvantaged individuals, may not even see barriers or constraints because their definition of success and achievement is being realized.

Devine’s (2004) research provides insight into how middle class individuals achieved their socioeconomic status and how they maintain their status. Devine (2004) provides an explanation of macro-sociological constants and micro-sociological impact.

Analyzing “educational dispositions and occupation horizons” Devine showed the manner in which her participants discussed using their economic, cultural, and social capital to benefit their children’s education and occupation opportunities (p. 209). Parents from higher economic class backgrounds had high expectations that their children would attend college and obtain prestigious occupations. Parents from working class backgrounds respected education and hoped their child would attend college at least to obtain a well-paying job.

Devine found that influential people outside of the working class participants family played a large role in supporting or contesting schools or other institutions that impair the development of beneficial forms of capital for their children. She examined how the influential people in the participant’s life supported or countered cultural capital from the participant’s family. Devine examined how the influential people in the participant’s life supported or countered cultural capital from the participant’s family.

MacLeod (2009) also found capital and habitus are tools to negotiate structural conditions that can place people at a disadvantage. Individuals use capital and habitus to negotiate their economic and structural conditions in life. People make choices for their future based on the context of their current circumstances. Social structures in our society influence our choices and habitus is a conduit for both reproduction and change for an individual. A person’s habitus can change because of new conditions but the person’s past habitus continues with the changing conditions.

Human agency is the capacity to change or maintain our relation with the structural systems in our society. The structure of the larger society acts on individuals and can limit or disadvantage working class and poor individuals. Individuals can make

choices as actors in society, that is a working class youth does not have to grow up to become a working class adult. As MacLeod (2009) and Lehmann (2007) found in their analysis of working class and poor youth an individual can be constrained by structural forces or overcome barriers due to human agency decisions. For example, MacLeod cites the case of “Super”, an individual in his study who deals cocaine rather than getting a “legitimate job” because his aspirations and expectations were lowered by an unsupportive school experience. For MacLeod’s participants, transition into the formal economy was difficult because his participants were making education and career choices in an unstable local economy that was experiencing a shift from well paying manufacturing jobs to low paying service industry jobs. Due to the lack of well-paying jobs, Super had few options other than to turn to the informal economy. Super’s goals were to make money and he was able to do so by selling cocaine. Super would not see barriers or constraints because he was achieving his definition of success/achievement. According to MacLeod, Super’s decision is informed, intentional, and rational given the structural constraints he experienced.

Great care must be taken not to devalue the importance of human agency and the individual’s ability to resist structural forces. MacLeod (2009) and McLeod and Yates (2006) state that macro forces do indeed shape individual lives and “in varying degrees reproduce social relations to power and inequality” (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 89). Yet, they argue, individuals are forming (self-action) and being formed (structural action) simultaneously. Structural forces such as family, school, economy, or societal values do not necessarily force individuals down a determinist path. Agency is an important component to understanding how individuals mediate structural forces in their lives.

Individuals must make sense of the roadblocks and situations they perceive to have no control over. MacLeod (2009) illustrates how individuals make sense of their material conditions.

The bricklayer's son may look across his high school desk at the banker's boy sitting in front of him, shake his head dismissively, and silently wager that the other can't change the oil in his Volvo. Or he may see in the banker's son an effortless ease with girls, grades, and teachers and shake his head despairingly at his own oil-stained fingers. Or he may do both, depending on the context—which peers are around, who the teacher is, and whether the class is algebra or technical drawing. (p. 250)

The reality of this illustration is the banker's son has more economic resources than the bricklayer's son does. The subjectivity is how the bricklayer's son perceives his situation. The reality of our society's economic inequality results in the possibility of both subjective views. MacLeod argues the banker's son will not have to deal with the same material constraints in society that the son of the bricklayer will have to face.

“Subjectivity is malleable, unstable, never completely sutured, yet it has elements of continuity and is constituted in and responsive to historical and local conditions and patterns of social differentiation” (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 79). Human agency or cultural models of shared ideas, attitudes, and behaviors address both the malleability and continuity of how subjectivity itself is shaped and produced. What is valued or perceived by one group does not necessarily have the same value or perception for another group. In some ways, individuals who grew up working class may see their background as an

advantage rather than a hindrance. In this study, I examine individuals' perceptions of how their own class background shaped their education and career decisions.

### **Life Chances and the Impact of Boundaries and Resistance**

Class based boundaries could contribute to life chances. The boundaries based on such things as class, race, gender, and sexuality reinforces the habitus within communities and creates organization and order (Lamont, 1992). For instance, a child who grew up working class may only see a future working on the family farm because his/her family expects them to carry on the family tradition or they see no other future available to their child due to the perception of financial or educational constraints. Boundaries result in-group creation, which provides a bond “based on shared emotions, similar conceptions of the sacred and the profane, and similar reactions toward symbolic violators” (p. 12). For example, working class culture may share similar views on gender roles, tastes in music or sports, and a general outlook on life. A youth who grew up working class may choose to take metal shop rather than a foreign language. The working class youth may value working with their hands rather than learning a foreign language because they cannot envision ever needing to use another language. Bonds based on class, race, gender, and sexuality can produce inequality because the bonds can produce unequal distribution of resources, discrimination and create a false sense of superiority (Lamont, 1992).

Class is not the only way society identifies or categorizes people. Race, gender, sexuality, religion, and citizenship status are but a few broad categories used to separate a particular group from the others. These characteristics are not generally thought of as factors of socioeconomic success. Factors such as “race, geographical location, height,

beauty or other aspects of physical appearance, health status and personality” can also create boundaries and contribute to life chances (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 4). This is important to note because class can come along with other boundaries in unpredictable ways.

Sociologists study resistance in many forms and view resistance to the dominant norm in society as a response to blocked mobility. The resistance against the dominant class by the working class must be examined closely to determine if it is truly resistance or something else (Giroux, 2001). For example, Giroux points out that what may appear on the surface to be lack of dedication or indifference to education may be resistance. Giroux uses an example of a school where some teachers did not adequately prepare lesson plans or rushed home immediately after work. On the surface, this situation cannot automatically be seen as resistance to the school administration’s authority. This situation could be nothing more than undedicated teachers. The behavior must be examined in the “historical and relational conditions” that cause the behavior (Giroux, 2001, p. 109).

MacLeod (2009) explored the historical and relational conditions of a group of boys he called the “Hallway Hangers” to explain one member’s drug dealing. In doing so, he was able to demonstrate the historical, informed, intentional, and rational decision behind the reliance on the informal and illegal economy. MacLeod was able to connect the historical and class relations to one of the “Hallway Hangers” drug dealing to demonstrate the act was a form of resistance. However, resistance to the dominant culture may not be in the best interest of the individual because some “resistance actually serves the needs of the system and, in the end, helps reproduce the relations” (Dunk, 2003, p. 139). For instance, if a young person places little value on education but instead focus

his/her efforts on hunting, fishing, or athletics the individual is aiding class reproduction. In this study, I explore forms of resistance reported by participants inside and outside of school.

### **Class Impact on Aspirations**

An individual's habitus weighs heavily on their aspirations and the steps they take to achieve those aspirations. In MacLeod's (2009) ethnographic work, he categorized boys from a low-income housing development into two groups to explain the process of social class reproduction. He found that a depressed habitus strongly influences occupational aspirations and outcomes. A depressed habitus is a conscious and unconscious limited outlook on life. "The leveled aspirations are a powerful mechanism by which class inequality is reproduced from one generation to the next" (MacLeod, 2009, p. 5). Similarly, Felski (2000) cites that individuals "completely internalized the structures of authority; it is the ultimate example of psychic self-regulation, of a class that has built the bars of its prison" (p. 36). Individuals build "self-regulating prisons" because there is a fear of ridicule, failure, or repercussions from the peer group. This fear of ridicule, failure or repercussions does not have to be because of a major occurrence, but merely a "seemingly unimportant event" (p. 39). An example might include an individual from a working class family who has working class friends and therefore might not explore choir, dance, or theatre activities because such pursuits would most likely be viewed as an infraction of the working class social code. This self-regulation is the internalization of their perceived inadequacies because such behaviors are often outside the activities in which working class people participate.

A recent study of rural working class youth may demonstrate how self-regulation due to perceived inadequacies influences the perception of educational and career possibilities. Ali and McWhirter (2006) studied the relationship between postsecondary aspirations and vocational or educational self-efficacy beliefs among rural Appalachian high school students. In the study, they explored four pathways for postsecondary education. The four pathways included work, vocational technical, bachelor's degrees, and professional degrees. They concluded that Appalachian students planning to obtain full-time employment had "lower vocational/educational confidence and outcome expectations for college" (p. 104). Perhaps these students had lower positive experiences that reinforced the pursuit of postsecondary employment. Additionally, the researchers found that those seeking employment after secondary education had lower socioeconomic status compared to those seeking a college education.

Even with comparable demographics, individuals who share a class background can develop differently since habitus is not uniform in the way it operates in society. Our dreams and desires are influenced by our habitus. Aspirations influence individuals to either dream big or not at all. Habitus affects individuals' aspirations because it sets the parameters of the dreams people dream for their future self. Expectations fueled by aspirations are "tempered by perceived capabilities and available opportunities" (MacLeod, 2009, p. 62). Two children can dream of becoming astronauts; however, habitus may temper or nurture the dreams of the children differently. Regardless of whether a child dreams big or not at all depends on the amount and quality of information they receive about the world of work.

## **Career Guidance and Aspirations**

Working class parents often expect teachers and especially guidance counselors to help their children with educational and career decisions. McLeod and Yates (2006) take issue with the well-meaning career counseling provided by school guidance counselors. The career counseling provided from the school depends on the student already knowing what career path they want to take in life. Teachers and counselors often fail to engage the student in a meaningful exploration of their aspirations to find careers and pathways. The “information about jobs...or advice that simply tries to match decisions with aptitudes, fail to engage with the deeper sense of ‘who I am’ or ‘who I want to become’ that leads young people to identify, or not identify, with certain careers and pathways” (p. 104). Often the working class and poor have fewer resources than the middle and upper class youth who have their parents, mentors, and other resources who will assist with mapping their education and career pathways. As with their view of academic education, working class and poor parents are also more likely to believe that the school, specifically the guidance counselor, should map their child’s education and career aspirations (Lareau & Conley, 2008, p. 109).

Ambiguity exists in the role of the guidance counselor in helping map a student’s educational and career choices. Here I am going to discuss the role of the guidance counselor because working class and poor parents are also more likely to rely on the school and guidance counselors to help guide their child’s education and career aspirations.

Life after high school is complex and the mechanics of post-secondary education and career formation is not transparent to most individuals. Schools traditionally

contribute to career planning using curriculum, group, and individual interventions as part of a comprehensive program. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) divides the counseling function into three competencies: academic, career, and personal/social development (ASCA, 2004). According to researcher and University of Missouri-Columbia professor Richard Lapan (2004), group counseling is a widely used method of career education and development.

Pyle (2007) has worked in the field of career counseling for several decades. He authored a book about the practices and principles of group career counseling for the National Career Development Association. Pyle uses stages for group counseling in an educational setting. The first stage occurs in elementary school. The goal is to “enhance awareness of the world of work” (Pyle, 2007, p. 19). One suggested approach is for the counselor to create awareness using task areas of people, data, things, and ideas. The task areas help the child view and organize the “world of work.” He provides an example of people who work outside with their hands versus office workers. Pyle (2007) recognizes that “it is not unusual for these experiential modes of organization to be filled with ethnic and gender biases and stereotypes” (p. 20). At the middle school level, the goal is to “understand how interests and abilities relate to careers while building on a basic understanding of the world of work” (p. 20). Understanding how interests and abilities relate to careers is accomplished via exercises that build on interests, values, and abilities with the expectation of a personal understanding of the “world of work.” At the high school level the goal is to “gain greater experiential understanding of the world of work and enhanced occupational literacy while more fully crystallizing interests, abilities, and

values” (p. 20). The increased awareness of interests, values, and abilities is based on “direct experiences such as work or volunteering” (p. 20).

Guidance counselors are not the only school personnel that influence a child’s aspirations. Although only one of many modeling sources, the teacher and school environment is very influential in creating internalized associations to status groups. Teachers can limit or expand a child’s outlook on life chances. A teacher can contribute to lowering aspirations of youth by reinforcing messages they receive from their family and friends. “Teachers are realistic about the characteristics that will be required for success, so it is little wonder that they have lower expectations for minorities, females, and the poor than for the non-minorities, males, and the well-to-do... They are merely accepting the nature of the world for which they are preparing youth” (Carnoy & Levin, 1985, p. 138). A study conducted by Bigler, Spears-Brown, and Markell (2001) in a school environment demonstrated that children’s attitudes and perceptions are affected by the expectations the teacher sets for their students. The researchers found that children learn the link between the “Us” (dominant social group) and advantage (status) from the models in their environment. The interactions are internalized by children and the results cause them to “associate higher status groups—even those of which they are not members—with more positive affect than lower status groups” (p. 1151).

The literature is clear: forces such as family, community, and school help shape our occupational aspirations. However, “causality runs in both directions in a reflexive relationship between structure and agency” (MacLeod, 2009, p. 255). This study will add to the understanding about how forces such as family, community, and school help shape

occupational aspirations of youth in Southwest County. This research will help to better understand social class reproduction in a Western Pennsylvania community.

### **Chapter Summary**

Class and social class reproduction is still a relevant issue in our modern social structure. Through this research, I examined how structural constraints of class in our society and human agency play a role in post-secondary educational and career decisions. Focusing on social class reproduction from the perspective of the lived experiences of individuals who grew up working class can help researchers and communities to understand the school-to-work transition and how individuals chose or happen onto their life paths.

Social class reproduction is a process by which social category and division is based on the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and prestige (Johnson, 2006, p. 285). To fully understand the complexities of class reproduction, I drew upon the Marxian, Weberian, and Bourdieuan class analysis as well as contemporary social writings of Bowles and Gintis, Giroux, and MacLeod. Drawing on different perspectives of class analysis is important because “depending upon the specific empirical agenda, different frameworks of class analysis may provide the best conceptual menu” (Wright, 2005, p. 192).

I continued the exploration of social class reproduction and provided insight into the process of how opportunities and options in life are visible or hidden, and accessible or denied, within an educational setting. I reviewed how authors have explored modern education systems and their assessments of whether the systems variably affect students

relative to social class. I also reviewed various authors' research on the influence of family, school, and community.

The purpose of weaving this tapestry together in this chapter is to explore how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County. The next chapter covers the research design including a personal identity statement, research questions, methodology, population and sample, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, and ethics.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the lived experience of how family, school, and community influence choices, I designed the study to explore how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County. I seek the individual's perspective to understand and explore the shared event of growing up working class in Southwest County. People make choices about their future and the contexts in which they live shape those choices. To achieve this, I interviewed individuals who grew up working class in Southwest County, were educated in the Southwest School District, and are currently living in Southwest County because family, school, and community have a great deal of influence shaping pathways to the future.

In this chapter, I review the qualitative methodology used to explore how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices. Since I am the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, I also offer this review of who I am as the researcher.

#### **Research Questions**

To explore and better understand how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices the following three general research questions were explored:

1. How do individuals who attended the Southwest School District perceive the district's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?

2. How do individuals perceive their family's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?
3. How do individuals perceive the Southwest County community's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?

### **Researcher Positionality**

As the researcher, I am the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Patton (2002) suggests the researcher provide self-disclosure of any personal or professional information that could positively or negatively affect the data collection, analysis, and interpretation (p. 566). This section addresses details about my background and relationship to this research topic.

I selected Southwest County, Pennsylvania, due to my familiarity and connection with the area. I grew up in a working class family in Southwest County, attended the local school district, and therefore have a rare advantage as a researcher. My personal and professional experiences present me with an opportunity as a trusted insider with an outsider's perspective. The information shared in this section provides background to support my ability to elicit robust information from the research participants. I can not only relate to the experiences in Southwest County but also interpret and analyze the information.

### **My Background**

I was born in 1971 and grew up in a rural part of Southwest County just outside of Woodbury, Pennsylvania. Southwest County is located just northeast of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I am the product of a Southwestern Pennsylvanian working class family. My father is a steelworker and has labored at the same mill for over forty years. My

mother has also labored for forty-three years as a clerk with a plumbing product company. She retired in 2009, but was unable to transition into retirement on her own terms. For 105 years, the company was one of the most prominent brand names in the plumbing fixtures industry until January 2009, when the company closed its doors for the last time due to trade policies and corporate practices. The company succumbed to increased imports of similar products from competitors and subdivisions of the holding company. The employees were adversely affected when production was shifted to Mexico and China.

My parents had two sons, of which I am the oldest. We grew up in a rural part of Southwest County with limited access to friends and opportunities. I attended a very small nondenominational Protestant church just a few miles from where we lived. I attended East Junior-Senior High School, part of the Southwest School District graduating with about eighty classmates.

Although there is no one specific instance to cite, I always felt an embarrassment and conflict between my working class socialization and my choice of social, educational, and cultural aspirations. My aspirations of higher education and pursuits were outside of what men from Southwest County were “supposed to do.” These aspirations are a source of internal conflict even today. For instance, I always felt out of place because I did not like to hunt, fish, or play/watch sports, all of which were and are important cultural capital elements in Southwest County.

Early in my life, my parents instilled in me the desire to seek a higher education. My father, and especially my mother, always stressed that I did not want to end up like them, breaking their back each day only to survive. My parents did not present their

social class position as a model, but as a warning to be “unlike” them. In their pursuit to make me “unlike” them, my parents encouraged me to pursue a higher education, although they really did not know how to guide me in the process. I attended Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, majoring in political science with a minor in criminal justice. From the first day of my undergraduate semester in college, I knew there was something amiss with the education provided by the Southwest School District. Even though Edinboro is a state university (not considered academically elite), I did not feel prepared academically and lacked many of the cultural experiences my peers seemed to possess. I realized my high school experience seemed inferior to many of my peers. For example, some of my peers had taken a variety of high school classes I believe provided them with a more comfortable freshman experience. Many of my peers had experienced traveling and attending musicals or opera. Perhaps my perception was incorrect, but I believed that I was disadvantaged because of my working class background. I wondered if I had a deeply rooted defect that would prevent me from progressing any further academically or culturally. I always wondered if my working-class roots would confine me.

I had apprehensions about researching the community where I grew up. This was my home but I felt uneasy because I feel like an individual without a class identity. I have an understanding of class literature but understanding does not equate to feeling identity. I do not fit into a working class mold nor do I feel comfortable as a middle/upper-class academic. This is the conflict that Bourdieu refers to when one’s original habitus is impacted by subsequent habitus (Bourdieu, 1970/2000). The conflict I feel is a result of the new external identity I am building. The internal identity I was given always exists within the façade of the new exterior identity.

Although I grew up in Southwest County, I cannot assume living there granted me the status of an insider. Mullings (1999) believes insider/outsider status is highly unstable because no one can remain an insider or outsider over the course of the timeframe they interacted and the location of the individuals (Mullings, 1999, p. 340). Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (2005) warn that that the participant may not treat the researcher as an insider.

Banks' (1998) multidimensional insider/outsider categories provide more depth to the insider/outsider issue. Banks (1998) breaks the insider/outsider into four typologies that include indigenous-insider; external-insider; indigenous-outsider; and external-outsider. Community members perceive the indigenous-insider as a "legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it" (Banks, 1998, p. 8). For example, since I grew up in a working class family in Southwest County, community members may give the findings of my study more legitimacy than someone who is not from Southwest County. I can talk about my experience and others' experiences with authority. However, the indigenous-outsider is perceived as an outsider (p. 8).

Community members might have viewed me as an outsider because I no longer live in Southwest County. If I was viewed as an outsider then this could have been a reason for potential participants to decline my invitation to participate in my research. The perception of an outsider status would have been a barrier to participation in the study and sharing details about their experiences. If an individual grew up in another community and moved to Southwest County, community members may "adopt" the transplanted individual as an external-insider (p. 8). Finally, the external-outsider is "socialized within a community different from the one in which he or she is doing research" (p. 8). An individual who grew up in another community may have little

understanding or appreciation of the community in Southwest County. The external-outsider may not fully understand the community leading the individual to misinterpret the community. Of the four typologies, I believe I most identify as an indigenous-insider and an indigenous-outsider. For the former, research participants saw me as an avenue to tell their story in hopes of seeking social change. On the other hand, I could be viewed as an indigenous-outsider because of perceived class mobility.

In my own life and experiences, living in Southwest County, I have experienced both the position of the indigenous insider and outsider. Prior to starting college, I enlisted in the Army Reserve to help pay for college. I was assigned to a unit based in Southwest County, and I travelled home every month for the weekend drills. Few in the unit had pursued post-secondary education at a college or university. This was a true working class town military unit. I was not the only individual attending college assigned to the unit, but we were a small minority. The most common stereotype I faced was that some members believed those of us attending college did not like to work, and that was why we were going to college. The local working class members of the Army Reserve unit also believed we had no common sense! I realized the members of the unit thought the college students only had book smarts when they criticized and discounted how accomplished tasks. For instance, one of the unit members said he often assigns college students menial tasks to perform to keep us out of trouble.

In one sense, I was an insider because I was a local boy that joined the local Army unit but I was a “college boy” which excluded me from feeling accepted and part of the unit. I was excluded from feeling fully accepted into the bond of being a soldier because I was seen as an individual with one foot in the world as a soldier but the other foot outside

of the working class world because of my education. After feeling excluded even after two years in the unit I asked one Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) why others treated me as if I did not belong. He explained to me that it was nothing personal but they see college kids “come and go” and some soldiers in the unit resented my aspiration to become an officer.

Perhaps my breaking codes of dress among fellow working class soldiers also influenced their opinion of me. During my sophomore year of college, rope ankle bracelets were a trend at my university. I wore one and made the mistake of letting one of the non-commissioned officers see it during one of our weekend drills. Although this fashion trend was accepted on the college campus, it branded me as a “fag” by some of the NCOs, who thought wearing ankle jewelry was feminine.

The sense of exclusion led to a lack of bonding within the unit between the small group of individuals attending college and the larger group without the college experience. Even if individuals in the larger group approved of our educational aspirations, we were not really part of the unit. For instance, when I was eligible to attend the first course of Army training needed for promotion to sergeant I was not selected. The first course of training for soldiers to advance into the ranks of sergeant is called the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC). One NCO knew my family and was glad I was going to college. I asked him why I was not selected even though I was next on the seniority list. He told me it was nothing against me but it was more important to send another soldier because he was out of work and I had college going. I was eventually offered PLDC because someone backed out at the last minute but it was in my final semester of college and I was soon to be commissioned as an officer so I declined

the class. Even those who fully supported my higher education pursuits still did not give me the feeling I was a true insider.

In this study, I attempted to address the concern that my assumed “insider” status may affect my role as a researcher. I did this through clarifying biases at the outset of the study by reflecting on my background and vetting interview questions and study design with peers. I also used reflective journaling to reveal assumptions that might influence my analysis of data and interpretation. One particular issue of concern was that I did not want to miss the opportunity to learn about the individuals’ perspective. For instance, one informant said, “you know what it was like growing up in Woodbury Township.” I did not want to assume how she perceived growing up so I asked probing questions to get to her perception.

Kanuha (2000) cites the failure to probe or ask for clarification from research participants because she “could somehow intuit what respondents meant by innuendoes about culturally specific behaviors, events, or analyses or what I refer to as coded language” (p. 442). She was able to compensate for the insider understanding through reviewing interview transcripts to improve future interviews. I reviewed and asked two academic peers to review my interviews to ensure I was not allowing assumptions or shared experiences to keep me from obtaining a deeper meaning of the participant’s experience.

In this work, I am literally an “outsider” because my informants still live in Southwest County and I have not for almost twenty years. I used my working-class roots as a strength to achieve an admirable military and civilian career while achieving a doctoral degree. I heeded my parents’ warning to be “unlike” them. However, because I

had limited social and cultural role models some aspects of my life feel constrained. I do not dwell on what could have been because I have accomplished much in my life. Aside from my academic accomplishments, I work for one of the nation's largest public pension funds as a benefit administrator. I also retired at the rank of major from the Army Reserve. My military experience included commanding a unit in Iraq and achieving various awards and recognition. Other than my parents, I have no ties with the Southwest County community or reason to visit.

### **Qualitative Methods**

In order to better understand how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County, I used qualitative methods. Patton (2002) argues that the advantage of qualitative research is the ability to study issues in depth and greater detail. I sought to uncover the "meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Since I have sought the individual's perspective to understand and explore the shared event of growing up working class in Southwest County, phenomenological research was an appropriate choice.

Phenomenology is looking retrospectively at a shared event or phenomena. This approach focuses on how people "make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). The purpose of using a phenomenological approach is to identify the specific phenomena through the perception of the individuals in a situation. Phenomenological research seeks how people perceive, describe, feel, judge, remember, make sense and talk about the phenomena (Patton, 2002). Moustakas

(1994) elaborates that general or universal meaning is derived from the individual descriptions to provide “the essences of structures of the experiences” (p. 13). Since meaning is derived from the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives the information collected can support or challenge structural or normative assumptions (Lester, 1999). Typically, data is collected through interviews from groups or individuals ranging in size between 5 to 25 (Miller & Salkind, 2002).

Phenomenological research allows us to observe the impact of macro forces since these forces cannot be directly observed. I asked questions that focused on capturing the meaning of the phenomena. In exploring their everyday experiences through interviews, individuals reveal how their choices were made, under what conditions, and whether or not they felt free or constrained.

### **Sampling**

I chose purposeful sampling to find individuals that could provide information or understanding about how family, school, and community influence educational aspirations and careers (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). I established criteria to find cases that would represent the “relevance of the phenomenon” under study (Flick, 2007). Creswell (2007) found that criterion sampling is necessary in phenomenological studies because participants must have experienced the phenomenon under study. In order to find qualified participants I used a chain sampling strategy. In chain sampling, participants who meet certain criteria were initially selected for the research. These initial participants were then asked to refer others who also met the sampling criteria.

Thirty participants were identified through the chain sampling strategy. Initially, I used the social networking site *Facebook* to contact individuals via email that might meet

the sampling criteria. Once an individual was identified and agreed to be contacted, a telephone interview was conducted to determine if the individual met all sampling criteria. After the initial contact with potential participants and eligibility was determined, I requested they refer others who might meet the selection criteria. An interview appointment date and time was set for those that met the selection criteria and agreed to participate. All interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon location that provided limited distractions. This process continued until I reached data saturation.

The criteria for participant selection included the following:

- Must have been between 25 to 35 years of age
- Raised by a parent or guardian without a college education
- Identified themselves as growing up in Southwest County, Pennsylvania
- Identified themselves as educated in the Southwest School District
- Identified Southwest County, Pennsylvania as their primary residence

Other than the criteria listed above, the participants varied in demographic aspects.

However, I attempted to achieve parity in participant gender. Including gender parity eliminated potential gender bias providing a better understanding of class formation.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. The interview questions were a mix of structured and open-ended questions. All the same questions were asked of all respondents with the exception of probing questions. These probing questions were based on how the lead question was answered. Moreover, if I believed the respondent was addressing an important topic, I asked for clarification, examples, or more details using follow-up and probing questions. The follow-up and probing questions were not

predetermined and depended on the richness of the answers provided by the respondents. An interview guide is found in Appendix D.

This project included 20 interviews with 11 females and 9 males between the ages of 25 to 35. Limiting the age group of participants allowed for more control of differences in experiences. For instance, the experiences of a 65 year old could be different from an 18 year old due to significant industrial and economic changes in the county over this time. The age group also captured a point in time when individuals have recently finished secondary or post-secondary education and should have started working but are not too far removed from their experiences growing up. For the purpose of this study, I was interested in those who never left or recently returned to and reside in Southwest County. I wanted to know why they chose not to leave the county or why they returned.

For this study, I used one-on-one and two-on-one interview sessions. Of the 20 participants, I interviewed; 14 were individual interviews and three sets of interviews were spouses. The six participants I interviewed as pairs consented to the interview with their spouse present. I found the interviews with participants who were spouses the most dynamic and informative. The interview with couples created a synergy between the couple and me, which seemingly provided more information than the individual interviews. However, there is the possibility one spouse could have influenced the other. I encountered instances where one participant paused to recall information and the other participant finished the sentence. In another instance, one participant prompted the memory of the other participant. I do not believe the interactions between couples negatively influenced the outcome of the interviews or the data collected.

The most important advice Rubin and Rubin (2005) provide on the subject of interviewing and building trust is that being honest, open, fair, and accepting will help establish and build trust. To help build trust between the interviewee and myself, I explored shared backgrounds and experiences. For instance, during the interview we discussed attending the same school district, growing up in the same county, and shared friends or acquaintances.

During the interview, I was cognizant of the way I dressed because it could have influenced the atmosphere of the interview. I wore casual clothing that I believed did not connote a specific class standing and would not significantly differentiate me from others. I was even cognizant of the type of vehicle I drove which was inexpensive and probably did not connote any type of prestige. The only possible aspect of my presentation that could have differentiated me from the participant was the language inadvertently used. For instance, I avoided using sociological terms or concepts like habitus, field, or agency. Participants may not have been familiar with academic jargon during the interviews.

Thomas (1993) warns that power is in language “because symbolizing events isolates and communicates one set of meanings and excludes others” (p. 45). For instance, one participant stated he did believe he is “looked down on” by his peers or employer for not having a bachelor’s degree in a hospital department staffed with seven others with bachelor’s degrees. I cannot take his choice of words to mean he has not miscalculated the level of education needed in an increasingly competitive job market. As a result of the language distinction between myself and the participant interviewee I was conscientious about the language I used and how I interpreted the language used by the

participant. I refrained from using academic jargon in my conversations and was careful not to use probing or follow-up questions that were leading or biased. I kept to the questions from my interview guide; however, in this conversational partnership I was vigilant not to remain overly dependent on the interview guide so as not to detract from the natural conversation. I conducted many of the interviews in the subjects' homes. This provided a relaxed atmosphere to set a conversational tone that invited rich information from the participant.

### **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

The experience of growing up working class motivated me to explore how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County. Through this research, I hoped to gain a more thorough and broad-reaching understanding of growing up working class in Southwest County and how individuals perceive life chances.

Mullings (1999) discusses candidly that the researcher has the power to take the participants' lives when the analysis occurs and the research is written. This research challenged me because I shared a similar background to the research participants. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) remind qualitative researchers that the researcher is not separate from the study but fully entrenched in all aspects of the research process. Ethically, I am bound to take the data I gather from the interviews and analyze it an unbiased manner. I grew up in Southwest County and could easily relate to the participants' experiences but I could not let this insider status prejudice the research. I tried to avoid "romanticizing or dismissing" my participants as long as I stayed aware of my frame of mind during my

analysis (Thomas, 1993, p. 45). After each interview I asked myself about how I perceived the interview, what was said, and how I felt about the participants' stories. Reviewing what I wrote helped me from "romanticizing or dismissing" the stories my participants told.

The participants in my study determined the meaning of the world in which they live. Using the phenomenological approach, I put aside my biases through reflective journaling to understand how the "human consciousness perceives its day-to-day world" (Madison, 2005, p. 57). After each interview, I asked myself questions and wrote in a journal about how I perceived the interview, what was said, and how I felt about the participants' stories. Through this research, I hope to better understand how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County. This study will not only help me understand my own view of the world I grew up in but will give a voice to others that are experiencing that same or similar world.

With the permission of interviewees, I recorded all interviews using a digital recorder. After the interview, I transferred the file to a password protected external hard drive. Each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym for identifying files and research material. I used the pseudonym to reference or quote participants in the dissertation.

I used field notes as a secondary method of data collection. The field notes taken during the interview provided me with the ability to construct follow-up questions and a reference to identify a significant aspect of the interview later (Patton, 2002). My field notes were transcribed immediately after an interview or contact with the interviewee (Gibbs, 2007). My field notes included documentation of "participant observation, which

may include the observer's personal and subjective responses to and interpretations of social action encountered" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 33).

My field notes were organized using the following categories. Observation notes (ON) record the details from my senses. These details include what I observed, heard, touched, tasted, etc. Methodological notes (MN) relate to how I collected data. Theoretical notes (TN) address my "hunches, hypotheses, connections, alternative interpretations, and critiques" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 31). Personal notes (PN) explore my thoughts about my research including whom I talk to and my "doubts, anxieties and pleasures" (p. 31).

Two independent transcription consultants transcribed the interviews. Once the interviews were transcribed, I used a qualitative analysis program to categorize the text and establish thematic concepts. Saldaña's (2009) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* provided the structure of how I coded and analyzed the interview transcripts. Saldaña (2009) recommends a two-cycle coding method. During the first phase of coding I used multiple methods including Provisional, Attribute, Structural, and Initial coding. Multiple approaches to coding were appropriate to capture the phenomena under study (Saldaña, 2009).

To analyze data collected from interviews I established Provisional Coding to inform my analysis. Provisional Coding was used to establish codes using my conceptual framework, research questions, problem areas, and key variables (Gibbs, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009). The key concepts were drawn from my conceptual framework, research questions, problem areas, and key variables (Gibbs, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009). These key concepts aided me in establishing codes for

patterns and themes in the data. For instance, I looked for concepts including but not limited to aspirations, education, family, agency, human capital, habitus, social capital, boundaries, resistance, community, and cultural capital. The purpose of examining these concepts was to listen to the perspective of the individual, explore, and understand their perception growing up working class in Southwest County (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I also used Initial Coding, which helped to develop “analytic leads for further study” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 81). Additionally, Attribute Coding captured basic descriptive information such as demographic information, data format, time and date, or other variables (Saldaña, 2009, p. 55). Finally, Structural Coding was a question-based code that afforded labeling and indexing segments of information which were pooled together for more detailed analysis (Saldaña, 2009).

The second phase of coding, Focused Coding, established “categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” from my first phase coding (Saldaña, 2009, p. 149). I combed through the first phase coding to develop a more selective list of codes through Focused Coding. In this phase of coding, I developed and clustered the most relevant categories together in a concise fashion that made analytical sense. I created a “conceptual web” that pooled the “constitutive characteristics” of the many parts into manageable groupings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2007) and Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) offer several measures to ensure the integrity of qualitative research so it is accurate and believable. Below I discuss the measures I undertook to provide a research product that was credible, dependable, and transferable.

## **Credibility**

Credibility is necessary to provide assurance that the researcher's findings are accurate and credible (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). To establish credibility I clarified my biases from the outset of the research. I addressed my biases through a reflexive journal, peer review, and member check. Addressing researcher bias is important to clarify my assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation (Merriam, 1998). Initially, I detailed my "past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations" through a personal interest statement (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). I also kept field notes to periodically record my reflections during the research process.

The participants' stories were represented in a fair and honest manner. I used member checks where I provided interview participants with summaries of my conclusions for review. I emailed my conclusions and a copy of their transcript to the participant. I requested that the participant verify the summary and transcript and provide input and corrections if necessary. This review process allowed participants to validate my understanding of how their experience growing up working class influenced their educational and career choices.

When I encountered information or instances that did not conform with my expectations, I reported these as part of my findings. In Chapter 5, I talk about how I believed my chain sampling only reached one segment of informants who grew up working class. There is a vein of individuals who grew up working class that was not represented in my study. The participants in my study could be viewed as conformists because they went to college and few held manual jobs. The grittier type of working class person exists in Southwest County. I know some individuals who grew up working class

are proud of their grittier outlook on life but I could not convince them to participate in my research. Discussing cases that do not conform to theory or my expectations adds to the credibility of my research practices. In Chapter 4, I discussed how an informant recalled her parents using a parenting technique often associated with middle or upper middle class families. Even though this case did not conform to my expectations, I reported it. I also used “member checks” where I provided interview participants with summaries of my conclusions for review. This review process allowed participants to validate my understanding of their experience with the phenomenon. Although this did not occur, I was prepared to make corrections and/or clarifications to my conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007).

In order to provide a more accurate account of participant experiences with the phenomenon, I used “peer debriefing.” I asked two peers to review my methodology, transcripts, and final report. One peer holds a Ph.D. and the other was a doctoral candidate. Feedback was provided concerning areas where assumptions took place or I over or under emphasized points. Using peer feedback helped validate or reconsider my assumptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I also used triangulation to check on my interpretations and information provided by participants. I used observations, interviews, documents, and government sources of information to help me verify the data I collected (Creswell, 2007).

### **Dependability**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), dependability is the record of processes and procedures a researcher used to collect and interpret data. I established an “audit trail” of how I collected and analyzed data. The audit trail included raw data,

written notes, and reflexive journaling. I also used peer examination to ensure my findings and analysis was reliable. This process required at least one peer to code several random interview samples and record the findings to establish inter-rater reliability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

### **Transferability**

Researchers using qualitative methods should provide “rich and thick” descriptions to provide readers with enough information to decide if the research is transferable (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). In order to assist the reader in understanding the context and background of the phenomenon, I provided detailed descriptions of how family, education, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of an individual that grew up working class in Southwest County.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The Indiana University of Pennsylvania’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) was used to ensure the safety, privacy, and ethical treatment of human subjects. Research subjects were not compensated to participate in this research study. Safeguards were incorporated into the study design to protect the rights of the adult human subjects.

I provided full disclosure of information to include the purpose of the study and any associated risks. Participation in this study was voluntary and a participant could have withdrawn from the study at any time. If a participant would have withdrawn from the study, their information would have been immediately destroyed and they would not have been included in any further analysis or discussion. No informants requested to be

withdrawn from the study. The informed consent form served as the primary means to communicate the purpose and risks of the research. There were no known risks associated with this research study. In the event that I had encountered signs that an interview had the potential or was causing emotional distress, the interview would have stopped. Completed consent forms and interview audio files were maintained in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed immediately after the completion of the study. All research subjects were afforded anonymity and confidentiality. Identifying information was changed to protect the identity of participants when the research results were written. Reputable transcribers transcribed interview audio files. Peers who helped score and/or interpret the results were disinterested parties. Although no one requested a copy, the research results were available to any participant.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Including the perspective of the parents and siblings, school administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, or community/business leaders, while informative, was beyond the reach of this study given time and resources. Thus, a logical follow-up study would include different sources of data to provide a well-rounded representation of all the components of the community. More about limitations and future research suggestions appears in Chapter 5.

The method of data collection also included some inherent limitations. Rubin and Rubin (2005) in *Qualitative Interviewing* point out that most research subjects try to be open and honest but there are some that may not answer interview questions honestly. Additionally, interpersonal influences could influence answers to questions. One method to overcome this limitation is to build redundancy into the questions as a way to check on

the consistency of information provided (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I built in data collection redundancy with the use of multiple forms of data to include interviews, newspaper accounts, observations, and social, economic, and demographic data. Using multiple sources of data allowed me to strengthen the study's credibility and develop an in-depth understanding of the situation (Yin, 2009).

Although this study has limitations, there are beneficial outcomes through this research. My primary objective was to positively contribute to the development of working class youth and those working with them to recognize the influences that shape post-secondary and career choices. If these influences are recognized, all stakeholders can make a more informed decision when faced with career and educational choices. I have started to speak with individuals and groups. Thus far, I have shared my findings in the following manner:

I presented a paper at Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Frederick Douglass Institute for Intercultural Research,

I guest lectured at Pennsylvania Highlands Community College First Year Experience (freshmen seminar),

I presented a paper at the 6th Annual PASSHE Graduate Research and Creative Projects Symposium,

I presented a paper at the 35th Appalachian Studies Association Conference,

I presented a poster at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Graduate Scholars Forum.

In the near future, I will offer to present my findings to the school district.

Presenting to the school district could start or add to discussions about how teachers and

counselors can better address the needs of working class youth. Additionally, I would like to present my findings to family members via school-sponsored workshops or parent teacher associations. Including local political and community leaders can lead to greater community awareness. Political leaders would include elected state, county, and municipal officials. Community leaders would include religious leaders, local American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO) labor council, and service clubs and organizations. Reaching out to a variety of resources in the community may stimulate discussion and bring a wider awareness of these issues. Through discussion and greater community awareness a dialog can be established to exchange ideas and establish achievable outcomes to mitigate the role class plays in shaping post-secondary and career choices.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed the qualitative methodology I used to understand the phenomenon of growing up working class in Southwest County. Since I was seeking the individual’s perspective to understand and explore the shared event of growing up working class in Southwest County, phenomenological research was an appropriate choice. Moustakas (1994) summarizes phenomenological research’s central tenets as taking a comprehensive description of an individual’s experience and determining “what an experience means for the person” (p. 13). Given the complexities of how family, education, and community interact, this study sought to understand the lived experiences of adults that grew up in a working class household in Southwest County, were educated in the Southwest School District, and were currently living in Southwest County.

Purposeful sampling was chosen because I sought individuals that would be able to provide information or understanding about the shared event in my research (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). In order to find qualified participants I used a chain sampling strategy. The questioning style consisted of a semi-structured interview. The interview questions were a mix of structured and open-ended questions. All the same questions were asked of all respondents with the exception of probing questions.

With the permission of interviewees, I recorded all interviews using a digital recorder. Each interview was assigned a pseudonym for identifying files and research material. I also used field notes as a secondary method of data collection. The field notes taken during the interview provided me with the ability to construct follow-up questions and a reference to identify a significant aspect of the interview later (Patton, 2002). Data was coded as emergent themes were identified. Saldaña's (2009) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* provided the structure of how I coded and analyzed the interview transcripts. Saldaña (2009) recommends a two-cycle coding method.

Creswell (2007) and Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) offer several measures to ensure the integrity of qualitative research so it is credible, dependable, and transferable. To establish credibility I clarified my biases from the outset of the research. I addressed my biases through a reflexive journal, peer review, and member check. Addressing researcher bias was important to clarify "researcher's assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). To ensure the research was dependable, I established an "audit trail" to provide a traceable account of how I collected and analyzed data. The audit trail included raw data, written notes, and

reflexive journaling. I also used peer examination to ensure my findings and analysis was reliable.

Transferable research relies on qualitative methods that provide “rich and thick” descriptions to provide readers with enough information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). In order to assist the reader in understanding the context and background of the phenomenon, I provided detailed descriptions of how family, education, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals that grew up working class in Southwest County.

The Indiana University of Pennsylvania’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) was used to ensure the safety, privacy, and ethical treatment of human subjects. Safeguards were incorporated into the study design to protect the rights of the adult human subjects. I provided full disclosure of information to include the purpose of the study and any associated risks. There were no known risks associated with this research study. All research subjects were afforded anonymity and confidentiality. Identifying information was changed to protect the identity of participants when the research results were written.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

In this qualitative study, I explored issues related to the life chances and school-to-work transitions of individuals raised in the rural, de-industrialized area of Southwest County, Pennsylvania. The central research question was to learn more about how family, school, and community influence education and career aspirations using individuals from Southwest County as participants.

The findings reveal how family, school, and community influence how participants planned and prepared for their future. Participants shared how they parents modeled behavior and provided messages about what they could become in the context of a changing local economy and restricting economic conditions. Participants also suggest they had limited guidance from school professionals who were ill equipped to guide their decision-making. Finally, participants revealed how living in a rural community was often isolating and created barriers, limited their social/cultural capital, and shaped their worldview.

As the participants illustrate, people make choices about their future and the contexts in which they live shape those choices. Their location as young white people in a rural working class community shaped their education and career decision making.

#### **Research Questions**

To explore and better understand how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices, the following three research questions were addressed:

1. How do individuals who attended the Southwest School District perceive the district's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?
2. How do individuals perceive their family's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?
3. How do individuals perceive the Southwest County community's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?

### **Findings**

In this study, to explore how community, family, and school influence education and career aspirations the following section summarizes the findings. This study begins with demographic information about the participants. Then I review how community, family, school, and career guidance influenced participants' educational and career choices. Finally, I discuss participants' aspirations and perceived barriers.

### **Participant Demographics**

This section provides an overview of the participants who participated in the study, including participants' age, gender, employment, educational attainment, relationship, children, cohabitation, where the participant lived growing up, siblings, and mother and father's education and employment. Along with participant information statistics, I report the corresponding statistics for all of Southwest County (where available) to compare participants' demographics with demographics of same-age individuals within Southwest County.

Twenty individuals participated in interviews for this study. Eleven females and nine males participated in the study. I sought to achieve parity in participant sex to protect for statistical gender bias. The sex composition of the sample mirrors that of

Southwest County's current population, which is comprised of approximately 51% females and 49% males (U.S. Census, 2013). To ensure participants shared similar experiences growing up in Southwest County and attending the same school district, I chose a cohort that ranged in age from 25 to 35. The age group 25 to 34 makes up 10.5% of the total Southwest County population as of the 2010 U.S. Census. All of the participants self-identified as white. The lack of racial diversity of participants in the study is not surprising or a concern for validity because Southwest County lacks a diverse population. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the racial makeup of the county is 98% white; 0.8% black; 0.1% American Indian and Alaska Native; 0.2% Asian; 0.1% some other race; and 0.8% two or more races (U.S. Census, 2013).

### **Siblings and Birth Order**

Except for one, all participants had siblings that lived in the same household as the participant while they grew up. Of the participants with siblings, ten were the eldest child of their family. Participants reported their parents were better able to help subsequent children in their family if they had prior experience navigating fields such as finding schools and financial aid. For instance, Rebecca has two older siblings that attended college. She explained, "They helped me as far as this, filling out applications and money to send the applications. They were supportive. It had been a long time since my mom had done any of that, but she helped me with student aid, financial aid." There was a large age gap between Rebecca and her siblings but her parents were familiar with the institutional processes of higher education after going through the application and college experience with her older siblings. Rebecca did not engage her older siblings in

deciding to pursue higher education but their examples heavily influenced her decision-making.

### **Participant Relationships, Children, and Household Composition**

Participants were asked to describe their relationship status, whether or not they had children, and with whom they lived. A majority of participants were married (N=13) one was divorced, and six were single. Three pairs of the participants were couples. A majority had at least one child (N=12) and lived with their spouse and child. Two participants were single parents. One was living with her children and the other with elderly parents and children. Thirteen participants lived with their spouse or spouse and child. Four participants were single and without children. Three of them lived in a household with their parents and one shared a house with a girlfriend and a non-relative.

The 2010 U.S. Census defines a household as “all of the people who occupy a housing unit.” The household and who resides in it is important to understand the support and economic resources available to the participants. The U.S. Census divides households into family and non-family types of households. The two household types are further defined by who is living in the household. Sixty five percent of the participants live in a family household, which is comparable to the 2010 U.S. Census of 67% for the overall population in Southwest County. An interesting pattern reported by the U.S. Census may explain why five participants live in a household with their parents. From 2005 to 2011, the U.S. Census found that nationally the number of young adults that returned home or continued to live in their parents’ home has increased. “The percentage of men age 25 to 34 living in the home of their parents rose from 14 percent in 2005 to 19 percent in 2011 and from 8 percent to 10 percent over the period for women” (U.S. Census, 2013).

## Participant and Parental Education Attainment

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the participants' highest educational attainment compared to the educational attainment among Southwest County residents. I used the 2010 U.S. Census categories for educational attainment to assess the highest level of education that an individual has completed (U.S. Census, 2013). Every participant pursued some form of post-secondary education but not all completed a degree. Some participants matriculated to a degree-granting program immediately after high school and finished, some did not finish, and others experienced a gap between starting post-secondary education and degree completion. The degree granting institutions included private for-profit, private not-for-profit, and public entities.

Table 3

### *Participant Educational Attainment Compared to Southwest County Population*

Highest Level of Education Completed	Participant Educational Attainment	Southwest County Educational Attainment
Less than 9th grade	--	4.1%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	--	7.7%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	--	51.7%
Some college, no degree	15.0%	15.0%
Associate's degree	25.0%	7.6%
Bachelor's degree	45.0%	10.0%
Graduate or professional degree	15.0%	3.9%

*Note.* Population 25 years and over. From U.S. Census 2007-2011 American Community Survey.

Comparing the study participants who were between the ages of 25-35 to educational attainment of the Southwest County population illustrates that the

participants were much more educated than the general population.<sup>4</sup> Fifteen percent (N=3) of the study participants had some college compared to fifteen percent in the county. Twenty-five percent (N=5) earned an associates compared to slightly over seven and one-half (7.6) percent in the county. Forty-five percent (N=9) earned a bachelor's degree compared to ten percent in the county. Fifteen percent (N=3) of the study participants earned a graduate or professional degree compared to less than four (3.9) percent in the county.

Comparing the highest educational attainment of the study participants' parents reveals the parents are more representative of the general population in Southwest County. Table 4 shows the highest level of education completed by the participants' mothers and fathers.

Table 4

*Educational Attainment of Participants' Mothers and Fathers*

Highest Level of Education Completed	Mothers	Fathers
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	--	5.0%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	75.0%	95.0%
Associate's degree	15.0%	--
Graduate or professional degree	10.0%	--

Most mothers completed high school (N=15). Mothers with associate's degrees (N=2) worked in the health services field and the mothers with graduate degrees (N=2) worked in the fields of education and nursing. The mothers who achieved master's degrees obtained the degrees prior to having children. Those who achieved associate's degrees

<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Census 2007–2011 American Community Survey does not provide a breakdown of educational attainment by age groups. The study participants can only be compared to the whole population of 25 years of age and older in the county. The participants fall into a smaller demographic of the county and it is not known if their educational attainment is representative of the age group of 25 to 35.

obtained the degrees after their children started elementary school. Almost all of the fathers, on the other hand, only graduated high school (N=19). Only one father completed neither high school nor a degree equivalency.

For most of the participants' parents, a high school degree was sufficient to achieve lucrative employment in Southwest County so few had post-secondary education. Only one participant reported their father did not complete high school but still obtained employment necessary to support a family.

### **Participant and Parental Employment Status**

The U.S. Census categorizes employment types by industry and occupation. The Census groups occupations into five categories which include management, business, science, and arts; service; sales and office; natural resources, construction, and maintenance; production, transportation, and material moving; and military and Table 5 compares participants' occupations with Southwest County's residents' occupations.

Half of the participants (50%) work in the management, business, science, and arts occupations compared to only 26.4% in the general Southwest County population. Fifteen percent (N=3) participants worked in service occupations which closely represents the percentage of service workers in the larger county (17.7%). Only one (5%) worked in a sales and office occupations whereas the county has a larger percentage of workers in this sector (22.2%). One participant (5%) worked in a natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupation, a percent slightly lower than that of the larger county (13.9%). Two participants (10%) worked in the production, transportation, and material moving occupations, also a percent slightly lower than that of the county as a

whole (19.8%). Three participants (15%) were currently unemployed but actively seeking training or education at the time of the interview.

Table 5

*Comparison of Participant Occupations With Southwest County Population*

Occupation	Participants	Southwest County Population
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	50.0%	26.4%
Service occupations	15.0%	17.7%
Sales and office occupations	5.0%	22.2%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	5.0%	13.9%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	10.0%	19.8%
Unemployed	15.0%	--

*Note.* Population 16 years and over. From U.S. Census 2007-2011 American Community Survey. The Census information for Southwest County’s total population only reported information on individuals employed.

The industries and occupations of the participants mirrors the predominate industries in the county. The largest employers in Southwest County are public sector entities, (e.g., local, county, state, and federal government). Compared to their parents, the types of industries and occupations of participants are very different. Many of the participants work in the management, business, science, and arts or service industries whereas they said their parents worked in natural resources, construction, and maintenance; production, transportation, and material moving; service; sales and office occupations. The shift in sectors of employment does not necessarily represent a positive

or negative change from their parents but demonstrates the shift from an industrial to a service based economy in Southwest County over the generation.

Of those employed at the time of the interview, twelve were employed in Southwest County. Five of the participants who worked in the county reported they worked for a public employer, six reported they worked for a private employer, and two worked for a non-profit organization. One participant earned an advanced professional degree and was self-employed.

Study participants were asked to describe the type of employment their mother and father held while the participant was under 18 years of age. The U.S. Census standard of industry and occupation was used to categorize the employment type of the parent. Industry occupation categories fall into management, business, science, and arts; service; sales and office; natural resources, construction, and maintenance; production, transportation, and material moving; and military. Table 6 shows participants' mothers and fathers by industry.

A pattern is evident in the types of employment participants' mothers and fathers held. Twenty percent of mothers (N=5) did not have employment outside of the home, whereas all the fathers held employment outside of the home. Twenty five percent of mothers (N=4) held employment in the industry category of management, business, science, and arts, whereas only one father fell in this category. Twenty percent of mothers (N=5) and only one father worked in the service industry. Forty percent of fathers (N=8) and zero mothers were employed in the natural resources, construction, and maintenance category. Thirty percent of mothers (N=6) and zero fathers held sales and office

positions. Finally, fifty percent of fathers (N=10) and only one mother were employed in a position under the production, transportation, and material moving category.

The pattern of parental employment shows fathers overwhelmingly held employment in manual positions in the natural resources, construction, maintenance, production, transportation, and material moving industries. The positions that mothers took were divided among working in the home or in service, sales and office positions. One quarter of the mothers worked in management, business, science, and arts.

Significant differences exist between parental occupations and the study participants' choice of occupations. More participants (50%) work in the management, business, science, and arts occupations than their parents do. Alternatively, less study participants worked in the natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations (5%) and the production, transportation, and material moving occupations (10%) compared to their parents.

Table 6

*Participants' Mothers and Fathers Occupations*

Occupation	Mothers	Fathers
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	25.0%	5.0%
Service occupations	20.0%	5.0%
Sales and office occupations	30.0%	0.0%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	0.0%	40.0%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	5.0%	50.0%
Unemployed	20.0%	0.0%

This section provides an overview of the participants who participated in the study. The participants were well representative of Southwest County's population. The population of Southwest County is overwhelmingly white and females outnumber males by two percentage points. Although it appears the participants have completed more education than Southwest County's overall population it is not clear whether this is true for the participants' age group because the U.S. Census 2007-2011 American Community Survey does not breakdown the educational attainment by age groups. Half of the participants were employed in management, business, science, and arts occupations while the service occupations; production, transportations, and material moving occupations; and unemployment were equally distributed between the remaining participants. The composition of the participants' household closely matches Southwest County's U.S. Census reports. The participants also provided information about the educational attainment and type of employment held by their mothers and fathers. The next section will discuss how Southwest County's geographic location affected the study participants' opportunities and habitus.

### **Family Shaping Skills, Resources, and Social Networks**

In this section, I discuss how parents helped to shape the types of skills, resources, and social networks participants accumulated and utilized to make education and career decisions. The capital a young person accumulates over the lifetime encompasses more than mere material goods. Young people inherit resources from their parents and obtain them through social networks and cultural training. As they make educational and career decisions and pursue their goals in these realms, their accumulated capital can be used as power and play an important role in creating and shaping the life chances of a person.

## **Types of Capital Important to the Family and Passed to the Participant**

Bourdieu identifies four types of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Economic (financial) capital is the accumulation of property and financial assets. Social capital includes friends, groups, memberships and social networks within the community. Cultural capital is an individual's knowledge, experience, and connections and includes such things as traditions, spirituality, habits, and heritage (Flora & Flora, 2008). Cultural capital includes our perception of our social world and a system of symbols and rewards as defined by the dominant social group. Symbolic capital is the use of the other forms of capital to communicate an individual's position of basis of power, honor, prestige or recognition (Turner, 2003). Flora and Flora (2008) identify natural capital, which includes our environment and the diversity of plants and animals that can be consumed or extracted for profit or protected as a resource (Flora & Flora, 2008).

In this section, financial, natural, and cultural were the most frequently cited forms of capital to which study participants perceived having access. Specifically, I examine how parents passed capital on to their children.

Many participants discussed their family's financial capital. While they did not perceive themselves as poor, their access to financial capital was limited. They and their families did not have excess beyond basic consumption needs. Most reported they had food, clothing, and housing and little more. Carrie summarized the financial positions of many participants in the study. She said, "My mom didn't work and my dad was working maybe minimum wage so I mean, and a lot of credit card debt." Robert also thought he had basic necessities but noticed that "other people seemed to have newer things, and

newer games, and they always seemed to have new shoes every other week.” Valerie explained her parents required her to earn money if she wanted trendy clothing or other items her parents considered unnecessary and wasteful. Carrie and Robert suggested their parents were able to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, and housing but little money was left over and for some families the accumulation of debt was an issue.

Cultural capital “determines how we see the world, what we take for granted, what we value, and what things we think can be changed” and includes such things as traditions, spirituality, habits, and heritage (Flora & Flora, 2008). In Southwest County, participating in the sport of hunting is one way in which families supplement their household income and pass on cultural capital to another. In the case of hunting, families are taking advantage of the abundant natural capital in Southwest County. Charles and Bonnie talked about passing on skills and knowledge of hunting to their son. Charles said:

I explained to my co-workers at my last job, they're very city folk, what my boys do, and how we raise them, and they thought I was a crazy person.

When asked what about what he told his co-workers Charles said:

Ron's (Charles and Bonnie's son) been hunting since he was eight. Always gone out in the woods with my dad during hunting season and sat. Always gutting, dragging, hanging, skinning, quartering. The whole deal, we do everything. We do all the processing, when you kill the deer, you see the deer from the time that you see it, the time that it gets put in a bag.

Bonnie added, “Sometimes when you're still slicing you're cooking the meat.” While Charles explained:

You're cooking it and eating it. And they thought, oh my god, you have an eight year old and he's shooting things first of all. Like my dad would hold the gun, it's called mentoring, he had his own little license that said he could shoot legally, he's registered. But my dad would help him out, but they thought that was insane. And we can, like we can deer meat. And we self-can foods, and they thought that was insane. They're like, wait, you take deer meat—first of all that blows their mind that we eat deer.

Charles' story illustrates the importance of hunting to many that live in Southwest County. Not every person hunts but the idea of hunting and eating venison is an accepted and shared concept. Charles works in the nearby metropolitan area of Pittsburgh and his coworkers were surprised the gun and hunting culture was so pervasive in Southwest County.

Another participant, David, not only hunted but also learned the skill of butchering and processing venison from his neighbor. David described butchering as “natural” and necessary skill working on a farm. David recognized the cultural value of hunting and processing the deer and he learned it from a farmer near his home. He also capitalized on deer processing financially by working with the farmer in the winter months.

Not only was the sport of hunting used to pass on values, traditions and ways of being from one generation to the next, hunting was also used as a financial relief as many participants reported their families saved money by eating the game. To relieve costs of food, families shared and traded the harvested wild game within their social networks. Owning guns and hunting are important to residents of Southwest County and provide

supplemental income to many families. The next section explores the process parents knowingly or unknowingly use to pass capital to a child. As noted by Charles' story, parents often pass capital (i.e. hunting and butchering skills) to their children. The next section discusses how parents knowingly or unknowingly pass capital on to their children.

### **How Parents Passed on Capital**

Annette Lareau (2003) uses the term “concerted cultivation” to describe how middle class parents manage the development of their children through organized activities and experiences. She explains, middle- and upper-class youth lead busy childhoods by way of their managed development. Their parents enroll them in an often-overwhelming number of organized activities and by doing so they learn to navigate structured environments (e.g. schools) and view themselves as equals with adults with a sense of entitlement. Other researchers have found that time spent outside the classroom is heavily managed by middle class parents (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008 and Bodovski, 2010). From sports, travel, cultural pursuits, volunteer work, or any number of other co-curricular activities, the life of a middle- or upper-class youth is booked with capital-building activities.

According to Lareau (2003) in contrast to middle and upper classes, the working class and the working poor socialize their offspring through “natural growth.” In this style of parenting, children create their own activities to occupy the significant amount of unstructured time. Working class parents are not usually able to devote the considerable time and financial resources to cultivate their children in the same way as middle-class parents. Working-class and poor parents are often too occupied with efforts to provide

food, housing, clothing, and health care for their families that they lack time, resources, and the wherewithal to cultivate their children's interests.

Although some other participants were involved in organized activities, most of their time was spent in unstructured activities. In describing their time outside of school, including weekends and summers, the remaining participants suggested a variety of unstructured activities filled up their time. For example, Neil's recollection of a typical summer was similar to the other participants. I do remember the years when my mother was in school and she was working at night still as a nurse's aide and I had to be quiet and, as you know, as a kid that is not always easy to do. But I spent most of my youth at football practice and the days were free to play with my friends, ride my bike."

Similarly, Robert said he participated in unstructured play in the morning with a lunch break then played until dinner, then often played again until late in the evening.

There was usually a group of anywhere between 15 to 20 of us growing up...Our summers would be spent out at the West Hills field...We'd be playing football, we'd get out there six, seven, eight in the morning play 'til noon, 2 o'clock, sometimes 'til dark...[Other times] we would find something else to do, usually end up playing basketball behind the one kid's house...Our biggest things, and this goes back to the other question, we loved playing paintball.

Robert described growing up with numerous other kids in his neighborhood who played in unstructured and unsupervised settings.

Many of the youth participating in the summer and weekend sport activities also participated in the same school-sponsored events (i.e. football, baseball, and basketball). The participants' parents were generally not purposefully organizing activities and

experiences in an effort to build skills and traits. Instead, the activities afforded the parents the time to focus on other matters necessary for the family.

For participants who grew up on farms, like Trisha and Lori, family life centered on taking care of the farm. Trisha explained:

We didn't have much of a neighborhood. We had 180 acres. Our neighbor was, my uncle lived across the road and then our nearest neighbor was three miles from us so we didn't, like we didn't play with other kids any time other than school. We didn't go on vacations, we didn't go on trips and rarely did we see the other neighbors unless they needed something.

Lori also lived on a farm and described a similar summer of isolation, chores, and working around house. She said:

Really there wasn't a lot of activities. I mean we lived on a farm so we, we made hay every summer, well twice every summer. We tended to the garden and that's pretty much what we had, we had to do work around the house during the summer... Mom and dad would go to work and we had to do chores while they were gone.

Individuals growing up on a farm did not have much free time because their work contributed to the family's income. Even if they did find free time, they could not easily find other children to play because the rural area was geographically isolated

Bonnie and Charles had a slightly different experience from Trisha and Lori because they did not grow up on farms. Bonnie and Charles are husband and wife and participated in the interview together. Their recollections of summer activities are representative of the thirteen participants who did not grow up on farms. Bonnie and

Charles's summer was not focused on work but just playing with a small group of friends. The streams, woods, and wildlife around the house played an important role in occupying their free time. Charles recalled spending his summers outside playing in streams because his trailer did not have air conditioning and he had plenty of friends to play with. He said:

Yeah, they're in the creek right now getting filthy [referring to his own boys at the time of the interview]. That's what boys do and that's what every boy in this area—I used to ride my bike to the neighbor kid's house, the Smiths right down the road here, and we would play baseball or football, and just run in the woods and beat each other with sticks... You were just outside all day, all the time, and the only time you came home was because you knew if you weren't home by dark you're gonna get it.

He went on to say, “Back in the day, I mean, we didn't have central air, we didn't even have an air conditioner for the most part. So you've got this...”and Bonnie interrupted by saying, “Stagnant house.” Therefore, Charles concluded, “You've got this hot box as a trailer until I was 13. That trailer was 10 degrees hotter than it was outside... So you're best bet is to go play in the woods or find some stream or some pond to jump in to just goof around in. But yeah, there was no reason for us to be inside.”

Bonnie and Charles experienced an environment where relatives and neighbors watched over them while their parents worked. The woods and streams occupied their youthful energies. Valerie also utilized the natural capital provided by the land to occupy her time. She explained:

We had like five channels (laughing) ‘cause we had the, there was no cable. There was no satellite when we were kids, but outside. Constantly outside... We had a tree house. We had bikes. We would go on four wheelers when we were a little older. We were off on the trails riding. I had cousins that lived nearby. If we were doing something, they were close to our ages so we would always be pal-ing with them, riding quads, dirt bikes, getting in trouble. (laughing) There’s usually someone there to play with. Not maybe as many people as if you were in town or, ‘cause we were rural.

Like other study participants, Valerie’s parents encouraged her to play using her creativity and the natural playground that existed just steps away from her home.

Through their everyday life and upbringing, participants utilized and built capital. In terms of financial capital, most recognized and discussed how their families could provide for their basic needs but they had to earn their own money to pay for luxuries beyond basic necessities. However, if financial capital was limited, natural capital was abundant and most participants commented on how they used the natural environment to learn, grow, and play. Participants also reported spending most of their time in unstructured play and unorganized activities, often playing with others in their neighborhoods. These participants illustrated how their parents adopted a “natural growth” style of parenting, allowing the participants (as children) to play freely and unsupervised.

In this study, all but one participant related their upbringing to a natural growth method of parenting. Beth’s parents took on a more middle class approach to parenting, cultivating her knowledge and experiences by traveling with her and introducing her to

cultural activities. She was the only participant that described her parents purposefully introducing organized activities and experiences outside of school in an effort to build skills and traits. Beth's parents purposefully introduced travel, cultural pursuits, and volunteer work into her childhood. Although her parents were working class, they employed the same parenting practices more often used by the middle or upper socioeconomic classes in Lareau's study. Beth explained how her time was structured and centered on travel and cultural activities on weekends and during the summer.

My mom really likes to, we all like to go on trips together so, like, we go on a lot of day trips. Even now that I am older, we, like every week or so, we try to find something fun to do for the day. Whether it's either going to Erie, we went up there a lot when I was little, just for the day, just the beach or the zoo or just the Pittsburgh Zoo, one of the museums. So, that's pretty much—swimming, just festivals, fireworks, parties.

When asked if she ever got to the point where she ran out of things to see or do, Beth replied:

Sometimes, yeah, but we always, even like, we try to find different things to go to like if we couldn't think of anything around there we'd go to Cleveland to the zoo or we would have done like last minute trips to Hershey or Gettysburg.

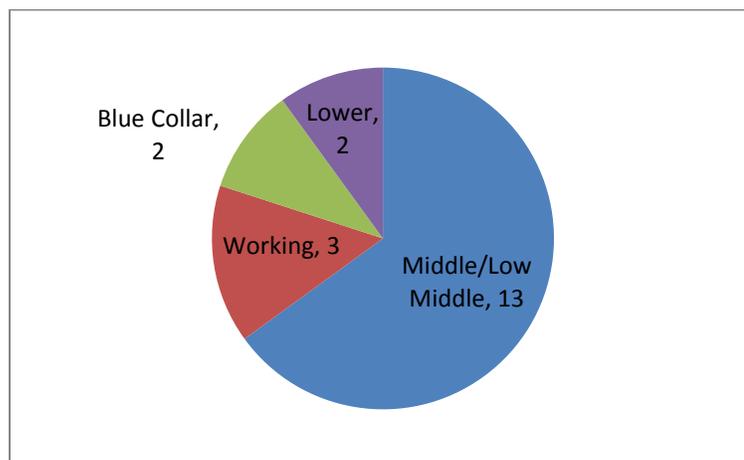
Beth's parents found ways to access capital-building resources within a day's travel time. Many of the trips were educational in nature, and entertaining. She continued to say her parents also encouraged her to participate in organized activities including cheerleading and volleyball and promoted volunteer work. As Beth reported, she was an officer in an organization that performed volunteer work for hospitals and nursing homes.

Although all but one participant described an upbringing similar to the “natural growth” style associated with working class and poor parents the participants did not necessarily perceive themselves as working class or poor. The next section discusses the perception of class identity passed on to the participants.

### **Parental Influence on Participants’ Perception of Class**

In order to understand how participants viewed their social and economic status growing up they were asked to describe their social class background. Most talked about how their parents passed on a view of how to perceive economic hardship and provided a model of family structure and roles. Parents also passed on a perception of their class identity to the participants.

Participants had a variety of ways of thinking about class and describing their class category growing up. As Figure 1 illustrates, when participants were asked to describe their perceived class status growing up their responses included middle/low-middle (13/20), working (3/20), blue collar (2/20), and lower class (2/20). Most participants (13/20) described their class status growing up as middle class. Seven of the participants described their class as working, blue collar, and lower.



*Figure 1.* Participant’s perceived class identity growing up.

Perceptions of social class are subjective and most Americans say they are “middle class” (Felski, 2000). Perhaps these participants likely self-identify with a middle class upbringing because in their own communities there was not a stark contrast between poor and wealthy during the time they were growing up. Carrie explained her view of class growing up and her current awareness of being of a lower social class.

Carrie said:

I didn't figure we were any different than anybody else. Now, looking back, I mean I obviously kind of understood that I didn't get everything that everybody else got...But now, looking back, obviously lower class. I mean, I mean my parents, my mom didn't work and my dad was working maybe minimum wage so I mean, and a lot of credit card debt and stuff so...I'm sure very low class.

Carrie shared an emotional story about how her mother kept Christmas special for her and her sister even with the lack of financial capital.

Well, I didn't, I mean, we always got a lot for Christmas and stuff, but I didn't know that my mom would go out to Goodwill and buy toys from there and clean them all up for us and wrap them like they were new. Like we didn't know that. They were new to us...So we didn't realize that like my parents didn't have money to do that, but I guess you just know what you know.

Most participants viewed themselves as middle class but one couple brought forth an interesting perspective about why others perceived themselves as middle class in Southwest County. Charles and Bonnie view their perception of class identity in Southwest County is skewed because they believe most individuals in Southwest County are living about the same although they admit there is a lot of poverty. Charles believed

“there's nobody that's wealthy” in the county. The couple recognized there are individuals that have financial resources but do not have the level of wealth that would allow the individual to stop being employed. They explained:

Bonnie: Even like, a [local coal mining company].

Charles: Yeah they're not even super wealthy, they're rich, they have more money than anyone in this area, but they're not wealthy... there's an upper echelon of [Southwest] County, but [they're] not wealthy by any means.

Bonnie and Charles saw the owners of the local coal mining company as rich but the mining company owners pale in comparison to the level of wealth in more affluent areas in Pennsylvania. Charles viewed everyone in Southwest County sharing a similar socio-economic experience. He recognized there is poverty in the county and wealth but not at the stark differences, he has viewed elsewhere.

This section focused on the types of skills, resources, and social networks participants' accumulated. Most participants did not perceive themselves as poor but their parents did not have many financial resources beyond basic living needs. Participants identified hunting as an important value and tradition passed from one generation to the next in Southwest County. All but one participant described their parents using a “natural growth” method of parenting. Finally, most participants viewed themselves as middle or low middle class due in part to how their parents presented their class status and participant perception that everyone in Southwest County shared a similar class identity. The next section focuses on participants' experiences with secondary education in the Southwest School District.

## **Secondary School Experiences**

This section reviews how participants' secondary school experiences offered and constrained opportunities and options in their education and career decision making. I first discuss the impact of family and friends on participants' educational and career decisions. Then I examine participants' perceived lack of academic and non-sport extra-curricular opportunities within the school district. Participants also perceived lowered academic preparedness for higher education. In addition, participants recalled their teachers treated them fairly so long as they were "trying" academically or did not have a bad reputation. Finally, the passive role parents played in the participants' secondary education decisions is also discussed.

### **Influence of Peers on Educational and Career Decisions**

This section explores the influence of family and friends on participants' educational and career decisions. In his ethnographic work, MacLeod (2009) used two groups of boys from a low-income housing development to explain the process of social class reproduction. He found that a perception of narrowed opportunities strongly influenced boys to "level" their occupational aspirations and life outcomes. "The leveled aspirations are a powerful mechanism by which class inequality is reproduced from one generation to the next" (MacLeod, 2009, p. 5). An example of leveled aspirations might include an individual from a working class family who has working class friends. The working class individual might not explore choir, dance, or theatre activities because such pursuits would most likely be viewed as an infraction of the working class social code. The self-regulation of what is acceptable behavior in a working class environment is the internalization of the actor's perceived inadequacies.

Lee and Mary were participants in this study and are husband and wife. Lee credits meeting his wife (then girlfriend) with shaping and helping him obtain his educational and career decisions. Lee grew up in a borough within the county that was low income and had a high crime rate. He hung out with friends that placed more value on sports and “having a good time” than doing well in school. Mary’s parents wanted her to go to college so she could get a “good” job so she could be “financially better off.” Mary and her friends aspired to do well in high school and to continue on to college. When Lee started to date Mary, he began to hang out less with his old friends and more with Mary’s friends. Looking back at the friends he once hung out with he is the only one from his neighborhood to graduate college. Lee said, “once I started to be around Mary and her friends I was more interested in doing well at school.” Lee attributes the change in his outlook and the possibilities he could achieve to meeting Mary and exposure to more positive influences. Lee believes that the influence of friends in junior and senior high school is “the most important influence in your life at that age.”

Lee and Mary’s story reflected how friends and groups influence aspirations. Wade had a similar experience to Lee and Mary. Wade’s parents thought he had potential academically and as an athlete. Wade’s parents did not believe the high school he attended allowed him to achieve nor did they approve of his friends. His parents believed his friends were part of the reason he was not doing well in school so they enrolled him in a different high school in the district. When asked why his parents thought his friends at the former high school were not good for him Wade said, “they thought they ran wild and their home life was bad.” Wade also believed he was not doing well academically because his friends “did not care about school.” Wade said he liked his friends from the

other high school but they “weren’t popular” and by association other students picked on him at the former high school.

When Wade transferred schools, he said it was like “night and day.” He excelled as an athlete and made friends with individuals on and off the football field. Wade said, “I became popular because of my performance on the football field which was nice. But still I hung out with...nerds and the geeks.” Wade believed his grades improved because of the positive influences at the new high school.

Lee and Wade believed that had they continued to hang out with their former friends neither would have valued the importance of good grades nor would they have had gained the self-confidence to seek a college education. Lee did not believe he would have been, in his view, successful without the change of friends. Even though Wade, Lee, and Mary are from a working class background, the friends they associated with did not narrow their education and career possibilities.

Family and the friends can influence the aspirations of individuals. The examples of Wade, Lee, and Mary illustrate the power of positive influences on an individual’s life. Even the school a participant attended had an impact on their life. Unfortunately, not all schools or school districts are created equally.

### **Academic and Extra-Curricular Opportunities**

Not every school in the district provided the same academic, sport, and non-sport opportunities. Tony and Beth are nonrelated participants but both attended East High School while each of their younger brothers attended Central High School. Beth explained that due to her experiences with lack of academic opportunities, her parents made the decision to send her brother to Central High School. Beth could not always get

the classes she needed because of the school's low enrollment. Beth was frustrated because she "fought over a year for advanced classes and they wouldn't give it to us, wouldn't give it to us because there wasn't enough interest." Beth was confused how her school could cite "low enrollment" as a reason for not offering advanced placement classes yet she was able to take home economics with only two other students enrolled. Beth's brother was put in the "gifted program" in elementary school and based on Beth's poor academic experience at the smaller high school her family decided, "he'd have more, better educational opportunities in [Central High School]." Even though the family still lived in the East High School district, they used a relative's addresses so the younger sibling could attend Central High School. A parent had to drive the child to school each day but the perceived better academic opportunities seemed worth the inconvenience.

In addition to the perceived lack of academic opportunities in her school, Mary reported a lack of clubs and volunteer opportunities. When Mary attended college and started to compare high school experiences with her friends and peers, she started to realize she did not have as many extra-curricular opportunities. Mary attended the largest high school in the district and recalled the school activities any students could get involved in were few and the other activities required the election to an office. Mary said, if "you didn't win that election, there wouldn't have been a lot of activities for you to do." Unless a student was popular enough to win a position as class officer on student council or chose to participate in sports, there were limited school-sponsored extra-curricular activities. The lack of a diversity of club and non-sport extra-curricular activities within the Southwest School District limited the participants' growth and development of social and cultural capital. In Mary's case, she perceived her high school

experiences as limited when compared to college friends with a greater diversity of opportunities.

### **Perception of College Preparedness**

Once participants began to compare their academic and extra-curricular opportunities with friends and peers in college they began to question their preparedness to compete in college. One participant commented that she thought she was prepared until she attended college. Carrie said she graduated third in her class but when she got to college, she realized, she was “probably one of the least smart kids there as far as being prepared.” Alice shared a similar experience when she attended college. She described feeling unprepared, especially compared to her peers who seemed “light years ahead of me.” Robert also reported he felt unprepared when he attended college. He believed his high school did not challenge him or prepare him for college as he relayed, “Cause once I got to college, I found the material to be like, ten times harder than I thought it should have been.” Finally, Charles also believed the “average Joe” was challenged academically in the school district but did not believe the district provided challenges for “gifted children.”

Only two participants pursued art and music in college, and they perceived they may have been especially poorly prepared. Wade attended the largest high school and Charles attended the smallest high school in the district. Wade and Charles believed their schools lacked the appropriate resources for students wishing to pursue artistic careers. Wade did not believe the school offered a serious art program, which left him underprepared in the areas of art theory and different styles of art in college. Charles commented on how underprepared he was musically when he matriculated to college. He

stated he had “a huge amount of catch-up to do” musically once he got to college. Based on his experiences, Charles did not believe a student like him from Southwest County “can take the education that you get in high school musically in this area, and have that translate in a professional setting.” When Wade and Charles measured themselves against their peers at the college level, they perceived that they were unprepared and at a disadvantage in college.

### **Perception of Teacher Treatment**

Overall participants believed teachers treated them fairly. One participant recalled a teacher who exceeded expectations in this area. Valerie became pregnant in high school and was trying to finish the semester before the baby was due. This teacher accommodated her needs because he saw potential in Valerie and did not want her to waste her talent. She explained:

He turned my class into AP [Advanced Placement] because he didn't want me to miss what the other class had. And he said “you just excel at this. You're very good at it.” He said “you would be wasting your brain if you don't do something in math,” but oh. (laughing) He was probably one of the few who ever said do something with it.

Valerie received a significant boost in her resolve to not only finish high school but also believe in herself.

Although participants reflected that teachers treated students fairly, this was usually accompanied with a caveat. Teachers helped only the students who teachers perceived as “trying” or those who did not have “a reputation or a family reputation for

being bad.” If the student was not trying or had a bad personal or family reputation, then that student was treated poorly.

### **Parental Involvement in the School**

All of the participants thought their parents were supportive; many commented that their parents attended their sporting and extra-curricular events, although attendance depended on their work schedules. The majority of participants mentioned at least one of the parents was not able to attend an event due to their work schedule or if they worked away from home.

Most participants in this study described making class scheduling decisions without the input of their parents. The school expects the parents to play a role in guiding their child’s education however; working class parents often take the view that it is the school district’s responsibility to help guide their child through school. Participants in this study say working class parents are likely to believe they are either unqualified to guide their child’s education or trained personnel at the school have greater expertise to steer their children.

Beth and her parents were an exception to others whose parents were not involved in their children’s schooling. Beth’s mother helped her study and select classes for the next year. Her parents were also active in her extracurricular activities. They used a concerted-cultivation method of parenting by staying involved in her decision-making, progress, and extracurricular activities.

The other participants’ parents played a passive role in their child’s education. Parents were not usually involved with planning the classes their child chose other than signing the permission slip. Instead, participants reported their parents had faith in their

child's choices and some believed they were not prepared to help guide their child through those decisions. For example, Amber was asked how often she discussed the selection of courses or programs at school with her parents. She recalled her experience with her mother. Amber said, "I don't think really much at all...I would just kind of tell her what I was taking." Amber's mother would only ask if she was happy with what she was taking. Amber believed her mother "had a lot of faith" in her.

When asked about how often Amber and her mother discussed what she was studying Amber said her mother did not feel comfortable talking about certain academic topics because "her mother did not do well in school." Additionally, Amber did not want to burden her mother with school related issues. Amber's mother was a single parent of two children and worked two jobs to support the family financially. Her mother worked during the day at one job then most of the evening at the other so she "was usually gone."

Charles's parents wanted him to attend college but did not know how to advise him. When asked how his parents helped prepare him for college, he said, "I mean, my mom and my dad weren't real academics when they were in high school anyway...their mind set was, you have to go to college to get ahead, so they made sure of that, but then besides that, whatever." The academic input parents provided decreased as the courses their child took became too advanced and if they had no experience with higher education planning.

In this section, I discussed participants' perceived influence of friends with positive influences and the lack of academic and non-sport extra-curricular opportunities within the school district. Participants also perceived their schools did not adequately prepare them for higher education. The lack of academic and extra-curricular

opportunities in conjunction with the perception of less academic preparedness created a perception within the participant they were not as well positioned as others to compete in college. This section also reviewed the participants' recollections that their teachers treated them fairly so long as they were "trying" academically or did not have a bad reputation or come from a "bad" family. Finally, the section suggests participants' parents played a passive role in their secondary education decisions and may have contributed to the participants' perceptions they were ill prepared. The next section examines the participants' perception of their secondary schooling.

### **School and Parental Career Guidance**

This section reports the career guidance that participants received from school personnel and parents. Parents expected the schools to provide educational and career decisions, however guidance was lacking, inconsistent, and exclusively favored those going to college. Participants also discussed a lack of guidance in educational decision-making as well as navigating higher education admissions and financial aid processes.

### **School and Career Guidance**

The majority of participants did not believe the Southwest School District did enough to help them with career and educational counseling. The participants found the educational and career guidance from school counselors and teachers was minimal at best. There was a general agreement among all participants that the district failed to engage them in addressing the issue of educational and career pathways. Individuals from a working class or poor family are more likely to believe that the school, specifically the guidance counselor, should help map education and career aspirations (Lareau & Conley, 2008, p. 109). Specifically, five participants spoke openly about how teachers and

counselors failed to engage them in meaningful exploration of their educational and career aspirations.

When asked about their recollection of educational and career guidance provided by the school personnel, most of the participants (18/20) had little recollection. Instead, participants shared a perception that the guidance counselors were too preoccupied with administrative tasks such as testing and scheduling to spend time with a student. Carrie illustrates the sentiments of the participants:

There was never like a lengthy, you have to meet with them, what do you want to do for the rest of your life...Like I would have never thought, oh I have a problem where I need some guidance in what to do or some advice. I'm going to go see the guidance counselor. Like that just didn't seem like an option. I don't know. I don't know if it was presented differently or they felt like since I was on such an academic track that I would pick anything else.

Carrie went on to explain how the ambiguous role of the guidance counselor limited educational and career guidance for students. Referring to her guidance counselor, she said, "I know talking with him at one point he said he wished he had more time to do the actual like talking with the kids than dealing with the schedules." Carrie also discussed her belief that the absence of one-on-one contact with a guidance counselor could have detrimental consequences for a student. She believed the school should provide more discussion about careers. When asked if guidance counselors could play a more positive role in helping students reach educational and career goals, she said:

Well, yeah. I think that people too often tell kids you can do whatever you want. No, you can't. You can't always do what you want and if you expect to support a

family, you need to have some sort of education in a place that's going to matter...I mean, you pay for how many years of college and you never even get into dealing with that field. I have a friend who went through the same thing. He went through, he was a sociology major. He worked in the field for three years and absolutely hates it and now has a job with some, I don't know, something that's pretty much like a factory type job...

Carrie believed the schools' guidance counselors needed to spend more effort in career counseling students before they invest the time and financial resources into higher education. She expressed that if she planned adequately for her career path; she may have chosen a less expensive college and would not currently be so burdened with student loans. She also believed her sister and a friend had the same limited assistance from the guidance counselor and might have transitioned more successfully from high school to work if the guidance counselor would have helped them with their educational and career options.

Other participants felt inadequately prepared for college or trade programs because of limited interaction with guidance counselors. Lee and Mary said more meaningful interactions with guidance counselors could have helped them progress more smoothly through their higher education rather than making uninformed choice on their own. As Mary said once, she knew what she wanted to do:

you really have to look far ahead because...[I needed]...so many chemistries and physics and, you know, things like that so that's how I ended up picking to major in Biology to cover my prerequisites for [my advanced professional degree ], but then not until I went to visit the colleges and they gave me a handout of like these

are the courses you need to take to, you know, fill your major requirements and I saw all this chemistry. I can remember, I think I even tried to change my schedule so I could take Chem II in high school. Like, I mean, had I not gone to the college and seen what the program entailed, nobody would have told me, hey you're going to need a lot of chemistry for that job. You better take chemistry while you're here in high school.

In Mary's case, she inadvertently discovered she lacked some key high school courses for the college program she was pursuing.

Another participant felt he pursued the wrong academic program necessary to reach his career goal. Nathan talked about the for-profit schools that frequently visited his high school. After high school, he attended one of the for-profit schools because he "fell for" their aggressive marketing of a quick degree and job placement promises after graduation. Nathan completed a degree in criminal justice and cybercrimes in eighteen months but the promises of job placement were never fulfilled by the school. He was not able to find a job in the criminal justice field. He explored taking courses at a Pennsylvania state owned university but abandoned the idea once he found out the majority of credits he earned from the for-profit school were not transferable. Nathan thought the guidance counselor at his high school should have offered better guidance as he made his post-secondary education choices. Nathan wanted to pursue a career in criminal justice but he did not have access to mentors or individuals in the field of criminal justice who could have provided him guidance on the best post-secondary educational choices.

Similar to what was noted by Nathan, participants thought the school district should have offered a job mentoring or shadowing program so that high school students could learn more about jobs prior to pursuing them. For example, Carrie said the school district should have a job shadowing experience to help students better understand different types of careers and jobs. Another participant, Valerie made the point that not everyone has access to a role model or mentor in a particular field of employment. She Valerie was interested in pursuing a career in the medical field but did not know of a role model or mentor working in the profession. She said:

There's no mentoring... There was no exposure to other jobs so it was like well, I don't know what this is and I don't know...So I went to the career fair...to try to come up with something and respiratory therapy was something I chose...at first I was agreeable to that and after I had gone to a couple seminars on respiratory therapy, I'm like I don't think I want to do this for the rest of my life.

Although the traditional career fair provided Valerie with a source of information she believed the number of careers represented and the time she had to interact with the individuals at the fair was limited. Valerie believed if the school had better resources she and others like her would have been better informed about their initial career choices.

Only two participants reported successful interactions with a teacher who engaged them in educational and career topics. Mary wanted to pursue a career that required advanced professional degree and Lee wanted to be a teacher. Mary and Lee remember a project in one of their advanced health classes that was helpful in confirming their career choices. The project consisted of shadowing someone in a field in which the student was interested, writing a paper about their experience, and a class discussion. Mary and Lee

both stated the class project helped solidify their respective career paths. Their experience was not common for the other participants. Instead, study participants felt they had inconsistent access to information and experiences.

Participants also reported inconsistencies in the quality of interactions with guidance counselors, which often depended on the student already knowing what they wanted to do. For example, Beth felt she had a great guidance counselor but the counselor was transferred to another school and Beth was stuck with a “horrible” one her senior year. When describing her experience with the more recent guidance counselor, Beth said, “she forgot to send my transcripts.” When asked if the teacher or the guidance counselor did enough to help her map her educational choices, Beth said the counselors did not “really do much.” In Beth’s senior year experience, the guidance counselor did not follow through with critical steps necessary for Beth to be accepted into college. Although Beth felt confident in the direction she was taking, she did not believe the school had a support system in place to address education and career issues with students. From her perspective, the guidance counselor and most teachers “weren’t really there to really help you.”

Beth also recalled a lack of college and university materials available in the guidance office. Specifically, she only remembered the materials from two local community colleges and a Pennsylvania state owned university. She did not recall seeing any information on any other schools and felt the school did not want students to “go out and experience anything else.”

This section illustrates how the majority of participants in this study did not believe the Southwest School District did enough to help them with educational and

career counseling. The participants found the educational and career guidance from school counselors and teachers was minimal at best. The educational and career guidance interactions between participants and school counselors and teachers were described as inconsistent and lacked quality. Participants reported their satisfaction or the quality of information obtained from counselors or teachers depended on the participant already knowing what they wanted to do. The general agreement among all participants was the district failed to engage them in educational and career planning which contributed to their frustration navigating the higher education system.

**Navigating the maze of education and career choices.** For students coming from working class families, navigating the higher education field was a daunting task. Even a student from a working class family who was as proactive and insightful as Valerie found it difficult. Valerie described herself as “motivated” but felt she had difficulty navigating higher education. She recalled a conversation she had with the guidance counselor concerning financial aid and scholarships. Valerie wanted assistance locating scholarships and the counselor replied “there’s the computer use it.” Valerie asked if there were other resources and the counselor directed her again to the computer. It took her a considerable amount of time to begin to understand the “maze” of financial aid and scholarships.

Similarly, Lee reported even when students were presumed “college material” by teachers or guidance counselors, the only assistance provided by high school guidance counselors was administrative and procedural (i.e. completing admissions applications, SAT testing information, and financial aid timelines). He felt a more personal connection

with school personnel would have been more beneficial. Mary spoke for most of the participants when she described the guidance counselor interaction.

But as far as like the application process, I mean, my parents just wouldn't have known, you know, when are you supposed to take your SATs, when are you supposed to start applying. So I would say a lot of that came from the guidance counselors like helping us with like timelines and deadlines. I can remember...they scheduled one meeting per student while you're in high school when we were there. It wasn't very thorough...

Mary recalls only one meeting where she was able to sit down with a guidance counselor one-on-one. The meeting consisted of her telling the guidance counselor she wanted to go to college and the counselor helped her with the college application. However, Mary does not believe the guidance counselor would have been able to help her if she was not already sure she wanted to attend college.

Participants reported a difference in the way the school guided students. Those with college aspirations were given more attention by the guidance counselor, but they also felt pushed to attend universities located close to Southwest County. Students seeking employment or training in a trade after high school were encouraged to transfer to the local career and technical school beginning at eleventh grade. Lee believed some individuals "just needed some help" with education and career choices because they were "borderline" students. Lee referred to individuals that had the necessary skills to either attend college or a trade school but chose neither because of lack of money or guidance. Lee recalled a good friend, "he could have easily went to trade school" and now "he is just getting by [working] at a pizza shop." According to Lee, "kids who were borderline,"

like the friend Lee mentioned, were left to make uninformed decisions without the help of the counselor.

Mary and Lee believed college was oversold to students and those seeking careers in the trades were overlooked. The perception that college bound students were favored over trade bound students presents potential bias towards students seeking careers requiring a college degree opposed to careers requiring technical or trade school training. Lee believed “there was not any emphasis on the trades.” While Mary and Lee took tour of the local career and technology school during 10<sup>th</sup> grade, they had to make a decision at the end of the same year whether or not they wanted to attend the career and technology school. Lee recalled some of his classmates would have benefited from going to the career and technology school but did not because they did not want to leave their friends at the regular high school. Mary added that at her high school, “there was just a stigma attached with it.” Mary believed the career and technology school option had a lot to offer students not bound for college but was underutilized because the school did not emphasize career planning within technical and trade fields. They felt there was little counseling or information for those not attending college. There was also a strong stigma associated with a student transitioning from the high school to the career and technology school.

Over half of the participants perceived that the school district did not care about trade or job bound students after high school. The resources the school provided to students reinforced this belief. Guidance counselors often brought college recruiters into the school to discuss higher education opportunities but no participants recalled similar opportunities for those seeking employment after high school. For example, Beth

believed the guidance counselors should have brought local and regional businesses into the schools to talk about “real hard facts about” what types of job opportunities or careers were available in the area. Similarly, Nathan believed the school sent a message to students to go off to college and never return to Southwest County. Nathan said, “There was no actual attempt to keep you from, I don’t want to say leaving ‘cause you have to leave to go to higher education, but there was no bringing you back I guess.” Lori also believed local and regional businesses needed to come into the schools just like colleges to let students know what types of jobs are available. Lori said, “we had plenty of colleges come in, but never any businesses...I think it would be a good idea because there are students that are not college material.” Most participants agreed that the school district did not use local and regional businesses to promote the current and prospective careers in the county.

As reported in this section, navigating the higher education field was a daunting task for students coming from working class families. Participants reported the assistance from the school was procedural rather than interactive and personal. Participants reported a difference in the way the school dealt with students with college education aspirations versus those seeking employment or training in a trade after high school. One participant sought help from the guidance counselor after she was sure she wanted to go to college. If she had not initiated the assistance, she did not believe the counselor would have helped her. Those seeking employment or training in a trade after high school felt they had no guidance, other than the encouragement to transfer to the local career and technical school beginning at eleventh grade. Still another group of students who were unsure what they wanted to do felt if the guidance counselors had devoted some time to

“kids who were borderline,” the borderline youth may have had made different choices in life. The perception that the school did not care about trade or job bound students after high school was reinforced by the options the school presented to students. Participants saw the school only presenting college options with no local or regional career opportunities. While the school is one source of educational and career opportunities, the role of the parent cannot be overlooked. Parents have a partnership role with the school to guide their child’s aspirations.

### **Parental Educational and Career Guidance**

Parental understanding and use of the various types of capital play an important role in shaping the life chances of a child. Parental social, cultural, and human capital all can influence how a parent guides their child concerning educational and career aspirations. Participants discussed their parents’ involvement in two ways. Parents either completely overlooked the child’s agency by making decisions for them or the child was given too much choice and little guidance by the parent.

Where the choice was made for the child, parents made it clear the child was to attend college. Carrie and Robert (unrelated study participants) recalled their parents’ involvement in their educational career decision making. As Carrie said:

All I remember is my mom always, I never had a choice whether I was going to college or not. I mean, it was not a discussion. I was going to college so...like I said, it wasn’t a choice...I was going to college and I never really even considered the fact that I was 18 and had my own choice...I didn’t necessarily have any like, great like, reason for going other than that’s what I (laughing) that’s what I was supposed to do so that’s what I did.

Carrie's mother pushed her to do well academically but discounted any educational choices other than college.

Likewise, Robert's father also believed college was the only way to break the cycle of financial struggle his family had experienced. When asked if anyone helped decide what to do after leaving high school, Robert replied, "my dad said if you don't go to college I'm gonna put my foot up your ass and make it come out your mouth. That was about the way he explained that." He further explained, "He didn't want me to grow up like he did. Struggling. He wanted me to be better than that. And I think in part he kinda saw that I could be better than that...He was a very caring father, he just wasn't one of the ones to sugar coat the way things are said."

Carrie and Robert's experiences represent those of other participants that reported their parents made their post-secondary educational decision for them. Overall, about eight participants had parents like Carrie and Robert's who were described as caring parents with the best of intentions. The parents who made their child's post-secondary educational decision for them believed college would provide an avenue to financial security. However, these participants reported their parents had little to no input in class selection in high school to help them prepare for college. The participants did not engage the parents nor did the parents engage the children in educational and career planning.

While some parents were overinvolved in emphasizing college, others gave little educational and career guidance. Ten participants said their parents did not participate in their career and education decision-making. As long as the participants' educational and career choices sounded reasonable, their parents did not object to their choices. The participants' said their parents just wanted them to "do something" with their life.

The male participants who were undecided were encouraged to go to college or join the military. Neil was asked if anyone in his family helped him decide what to do after high school. He replied, “Well, my father said I can either join the military, go to college, or get a job and I decided to get a job.” David shared a similar experience. He said:

Dad just, his thing was he wanted us to go on for something. I don’t think he would have cared if I’d have went straight trade school...Dad just, he definitely wanted us to go on for something. He didn’t force the issue one way or the other as far as the direction, but definitely encouraged us to, you are going (laughing), you are going to do something. What is it? Military or college. That was definitely an option too.

Neil and David’s fathers just wanted them “to do something.” The fathers were not necessarily concerned about what their sons planned but encouraged them to have some direction after high school.

**Difficulty navigating higher education.** Parents placed a heavy emphasis on college and the study participants who attended college expressed difficulty for them and their parent in navigating the field of higher education. Participants who were the first or only child to attend college also recalled the difficulty their parents had navigating higher education admissions and financial aid. For example, when asked how her mother helped map her plan for leaving high school to get into college, Carrie said, “I did it all myself I guess...I was their first one...I figured that out all on my own and, I mean, of course I grew up as the internet was kind of coming so it was easy for me to learn so, I mean, I had that on my side.” Carrie had to navigate the financial aid system to pay for her post-

secondary education. After building her own cultural capital by learning about financial aid and college life, she assisted her sister when it was time for her to attend college.

Whereas Carrie built her own cultural capital, Mary and her parents learned the financial aid and college admissions process together.

Mary recalled taking a group tour with other prospective students and their parents. Mary believed she could tell the students who had parents with them that either had gone to college or had experience with the financial aid and admissions process. Mary said, “I learned a lot of things that I needed to look for in a school by listening to those parents’ and those students’ questions ‘cause I wouldn’t have known where to start or what to do...I didn’t have anything else to go off of.” Mary was observing the interactions of parents with college experience to bridge the gap in her cultural capital resources.

Mary and her parents learned about the financial aid and college admissions process together, and she was fortunate her parents were able to take time off from work to visit colleges. Four participants reported that their parents did not have the flexibility of taking days off work or if they did take a day off it was unpaid. Working-class parents often lack the ability to take work off to visit colleges or universities. For Nathan, his parents’ inability to take work off limited his choices and ability to visit and participate in recruiting events. Nathan and his parents “looked at the one I ended up going to on a weekend ‘cause none of us could really get away for a weekday to go down and then I’d been up at IUP before and walked around and knew a bunch of people there. But, other than those two, we didn’t really look anywhere else.” Nathan and his parents could not

participate in the same information-gathering process that other prospective college students enjoyed.

In this section, I examined participants' shared experiences with educational and career guidance through their school. Some reported the guidance counselors were more focused on administrative tasks than providing educational and career counseling to students and the contact they did have with a counselor lacked substance. Some participants felt the district should have done more to help students. Several suggested a job mentoring or shadowing program would have been worthwhile for students who did not desire to go to college. A number of participants felt college-bound and trade school or employment-bound students were treated differently. Parents were well meaning but seemed to rely on the school to help navigate higher education admissions processes and financial aid. Working-class parents either pushed their children towards higher education and then provided little guidance in the process or took a hands-off approach to career guidance altogether.

### **Influence of Southwest County as a Community**

In order to understand the influence of Southwest County and how location influences the individuals within the community, this section will focus on shared community capital and the prominence of natural capital in the community. Other thematic aspects of capital related to the county as a place will be addressed. The amount of diversity is reviewed and the impact of deindustrialization is discussed. The last aspect reviewed is themes of change the participants of this study would like to see take hold in the county.

Southwest County is located within 60 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Southwest County was formed through the natural boundaries of creeks and rivers. The Langwell River flows through the county towards Pittsburgh passing by the steep, rolling farmland and forested land. Perhaps a lesser known fact about Southwest County is that it is part of Appalachia (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2013).

### **Geographic Location's Influence on Opportunities and Habitus**

Southwest County as a geographic location has influenced participants' opportunities and habitus. This section illustrates how residents have/have not been able to make use of natural and cultural capital. Habitus may influence educational and career choices (Bourdieu, 1972/1977), which provides "varying cultural skills, social connections, educational practices, and other cultural resources, which then can be translated into different forms of value (i.e., capital) as individuals move out into the world" (Lareau, 2003, p. 276). The shared aspects of capital reviewed here are natural, built, social, and cultural.

**Southwest County's natural and built capital.** Southwest County is rife with natural capital, which includes a diversity of plants and animals (Flora & Flora, 2008). A significant portion of the county is farmland and mixed in among the farm and forestland of the county there are many lakes and miles of waterways. According to a report from the Penn State University Extension's School of Forestry,<sup>5</sup> 60% of all land in the county is forestland, which makes the county ideal for hunting, fishing, and many other outdoor activities. The Southwest County Industrial Development Council (SCIDC) markets the county as an outdoor enthusiast's playground. The SCIDC describes the county's natural

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<sup>5</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

features in terms of waterways and lakes available for recreational boating and fishing and the vast acres of open and wooded lands for hunting, cycling, hiking, and horseback riding.

Natural capital also plays a role in some aspects of built capital in Southwest County. The infrastructure of our society is built capital and includes such things as industrial complexes, roads, sport stadiums, and airports (Flora & Flora, 2008). Built capital is the delivery system which impacts how other capitals can be used (Flora & Flora, 2008). The combination of steep, rolling farmland and narrow river valleys creates natural boundaries, makes it difficult to connect individuals, and restricts the sense of community. Several participants talked about how “Being off the beaten path” made their everyday lives difficult. For some, where they lived created isolation and limited the number of extracurricular activities in which they could participate. Other families could not afford travel costs, and still others expressed limited access to cultural activities such as shopping and dining.

**Influence of natural and built capital on social and cultural capital.** Many participants described their feeling of isolation and a lack of community because natural barriers separated them from others. When Trisha described her experience in the rural township setting, she suggested her only non-relative neighbor was miles away from where she lived. Her neighborhood consisted of her immediate family and an uncle. She said:

We didn't have much of a neighborhood. We had 180 acres. Our neighbor was, my uncle lived across the road and then our nearest neighbor was three miles from us...we were kind of our own neighborhood. We were it.

She said her neighborhood was a large area of wooded property. Like Trisha, Mary said her only neighbors were relatives and there were no other neighbors with children.

Even in parts of the rural townships where houses were closer together, the feeling of isolation still existed. Rebecca is one of two participants who described how a major highway created a limited sense of community. According to Rebecca, many of the homes had limited interaction among neighbors because a highway acted as a barrier. She said:

The houses are pretty close on, I live...on the highway. The houses are pretty lined up..but it was hard to have a relationship with any of the others [neighbors], being that I'm on the highway it's not like you can just cross the street or walk down the road.

Rebecca went on to say access to neighbors on the same side of the highway was limited and those across the highway were unknown. Because of this lack of access to neighbors, some of the participants growing up in a rural setting felt little sense of community.

Those who lived in a borough setting described their neighborhoods as isolated communities where there was always something to do but they felt trapped due to the distance that separated them from others. Lee, Neil, and Robert each grew up in separate boroughs in Southwest County. Each noted that although they found activities to keep busy, they were confined due to a lack of transportation. Lee described an abundance of activity and plenty of individuals to interact with where he lived. Neil described a similar experience but he was in his "own little environment" because many of his friends lived in other neighboring communities that were too far and he lacked transportation.

Whether the study participant lived in a rural setting or in a borough, the feeling of isolation connected their experiences. For example, David talks about the amount of time he spent riding the bus to school and how the distance between his home and school prevented him from participating in extra-curricular activities. He said:

Even with the towns within our school district, the schools were relatively small.

We traveled, what, almost 45 minutes to get to high school...so there again the activities we [could participate in] were [limited]...because of the travel times and everything else, but we tried to carpool with neighbors...but the high school was relatively small.

Many participants suggested the distances between communities and the poor road network in Southwest County increased their travel time and expenses. Alice suggested that opportunities to dine and shop were also limited and costly because her family “had to go 45 minutes away to go shopping anywhere,” David concurred, “There’s not much on this side, there’s still not much on the other side of the river. You got to go on the other side of the river...” which is about a 30-40 minute drive. When asked what if he wanted to see a movie David also replied, “it seems that a lot of things have skipped through us.” The eastern part of the county has especially been historically underdeveloped making it difficult for residents to access extracurricular and cultural activities.

Beth felt constrained by the lack of opportunities in Southwest County and did not want the limited lifestyle in the county. Beth’s family traveled outside Southwest County for social and cultural experiences because they viewed their options were limited locally. Beth expressed surprise with the reactions from individuals when they learned

she had freedom to explore social spots for the under 21 crowd in Pittsburgh. Beth explained:

I always thought it was normal that we always went places...I would tell people [where I went and what I did] and they'd be like, oh where's that? I never realized how, how many people even where I live haven't been [to the places outside the county]...in high school, people thought it was a big deal that I drove in Pittsburgh by myself and I went to...[an under 21] club....If I didn't go on those [places outside Southwest County] I would not have a good grasp of the world. [Some of my friends] don't know what's out there and they just think [with a] small community mind and not all of the possibility there is out there.

Beth was not satisfied with local opportunities nor did she want to be constrained by the lack of opportunities for young adults in the county. The only option available to her was to seek those social options in the nearest metropolitan city, Pittsburgh (within 60 miles southwest of Southwest County).

The participants did not always perceive living in a geographically isolated community negatively. For example, Carrie, like fourteen other participants, preferred a slower paced lifestyle. Moreover, not only did David prefer a slower paced lifestyle, he believed the geographical isolation enabled the county to avoid crime and social problems other more impoverished communities faced.

Carrie and David illustrate how one's habitus, or the lifetime accumulation of skills, habits, and unconscious outlook on life informs "an understanding of society and their role in it,..that in turn affect the choices children make" (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 55). For example, Carrie has an uncomfortable feeling when she thinks about living outside of

Southwest County. Carrie's sister lives in a large metropolitan city outside of Pennsylvania. She believes there is too much pressure to maintain a fast-paced lifestyle where her sister lives and she likes the slower pace in Southwest County. She is comfortable with her identity as a "hick" and would never want to give up riding four-wheelers and shooting guns, something she believes living in a geographically rich yet isolated environment allows her to do. She compares the two modes of living in the metropolitan town and her own small rural town:

I mean, I feel like people are, the pressure there is greater too..I feel like that's a lot different than here. You just...don't feel that you [have to] make a lot [of money] and that's okay...we go shoot our guns and we're rednecks and like hicks and that's fine...we ride four-wheelers...They dress nice there [even if they] go to Wal-Mart...it's just a big deal there to them, stuff that's not a big deal here, which is nice. I can go to Wal-Mart in sweats. If I went there in sweats out there, they'd be like, ooo she's from a really bad part of town or something...I like not living with that pressure...You can be different...[that's] why we stay here. I like it. It's nice.

Carrie views herself as a "redneck" and a "hick." She perceives everyone in her town to be economically equal. She is also comfortable with the lifestyle in Southwest County and does not feel comfortable outside of the area where she would be viewed as from the "bad part of town."

Another benefit to living in the county identified by most participants was its "peacefulness," as stated above, David perceived the county to be shielded from a moral decline in the country and increase in violent crimes. He viewed his community as a

place where “children can still play in the front yard and you can keep your house unlocked.” David also felt he lived in the kind of place where if someone violates the sanctity of the home, the owner has a right to take justice into his or her own hands. He said:

It’s, so it’s changed as the world has changed I guess. It’s not as free and as friendly as maybe it once was...I think we’ve still been shielded to the worst of the world’s changes...the kids can still go out in the front yard and play...You can leave the house open. You’re not worried about somebody coming in and if they do, you’re probably going to shoot him if you catch him. We take care of our own [and] look out for your neighbor. So I don’t think...this community’s changed a whole lot...

Perhaps David’s sense of security is gained through a sense of community and the stability of neighbors. David likes that the composition of the community has not changed much and he is familiar with most of his neighbors. He added:

Being here all my life, I’ve never left. I never went away to college. Never experienced anything but this. To me, I don’t see it being much different. It’s still, we know our neighbors, know most of our neighbors. I mean, people have left and people have come in and they’ve chosen to not want to be associated with, just the world has changed or people that came from different regions that moved in, they just can’t believe that we can be as neighborly...They just don’t understand the sense of community.

Outsiders that move into the community are given the chance to integrate into the community. Those who choose not to become “neighborly” are looked at with surprise, suspicion, and disbelief that they would not want to participate in the community.

Southwest County is geographically isolated, which limits participants’ opportunities for extracurricular and cultural activities. Many participants shared ways they felt isolated but others perceived the isolation benefitted them including the slow paced, non-judgmental community members and the sense of community that was maintained even while other geographic areas saw moral decline and increases in crime.

### **Impact of Lack of Diversity in Southwest County**

In addition to an isolated geographical location and variations in the forms of natural, built, social, and cultural capital students had access to; another aspect of the community that shaped participants’ habitus was a lack of diversity. Participants commented on the “sheltered” nature of Southwest County and one participant even referred to the community as “unsophisticated and narrow-minded.” The racial makeup of Southwest County has remained highly homogeneous for decades. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the racial makeup of the county is 98% White; 0.8% Black; 0.2% Asian; 0.1% American Indian and Alaska Native; 0.1% Some Other Race; and 0.8% Two or More Races (U.S. Census, 2013). According to participants, racial hatred lingers within the community.

Boundaries are based on such things as class, race, gender, and sexuality; they create “order within communities by reinforcing collective norms” and “provide a way to develop a general sense of organization and order in the environment” (Lamont, 1992, p. 11). Since Southwest County is overwhelming white, participants were asked about their

experiences with racial and cultural diversity to see what collective norms and boundaries exist in the community. The majority of the participants shared that they did not have much exposure with racial and cultural diversity unless they traveled outside Southwest County. Still, six participants spoke about community members' "narrow-mindedness." For example, growing up, Beth experienced the hateful pressures of discrimination because she had a biracial friend. She explained:

I felt like I was in a class of a lot of people who were backwards...my senior year, one of my best friends is biracial and it pretty much at that point because I got text messages that told me I was gonna be hung by the KKK because I was friends with him. Yeah. It was disgusting.

Neil provided insight to Beth's experience when he suggested the vestiges of a "good ol' boy mentality" still exist in Southwest County. He discussed his view of the historical resistance to diversity and change.

It [my town] was very sheltered. I can best describe it like a Norman Rockwell neighborhood. It was not very culturally diverse, but it was very quiet...Not a lot of people moving in and out of the neighborhood. It was a pretty stable environment...[Keystone City] being the only, you know, small diverse with any kind of even African American families. There was none in [West Woodbury] growing up.

When asked his view on how people, around the community and county viewed racial and ethnic diversity, Neil said:

I think there's still a lot of good ol' boy mentality still unfortunately in this, in this area because it's not very culturally diverse. I think that's why that mentality still

remains. I don't know if it's generational or perhaps maybe they just, you know, parents, grandparents. They didn't grow up in a culturally diverse area and/or work in one so maybe they, there's a lot of racial and ethnic things that, you know, slurs and whatnot that go on only because this area just is not very diverse.

The geographical and moral boundaries created in Southwest County as well as shared norms resulting from a lack of exposure to people of races and ethnicities other than white, brought difficulties for participants when they went to college. For example, Amber found that attending the state university in the next county was a "culture shock" to her because of the lack of exposure to anyone outside of her race or ethnicity. She explained:

I mean, it was a culture shock to come to [Pennsylvania state owned university] and see African Americans and, I mean, it's very diverse here. In [Starkton], we were, we would maybe have, I think I maybe met four/five African Americans during my entire school career, kindergarten through 12th grade. And usually they didn't stay so that was different.

The majority of participants reported that negative views and negative expressions about other races are prevalent in Southwest County. Racial boundaries created in Southwest County ensured collective norms and consciousness among residents yet brought barriers for those who expanded their experiences outside of the community. However, over the life course of the participants, economic changes forced many of their family and friends to leave the comfort of their communities and seek employment beyond the county borders. The economic changes of a global economy in the last century resulted in a change of economic opportunities in Southwest County.

## **Impact of a Global Economy and Deindustrialization**

Chiang (2004) describes the impact of the global economy and the deindustrialization of the entire United States and places like Southwest County. Chiang efficiently summarizes what are known as globalization or the global economy and deindustrialization in America. According to Chiang (2004), “globalization refers to a period of capitalism that began taking root in the 1960s and first began really showing its effect in the United States in the 1970s with the advent of deindustrialization” (p. 166). This expansion of capitalism was due in part to cheap and accessible technology that made communication and transportation cost effective for corporations. Cheap communication and transportation afforded companies new tools against the strong labor movement in the United States. Companies were able to manufacture in one location, assemble in another, sell in yet another, while headquartered somewhere else (p. 166). American companies started to invest their manufacturing capabilities in countries with immature environmental and labor regulation, which is a significant cost savings to the corporation. Not only could companies exploit local labor with low wages and long workdays, they could exploit the environment as well. Corporate investment in other countries continues to change the economic health and type of employment opportunities in Southwest County.

The impact of deindustrialization in Southwest County has continued to limit the number and types of employment opportunities. The Southwest County Department of Planning and Development provided a list of the top ten employers in the county (personal communication, November 7, 2008). In 2008, the top ten employers, by

number of employees, included three public employers, one hospital, Wal-Mart, and five private companies (See Table 7).

Table 7

*Southwest County's Top Ten Employers (2008 to 2010)*

<u>2008</u>		<u>2010</u>	
Industry	Employees	Industry	Employees
Health Care	1004	Health Care	1004
Education	780	Mining	850
Mining	710	Education	780
Manufacture Food Products	500	Public Administration	553
Public Administration	500	Mineral Extraction	425
Mineral Extraction	325	Service, Retail	275
Manufacture Windows	280	Education	252
Service, Retail	272	Manufacturing, Medical Equipment	252
Education	252	Financial Services	200
Financial Services	200	Scientific Research and Development Services	125

In 2010, the Southwest County Department of Planning and Development provided an updated list of the top ten employers (personal communication, April 29, 2010). Some changes occurred (See Table 7). Most notably, the manufacture of food products and the manufacture of windows closed. The coal mining and mineral extraction companies increased their number of employees. The composition of the top ten employers (public versus private) did not change but it is clear that if the hospital, school, and county government are excluded the remaining employers include two companies focused on mining and mineral extraction, Wal-Mart, and the financial services company, which employs 200 or more employees. The two companies dealing with nonrenewable

resources will eventually close in the near future. After the natural resource extraction companies fade away, the public service sector will constitute the largest sector of employment in the county. The size of private employers is decreasing, due to the disappearance or departure of companies employing more than 200 employees.

The departure of employers and the decline in population in Southwest County has caused local stores, banks, and other services to fade away over the years. The downtown areas of Tennantport, Woodbury, Keystone City, and Torchwood have all but disappeared. A participant in the Tennantport Historical Society's oral history project recalls what downtown Tennantport used to be like in the first half of the twentieth century and prior to the area's deindustrialization.<sup>6</sup> The small town of Tennantport had several grocery stores, three clothing stores, several restaurants, and banks. Today, downtown Tennantport, like most towns in Southwest County, is empty and in disrepair.

A housing and community development consulting firm conducted an economic revitalization study for Woodbury Borough in 2009. One section of the report included a photographic essay of downtown Woodbury focusing on Market Street. The 100 Block of Market Street is the core of the downtown business district. The report notes that the area has a "lackluster physical environment (deteriorated buildings and facades, lack of green space, storefront vacancies, etc.) [that] imparts a negative impression."<sup>7</sup> The consulting firm found Woodbury presented a "harsh" visual impression to visitors. The study's photographic essay presented pictures that clearly illustrate the core downtown area is no longer vibrant and in a state of decay.

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<sup>6</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

<sup>7</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

All of the participants believe the county's economic health has declined over the years and the outlook for the future is not positive. Neil builds on his parents' recollection about how things once were in the county. He believes it may take a younger generation to turn the community around because Neil believes the community is dying. Neil said:

I think it's a shame that this county is dying off. I hear stories from my parents...about what this community used to be and how it was so busy, hustle and bustle and businesses going on and I know it's just not our community...It's just kind of a shame to see this town dying off the way it is...I don't know if it's the people who are in power, if it's a generational thing or perhaps the people in our age group...Maybe as they start taking places of power, maybe it'll bring in some new thinking and a new...regime [that does not have a] not in my backyard of thinking...I mean, it's a nice place to live. There's no jobs here. If you want a decent paying job, you have to drive out of [Southwest] County.

Participants like Neil have a bleak outlook about employment opportunities in Southwest County but some of the causes for diminished opportunities may exist within the county.

Some study participants had strong opinions about the why new jobs were not coming into the county. David believed communities in the county are turning into ghost towns and part of the reason he suspected that owners of existing businesses were threatened by new business and prevented new employers from coming to Southwest County. Specifically, he said not many businesses were moving into the county because:

The old money still talks and they don't want new competition even if it ain't directly competitive. If a new mill's going to move in and they're going to pay 300 good jobs, well, they've got guys working for them that's worked for them

for 20 years that's still only making decent money and they would quit them in a heartbeat to go get into the other company or they may have to spend more money to keep people.

David, like others interviewed, believes the local and county governments, in addition to some existing local businesses, do not have the county's citizens' best interests in mind.

The impact of deindustrialization in Southwest County has continued to limit the number and types of employment opportunities. Aside from natural resource extraction, public service sector employment constituted the largest sector of employment opportunities in the county. Study participants believe the county's economic health has declined over the years and the outlook for the future is not positive. Some participants believed that existing businesses were threatened by new business and prevented new employers from coming into the county and change will only occur when a new generation and new ideas takes hold in Southwest County. The next section explores what participants perceived as necessary changes for the county to be economically vibrant.

### **Participant Perception of Blocked Opportunity and Community Change**

In their experiences, participants felt the community lacked opportunities for themselves (and younger generations) that would have provided them with resources they needed to make informed choices about their education and career. Specifically, participants thought that more opportunities for youth in the community, more opportunities in school, and more jobs in the county would bring vibrancy to the community. Furthermore, the participants felt that attempts should be made to reverse the

historical economic decline of the region, and the region needed more diversity of culture to thrive.

Most of the study participants believe two high schools would have provided more social, athletic, and academic opportunities. When participants attended Southwest School District, there were four high schools. Yet, community residents who felt the county's shrinking youth population did not warrant four high schools and was a tax burden to residents have long debated the number of schools. Beth illustrates how most of the study participants did not believe four high schools<sup>8</sup> provided the best opportunities for students. In fact, Beth argues splitting the small population of youth between four high schools has limited the social, athletic, and academic opportunities for Southwest County youth. Beth said:

(laughing) I would close all the high schools and build one. I just feel like there's not, sometimes there's just not enough opportunities for the kids and I don't think they realize it because they're in school. You don't think you don't have the opportunities when you're in school. You think everything's fine and like, oh no I'm not missing out, but whenever you get out, I know like a lot of people realize that, oh well I wish I could have had that, wish I could have had this. And like social aspects, academic aspects.

Reducing the number of high schools could lessen the perception (and reality) of reduced social and academic opportunities within Southwest County.

Aside from outdoor activities participants felt there were limited social and cultural activities for youth in Southwest County. Beth previously talked about traveling

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<sup>8</sup> Not long after the interviews, a change in the school board resulted in new school directors who ended decades of debate. The district is building a new school and reducing the number of high schools from four to two.

to Pittsburgh, even in high school, to find alternative social activities from what was available in Southwest County. Rebecca also touched on the lack of activities and events for young people by suggesting a lack of activities could lead to delinquent behaviors.

She said:

We need, there needs to be something to do. I don't have a problem now 'cause I don't have time to do anything and I'm of legal drinking age. I'm talking for 16 to 20 year olds. Kids are getting in trouble because what are they supposed to do[?].there needs to be something...to do anything fun whether it's shopping or going out to eat. The options in, especially here in [Woodbury] just aren't that great...There's nothing to get them out and be socially interactive.

Responding to a general public sentiment that the county lacks activities for youth, the Southwest County Planning and Development department published a comprehensive recreation and parks plan to inventory, assess, and plan for the development of future parks and recreational facilities.<sup>9</sup> Public input through meetings and surveys were used to develop the plan. In the survey when asked, what group of people was least served or should be targeted with recreational programs or facilities; respondents identified children and teenagers as underserved. The lack of recreational facilities within the community leaves a lack of social and cultural opportunities for the area's youth.

Although most participants believe the county is insulated from crime and drugs; Beth and Wade (unrelated) believed the lack of social, economic, and cultural opportunities for youth in the community is leading to dangerous and tragic results. She comments on a tragic difference from the time she was in high school to what her younger brother experienced. Beth shared stories of several drug incidents at her

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<sup>9</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

brother's high school including three kids at her brother's school that overdosed and died within the same year. Beth's point is punctuated with recent news of a significant heroin drug distribution network operating in Southwest County was recently stopped by law enforcement. In a statement about the anti-drug operation in Southwest County, the Pennsylvania Attorney General cited Southwest and a neighboring county encountering an alarming number of drug dependency referrals to treatment agencies and a rise in the number of high school students using heroin.<sup>10</sup>

Beth believed the drug tragedies were due to a lack of opportunities and engaging activities for youth. Like Beth, Carrie believed community members are pessimistic and depressed because of a lack of viable economic opportunities for residents because only those who are excited about life" are motivated enough to leave. Carrie suggested those with the desire and ability to escape usually does and those who stay are unprepared or have no guidance on how to seek other opportunities in a changing job market. She said:

I do wish that there were more, I wish this area wasn't so depressed because I really feel like that weighs on the younger generation even like...

When asked what she means by "depressed" Carrie responded:

I just generally feel like everybody in this area as a whole, the general attitude is just pessimism and depression...People are not excited to live and that is hard to deal with every day. Just being around people like that and you really just become like that. I guess that's why people move. That's why, 'cause it's just, other than job opportunities. I mean, I just feel like people who are excited about life don't stay here because there's no one else here like that. So they don't feel like, why would I stay here then?...I think that a lot of people because they're unprepared,

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<sup>10</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

that's why they stay... They don't have any guidance and the fact that they could go places, get another job or work somewhere or be something so they just stay here... I mean, you look at all the industries we have, had close... and everything is just moving out and it's like, at what point is it really ever going to be something that's brought in and what would it be.

Carrie does not believe community members have a positive outlook because of limited opportunities for work. She hopes big changes will come to the community to lift the cloud of pessimism and depression. Like Carrie, every participant thought bringing jobs back to the community was the most important factor in economically, socially, and culturally reinvigorating the county.

Wade, an artist who has to travel to Pittsburgh to participate in an art community believes the county lacks a definitive artistic culture. Wade estimated there are approximately thirty other artists between the ages of 25 to 35 years of age living in Southwest County. He and other artists have attempted to introduce the community to diverse art and music opportunities but the artists were met with stiff resistance. Wade is frustrated with what he perceives as a lack of cultural diversity especially in the arts. He refers to groups that controls funding for the arts in the community as the "old hens' club." Wade perceives a resistance exists in the community to introduce anything other than what is in line with the tastes of those in control of arts and music in the county.

Wade said:

They need more culture—if they want to bring into the county a vibrant thing, they need to do cultural stuff... I tried to work with [people in the community], but... These old hens, instead of the old boys club, it's the old hens' club.

When asked to clarify what type of cultural activities received funding in the county, Wade said:

All they want to do is bring in folk music, some old 50s bands, The Clarks, and that's all they want to do... And they could change a lot if they brought in some diversity of culture. Cause, if there's some culture, some cultural things going on and some little things start to get going I imagine these businesses would come in and start putting stuff up, because there's an actual vibrant community.

Wade believes that a change in cultural diversity could bring a source of economic development for downtown Woodbury. He sees the potential for creating an artistic and cultural island in Woodbury similar to what is occurring in Lawrenceville, a section of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Wade points the significant transformation in Lawrenceville. A Lawrenceville community organization cites the revitalization that occurred there is due in part to the "shops, galleries, and restaurants and are drawing customers from around the region (Lawrenceville Corporation, 2014). Wade believes the local gatekeepers, he refers to as "the old hens' club," limit the cultural development of the Southwest County and the changes that occurred in Lawrenceville will never happen in Southwest County until there is a change in community leadership bringing new ideas and vision for the future.

This section summarized the geography and location of Southwest County that participants saw as private and community oriented as well as isolating and lacking social and cultural opportunities. Although participants reported, they enjoy the laidback, peaceful, and consistent nature of the communities in the county there is a lack of diversity and an undertone of narrow-mindedness according to the participants. All of the

participants suggested they would not be surprised if young people living in the county today moved due to the lack of jobs. They felt historically, the community offered very little opportunities for youth to engage in extracurricular and cultural activities, and schools did not provide enough resources to young people. In the next section, I examine how factors within the participants' family influence their post-secondary and career choices.

### **Aspirations and Structural Barriers on Participant Education and Career Decisions**

In this section, I examine the participants' educational and career aspirations, and agency and social support resources used to reach their aspirations despite structural barriers they confronted.

### **Navigating Social and Structural Barriers Through Aspiration and Agency**

In this section, I review the aspirations and agency of the participants and discuss how social structural barriers often acted as impediments to their education and career decisions but also how they resisted the barriers they faced. An individual can be pushed into a decision or situation by structural forces or jump due to human agency. MacLeod (2009) and McLeod and Yates (2006) cite that macro forces do indeed shape individual lives and "in varying degrees reproduce social relations to power and inequality" (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 89).

Despite her parents' discouragement of options other than working on the family farm, Trisha had her own unique aspirations. At a very young age "probably only in 3rd or 4th grade" she decided to be a funeral director. Trisha went against the great pressure of working on a farm that has been in her family for generations and in doing so illustrates individuals are free willed and do not have to succumb to parental pressure to

continue a family tradition. Trisha did not know what motivated her to reveal her aspiration that one evening sitting at the dinner table. When she did, she recalled her grandfather dismissing her career aspirations but she held on to her idea of career choice. She became a funeral director and her family never approved nor understood why she would do anything else other than working on the farm. She summarized her experience:

They just felt that we were born and raised on that farm and that's where we should stay. And you should, there should be no reason to leave there. That none of us should ever have to leave the farm and do anything different other than farm.

When asked if the farm was handed down from generation to generation, Trisha responded it was in her family since 1832. Although Trisha is no longer working in the mortuary field, she was able to resist the overt pressures from her family to continue a farming lifestyle.

Like Trisha, other participants recalled having aspirations that went against what their families saw as appropriate. Neil's parents wanted him to attend a trade school or college but he saw no reason to plan for his future because during high school he thought he could rely on a well-paying job at the coal mine or steel mill. He explained his high school experience:

And I didn't really think a lot about my future at that time and I just blame it on my youth. I just unfortunately lacked that direction at that point in my life...I just banked on, you know, hey I'll find a job with my brother at the steel mill or I'll go work at the coal mines. Those jobs were still very plentiful at the time. I had no

way of knowing that whole industry was going to totally change in the next decade.

After high school Neil did not find the once well-paying coal or steel jobs he envisioned. He did find some industrial jobs but they did not pay what he had anticipated he would earn. Neil “leveled” his aspirations by assuming he could find a well-paying labor job right in his own community. He did not aspire to anything that required post-secondary education because he saw his brother secure a decent job in the mill.

In his ethnographic work, MacLeod (2009) observed and interviewed two groups of boys from a low-income housing development to explore the process of social class reproduction. The parents of one group of boys who MacLeod calls the “Hallway Hangers” wanted the best for their children but did not encourage high aspirations. MacLeod found that the “Hallway Hangers” habitus, or worldview, narrowed the opportunities they perceived available to them and strongly influenced the boys to “level” their occupational aspirations and life outcomes (MacLeod, 2009). Like MacLeod’s “Hallway Hangers”, Neil spent much of his time right after high school moving from one job to the next hanging onto the belief he could only be a laborer. Neil explained:

I kind of had a live for today attitude at that time...I was doing, which just kind of seemed like floating around from one basic labor job to another. I never felt that at any of those jobs I was special or that that was something I wanted to do the rest of my life.

Neil thought working in the mine or mill could provide him with a secure living as it did for his father and brothers so he did not aspire to a career or job that required higher levels of education and he certainly did not pursue higher education. Neil could not have

predicted that mine or mill industries would diminish their presence in Southwest County. The economic outlook for Southwest County changed but boundaries were already put in place that limited what Neil believed he could achieve.

All the participants followed their aspirations even if their parents did not agree with the path the participant had chosen. All the participants could count on the continued economic and social support from their family to help with the pursuit of their aspirations.

### **Participants' Economic Struggle and Family Social Support**

Most of the participants struggled financially. For example, Lori lives in an apartment above a garage at her parent's farm. She has had difficulty providing food and housing for her family. During the interview, she expressed concerns about the impact of her financial situation on her children, especially her son for whom she cannot afford the extra cost of musical equipment or athletic uniforms. She stated "that's like the biggest problem with my son because he wants to do all this stuff and I just can't afford it." She wants him to have opportunities and fit in at school but she does not have the financial resources.

Robert also had to cope with limited financial resources, like others was resilient, and found strength and a sense of personal accomplishment surviving his financial struggles. He credits his parents with setting an example. He said:

We always seemed to struggle...But sometimes struggling isn't necessarily always a bad thing...It kinda teaches you some life lessons, gives you a better understanding of how to manage money and take care of yourself. But yeah, for

the most part it seemed like we were always kinda right on the cusp of not quite making it...

Robert coped with his family's financial struggles by believing he was learning a life lesson. At the time of the interview, Robert was unemployed and struggling financially, but in training for a new career from which he hopes to find steady employment.

Four unrelated participants discovered they could not replicate the home environment they experienced as children due to economic constraints. These participants grew up in single income earner homes, with fathers working outside of the home and mothers' providing domestic work. Rebecca was one of these participants who desired a household where her husband made enough income so she could be a stay-at-home mom. Rebecca was not alone, three other participants desired to live in a single income earner home with a stay-at-home mom and a working father. Rebecca explained:

I actually thought I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. That's what my mom did and it was so great for me. Needless to say that's just not for me now. I did it for just a few months when the baby was born but we couldn't afford it. I was getting my education for plan B. I said that all through college. I said this is plan B.

When asked if she thought it was hard to have a single income, she replied:

Yeah, it is. Yeah it really is and my fiancé and I, we make more than minimum wage. We don't make excellent money and we need two incomes. We're not living paycheck to paycheck, but I don't know how people do it. And I have tremendous support from my family as well as his so I don't know how people do it.

Rebecca was not able to replicate the home environment she experienced growing up but she did have a “plan B.” Rebecca had sufficient human capital to obtain employment so she was able to find a job that met their financial needs. While Rebecca and her fiancé work, their parents provide childcare.

Like Rebecca, most participants relied on friends and family for financial and emotional support. For example, nine participants chose to attend a Pennsylvania state owned university because it was close to where they lived and they could stay in their parents’ home to save money. Several participants had children at a young age, so the support of their families for childcare was essential to their pursuit of a higher education. Rebecca’s older sister watched her baby while she commuted to college and worked a part-time job. Rebecca stated that without the much-needed “emotional and financial” support from her family she would not have been able to make it through college.

Valerie, a single mother of three children, has a similar support system to Rebecca. At the time of the interview, she was a social worker, but this was only a temporary job as she is completing college coursework on the weekends. She was hoping the additional education would allow her to secure a higher paying job in the future. Valerie explained that working and caring for three children, one of which has special medical needs, requires help from her mother and other family members. Without strong social supports, Valerie would have a much more difficult time advancing her education, especially with to the unique medical needs of one of her children.

The economic and social support from the participants’ families helped participants make ends meet and achieve milestones in the pursuit of their aspirations.

Even with economic and social support, participants felt constrained by the physical boundaries and cultural norms while growing up in Southwest County.

### **Limiting Career and Education Opportunities**

Southwest County's geographic boundaries discussed above also informed the habitus of participants in such a way that they limited the career and education opportunities participants perceived for themselves. Boundaries are based on such things as class, race, gender, and sexuality and create "order within communities by reinforcing collective norms" (Lamont, 1992, p. 11). Participants felt more comfortable within the boundaries of Southwest County and experienced a level of anxiety in exploring options outside the county.

Several participants shared their discomfort with living anywhere else than a rural setting. Some even rejected the idea of living in a borough environment let alone moving to a larger metropolitan area like Pittsburgh or some other urban center. The bonds of a rural environment influenced the life decisions of many of the participants interviewed. For example, Robert said location played a large role in his educational choice because he did not "like the city." He said, "I wanted to make sure I found somewhere where I didn't feel like I was being cramped into like a rat box." Cities made him feel uncomfortable and he only considered colleges in a rural setting.

Carrie had feelings similar to Robert about living in an urban environment. However, unlike Robert's aversion to Pittsburgh, Carrie could not stand living in a section of Woodbury borough because the more populated neighborhood lacked privacy. She said, "I just want to be out in the country where I'm my only neighbor." Even though

Carrie's husband worked in Pittsburgh and spends over three hours commuting each day, Woodbury is the closest she is willing to commit to living in an urban environment.

For some participants, living in a rural area provided comfort that kept them from venturing elsewhere for other opportunities. For Mary, doubt and fear about what awaited her outside Southwest County was a concern when she started planning her future. Mary reported she did well in school and her parents' often told her she was smart. She chose a college in a rural setting. Still, even though Mary "got all As in college" she still doubted her ability to pursue a career that required an advanced professional degree. She measured herself against individuals she perceived were "very intelligent people who went to very good schools." Mary believed her doubt stemmed from coming from a rural school that made her less competitive compared to others who may have had more diverse experiences. She said, "until you actually get out there [with] people from all different backgrounds and areas and then you realize you had it in you the whole time."

Nearly all the participants shared similar stories about the fear and anxiety they experienced that kept them from thinking or going beyond the borders of Southwest County. Mary experienced the same anxiety and self-doubt that others from Southwest County felt when she pursued a post-secondary education Mary did not discover she was able to compete with others with perceived advantages until she started her advanced professional studies.

Several participants expressed a general disappointment with perceived barriers they believed had an impact on their social and economic mobility and educational and career choices. Participants responded to the perceived barriers to mobility in several ways. Several (6) placed less value on education and more on hunting, fishing, or

athletics because they were highly valued by the working class culture in Southwest County as well as their peer groups and families. Neil reflected on how a sports focused mindset affected his educational choices.

Looking back on it, I wish that I would have tried a little harder academically than what I did. Unfortunately, I was kind of in a bit of a crowd that didn't care as much for grades. You know, I was just keeping my grades up enough to play sports...None of the circle or the group I ran with was really...an honor roll kid or (laughing) anyone that really had the 4.0 average so we didn't have any kind of competition as far as grades or anything of that sort. But I can't remember too many of my circle of friends that actually went to college after school. So maybe indirectly, it might have affected my choices at that time.

Charles was also influenced by sports because his father focused on his wrestling ability rather than Charles' musical aspirations. Charles' true passion was his music and he participated in various musical endeavors. His aspiration was to join the military and serve in the "The President's Own," which is the United States Marine Band and the most prestigious of the military bands. Charles was accepted into the military but was medically discharged due to an injury incurred during wrestling season. Charles' needed surgery on his hand but the surgery would have interfered with wrestling season. Charles' father supported his wrestling coach's philosophy of winning at all costs. Charles' father told him to wrap-up his hand and wrist to finish the season. After wrestling season concluded, Charles was finally able to have the surgery to his wrist but the damage to his wrist required pins and screws. The injury to Charles' wrist no longer made him eligible for military duty.

Charles said his father was more concerned about Charles completing his final year of wrestling as a high school senior than Charles' health. Although Charles bought into the sports culture, he rebelled against his father's wishes in choice of education and career aspirations. Charles said, "My dad was completely against me going for music. He's like, what are you gonna do with a music degree?" Unfortunately, Charles's aspiration to seek a musical career did not come to fruition. He started college majoring in music but had to drop out soon after starting because he and girlfriend (now wife), became pregnant. Charles switched schools and majors to be closer to his baby and soon-to-be wife. The financial uncertainty caused him to drop out of college altogether. He worked in construction for about a year until he was laid off. He went back to school and earned an associate's degree from a technical school while working various jobs to support his new family. Currently, Charles is a software developer for a small information technology company.

Wade was also heavily involved in sports and based his future on athletics. Like most other participants (12/20) he did not achieve the aspirations he had in high school. Wade is an artist who would love to find gainful employment creating art. Reluctantly, he settled on construction work while working on his art craft in the evenings and on the weekends. His job just "pays the bills" but it does not leave much money for him to save. He would like to go back to school to work on a master's in art but "it'd put too much strain on me and I don't need it right now." Wade feels trapped between pursuing his artistic aspirations and meeting his immediate financial obligations. Wade resents his situation because he went to school to become an artist to escape the working class background he grew up in. To make his resentment worse, he feels stuck in the

community he has tried to get away from and only gives his employer enough effort to not “get fired.”

Participants described feeling constrained by the cultural and physical boundaries growing up in Southwest County and how the county shaped their lives. For some it was the discomfort with living anywhere else other than a rural setting that kept them in a community with limited education and career opportunities. For other participants, the bonds of a rural environment or a sports focused culture impacted their educational and career decisions. And still another group of participants felt “trapped” in their communities because they did not have the financial means or employment skills to leave.

### **Chapter Summary**

Throughout this chapter, I explored how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices among Southwest County residents in their transition from secondary schooling to higher education or work. I presented detailed information about the participants and their background, about their capital and how their parents managed their development growing up. The chapter also looked at the community through a geographic description, prominent themes of capital, diversity and the impact of deindustrialization and the changes participants would like to see for the future of the community. I also presented perceptions of class, aspirations, agency, boundaries, and resistance, including the influence of family, friends, schools, and parental career guidance. School experiences, perception of preparedness and whether the participant was treated fairly or unfairly was discussed. The next chapter will include a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Family, school, and community have a great deal of influence shaping pathways to the future. For example, parents' advice and guidance are made in response to structural conditions and constraints their families faced including a reliance on schools to guide their children's educational and career decision-making. Schools in working class areas are ill-equipped to guide young people in a new economy. The rural community can be isolating and create barriers, limit social/cultural capital, and shape a worldview that keeps people within the community. People make choices about their future and the contexts in which they live shape those choices. This study discusses how young people in a rural working class community perceived their decision making given the context in which they live. Southwest County, Pennsylvania is not unlike other poor/working class rural places where deindustrialization has occurred. Rural communities that were once dependent on a limited number of economic sectors (i.e. agriculture, natural resource extraction, and manufacturing) have faced declining economic opportunities and physical deterioration (Budge, 2006; Swanson & Luloff, 1990).

This research explored how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County, Pennsylvania. I sought the individual's perspective to understand and explore the shared event of growing up working class in Southwest County. I used qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured interviews to collect data from twenty individuals that grew up in Southwest County,

were educated in the Southwest School District, and are currently living in Southwest County.

This study is significant to the economic and cultural health of Southwest County and similar economic and rurally positioned areas throughout the United States. The economic changes ensuing from the expansion of global capitalism in the last century resulted in a change to the economic opportunities in Southwest County. All of the participants believed the county's economic health has declined over the years and the outlook for the future is not positive. Participants felt the community lacked opportunities for themselves (and younger generations) that would have provided them with resources they needed to make informed choices about their education and career. Specifically, participants thought that more opportunities for youth in the community, more opportunities in school, and more jobs in the county would bring vibrancy back to the community.

Capital is the different types of skills, assets, and connections acquired throughout one's life. People inherit capital from their parents or obtain them through social networks and cultural training. Capital is the currency of power to compete in society. The more capital an individual wields, the more likely he/she will have more powerful and advantaged positions in their social and economic life. This study also examined the role of Southwest County parents and school personnel and how participants perceived parents and schools as building capital and shaping the life chances of young adults.

This study also examined participants' habitus, which is the lifetime accumulation of skills, and habits. Habitus also includes a learned yet unconscious outlook on life. The habitus positions an individual to act, express, and think in socially acceptable ways

(Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus builds over time and is relevant only in the appropriate context of social history. For instance, an individual growing up in a working class environment in Southwest County would most likely develop a different habitus from someone growing up in an urban environment, such as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Habitus accumulates over time and is based on location. habitus operates “through discourse, practices, and institutions, and through interactions with others in their environment, principles are set up for the individual about what matters, what is noticed, how one comports oneself physically, socially, emotionally, and much more” (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 90). This means the community and schools culture may influence how an individual who grew up working class will see themselves and what educational and career choices make sense and are obtainable.

### **Research Questions**

To explore and better understand how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices, the following three research questions were addressed:

1. How do individuals who attended the Southwest School District perceive the district’s influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?
2. How do individuals perceive their family’s influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?
3. How do individuals perceive the Southwest County community’s influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?

## **Interpretation of Findings**

In Chapter 1, I discussed that social class plays a significant role in access to opportunities and options in life. Social class influences how an individual is characterized in society as a person, how the individual fits into the workforce, what life goals are possible, and how those goals can be attained. Individuals learn what resources they have or do not have, when or when not to use them and how or how not to use them to achieve their desired ends. For instance, several researchers have found that parents and social institutions (e.g., schools) pass on an understanding of the type of post-secondary and career opportunities available to working class children and this understanding impacts the choices children make (Devine, 2004; Flora & Flora, 2008; Lareau, 2003). The following section reviews how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County.

### **How Secondary School Experiences Shaped Participants**

Participants' in this study discussed how their secondary school experiences offered and constrained opportunities and options in their education and career decision making. The participants' experiences point to a lack of academic and non-sport extra-curricular opportunities within the school district. Participants also perceived their schools did not adequately prepare them for higher education. The lack of academic and extra-curricular opportunities in conjunction with the perception of less academic preparedness created a perception among the participants that they were not as well positioned as others to compete in college.

Anyon (1981) found affluent school districts provided educational services that helped elevate or sustain class position and school districts in working class or poor communities provided a one size fit all approach that works against working class and poor youth. Often the working class and poor have fewer resources than the youth attending affluent school districts. The affluent youth have their parents, mentors, and other resources who assisted with mapping their education and career pathways.

Navigating the higher education field was a daunting task for students coming from working class families. Participants reported the assistance from their high school provided a one size fit all approach to education and career guidance. The participants perceived school guidance was procedural rather than interactive and personal. Participants reported a difference in the way the school dealt with students with college education aspirations versus those seeking employment or training in a trade after high school. Participants preparing for college felt like the school only helped administratively and offered no resources in exploring careers and educational institutions. Those seeking employment or training in a trade after high school felt they had no guidance, other than the encouragement to transfer to the local career and technical school beginning at eleventh grade. The perception that the school did not care about trade or job bound students after high school was reinforced by the options the school presented to students; they could either stay at the home high school in a general education path or attend the local career and technical school. The participants' belief they were blindly pushed through the secondary education system was confirmed in an interview with an Southwest School District administrator who likened the district's function to a factory

by saying the school is “an assembly line in that they educate students and filter them off to post-secondary education” and other career opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

That a school administrator felt the school district was nothing more than a factory coupled with the lack of academic and extra-curricular opportunities suggests a hidden curriculum existed (or at least existed) within the Southwest School District, which contributed to the maintenance of social stratification. Researchers such as Anyon (1981), Carnoy and Levin (1985) and Finn (1999) observed that schools—through hidden curricula—help to maintain social stratification between working class, middle class, affluent, and elite youth. Schools are pathways where youth learn their place in the economy. The message the school sends to a youth serves not only a means of socialization but also as social control that benefits the maintenance of schooling for different types of economic and social classes.

Lehmann (2007) studied youth apprenticeship programs in Canada and found that class reproduction was prevalent in Canadian public high schools. Lehmann also suggested that the labor market and the educational structure supported the reproduction of social class. Like the Canadian educational system, schools in America function to produce workers, not equality. Schools accomplish this function through the “correspondence principle,” which refers to the structuring of the school environment so that social interactions and individual rewards mirror the workplace (Bowles & Gintis, 2001). The school prepares youth to assimilate into the social order through citizenship and learning to labor (Aronowitz, 2004).

The majority of participants did not believe the Southwest School District did enough to help them with career and educational counseling. The participants found the

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<sup>11</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

educational and career guidance from school counselors and teachers was minimal at best. There was a general agreement among all participants that the district failed to engage them in addressing the issue of educational and career pathways. The participants in this study expected the school to help with preparation and planning for the future that is consistent with other research that suggests individuals from working class and poor families are more likely to rely on the school, specifically the guidance counselor, to help map education and career aspirations (Lareau & Conley, 2008, p. 109).

### **How Family Shaped Participants**

Working class and poor youth are not only let down by a lack of guidance from schools, they also struggle with their parents' lack of knowledge and resources in helping them plan for their futures. In this study, parents helped to shape the types of skills, resources, and social networks participants accumulated and utilized to make education and career decisions. In other words, parents built capital. The capital a young person accumulates over a lifetime encompasses more than mere material goods. Young people inherit resources from their parents and obtain them through social networks and cultural training. As they make educational and career decisions and pursue their goals in these realms, their accumulated capital can be used as power and plays an important role in creating and shaping life chances.

Financial, cultural, and natural were the most frequently cited forms of capital to which study participants perceived either lacked or had access. For example, many participants discussed their family's financial capital. While they did not perceive themselves as poor, their access to financial capital was limited. They and their families did not have excess beyond basic consumption needs. Most reported they had food,

clothing, and housing and little more yet they did not see how their families could financially assist in their education and career development.

Cultural capital “determines how we see the world, what we take for granted, what we value, and what things we think can be changed” and includes such things as traditions, spirituality, habits, and heritage (Flora & Flora, 2008). One example of cultural capital noted by participants was hunting. In Southwest County, participating in the sport of hunting is one way in which families supplement their household income and pass on cultural capital to another generation. In the case of hunting, families are taking advantage of the abundant natural capital in Southwest County. Hunting also provides the opportunity for family and friends to connect on a personal level and enjoy the outdoors.

Annette Lareau (2003) uses the term “concerted cultivation” to describe how middle class parents manage the development of their children through organized activities and experiences. She explains middle- and upper-class youth lead busy childhoods by way of their managed development. Their parents enroll them in an often-overwhelming number of organized activities and by doing so they learn to navigate structured environments (e.g. schools) and view themselves as equals with adults with a sense of entitlement.

According to Lareau (2003) in contrast to middle and upper classes, the working class and the working poor socialize their offspring through “natural growth.” In this style of parenting, children create their own activities to occupy the significant amount of unstructured time. Working class parents are not usually able to devote the considerable time and financial resources to cultivate their children in the same way as middle-class parents. Working-class and poor parents are often too occupied with efforts to provide

food, housing, clothing, and health care for their families that they lack time, resources, and the wherewithal to cultivate their children's interests. Lareau noted that working class parents tend to defer to authority figures (i.e. teachers and bosses at work) and institutions (i.e. school district and employers). Working class children do not have the opportunity to develop the needed skills to achieve the greatest advantages when dealing with individuals with authority or institutions. For instance, a working class youth may not have the skills to question or negotiate issues with high school teachers or college professors or administrators. Working class youth are less prepared to navigate and interact with institutions (i.e. job market and education system).

A majority of study participants described growing up in a "natural growth" setting. Although some participants were involved in organized activities, most of their time was spent in unstructured activities. In describing their time outside of school, including weekends and summers, the remaining participants suggested a variety of unstructured activities filled up their time. Although participants believed the unstructured free time and activities provided opportunities to express creativity and to problem solve, but participants were unprepared to manage interactions with authority figures and institutions. For instance, few participants challenged guidance counselors to provide them with the education and career guidance they were expecting from the school district. Several participants expressed regret with placing less value on education and more on hunting, fishing, and athletic activities because it created fear and anxiety when pursuing post-secondary education.

In a study of working class boys conducted in the 1980s, MacLeod (2009) found that boys leveled their aspirations by not participating in non-sport extra-curricular

activities or focusing on serious academic work because their peers and families viewed such pursuits as an infraction of the working class social code. The working class boys in MacLeod's study internalized their perceived inadequacies and self-regulated their behavior in the working class environment. MacLeod (2009) found the context in which working class boys lived formed a perception of narrowed opportunities and strongly influenced them to "level" their occupational aspirations and life outcomes. According to MacLeod, "The leveled aspirations are a powerful mechanism by which class inequality is reproduced from one generation to the next" (2009, p. 5). In my study, two participants believed if they had continued to hang out with their former friends neither would have valued the importance of good grades nor would they have had gained the self-confidence to seek a college education. They resisted leveling off their aspirations by changing their peer group. The other participants emphasized behaviors expected in their working class culture, which ultimately hindered their aspirations. Several participants placed less value on education and more on hunting, fishing, or athletics because they were highly valued by the working class culture in Southwest County as well as their peer groups and families.

While MacLeod's study occurred in the early 1980's, my participants illustrated similar responses to social, economic, and cultural barriers. As stated above, leveled aspirations or the perception of narrowed opportunities for employment and life outcomes strongly influences an individual. The examples of two participants from my study showed their aspirations were leveled until they changed their friends and environment. MacLeod also addressed that when it comes to understanding the outcomes in an individual's life, social and cultural capital are very important factors for success.

Employment success is not based on meritocratic criteria but on the strength of the local economy and individual social connections. Much like MacLeod's participants he referred to as the "Brothers" most of my participants conformed to the "achievement ideology" (MacLeod, 2009). Thus, most of my participants believed a college education would bring economic success.

All but three participants believed they have not yet achieved their career and financial goals they envisioned at the end of high school. The participants in my study did not reject post-secondary education although some temporarily leveled their aspirations. All but one participant started post-secondary education immediately after high school. For some participants, completing college took longer. Four participants started college then dropped out for a couple years for family or financial reasons but eventually returned to complete their degree. One participant sought employment right after high school but later obtained a college degree after several years of moving from one low paying job to another. Three participants changed their definition of success after starting college and left without obtaining a degree to start working.

### **How Southwest County Shaped Participants' Aspirations**

Southwest County is "a little off the beaten path" because the county consists mostly of forest and rolling farmland. The geographic location of Southwest County played a role in shaping participants' opportunities and habitus. Specifically, the natural capital, which allowed participants to enjoy the land in many recreational ways but it, also was a source of isolation and a barrier to their access to cultural and educational activities. For example, some participants perceived the isolation benefitted them with a slow paced, non-judgmental community members and the sense of community. Yet

others talked about how “being off the beaten path” made their everyday lives difficult. For some, where they lived created isolation and limited the number of cultural and extracurricular activities in which they could participate in Southwest County. Other participants could not afford travel costs, and others expressed frustration over the limited access to cultural activities such as entertainment, shopping, and dining.

Many participants described feelings of isolation and a lack of community because natural barriers separated them from others. Participants suggested the distances between communities and type of roads and time it took to travel within and outside Southwest County was cumbersome and expensive. Aside from outdoor activities participants felt there were limited social and cultural activities for youth in Southwest County. Participants traveled outside Southwest County for social and cultural experiences because their options were limited within the county.

The impact of deindustrialization in Southwest County has continued to limit the number and types of employment opportunities. Aside from natural resource extraction, public service sector employment constitutes the largest sector of employment opportunities in the county. The departure of employers and the decline in population in Southwest County has caused local stores, banks, and other services to fade away over the years. All of the participants in this study believed the county’s economic health has declined over the years and the outlook for the future is not positive.

Participants felt the community lacked opportunities for themselves (and younger generations) that would have provided them with resources they needed to make informed choices about their education and career. Specifically, participants thought that more opportunities for youth in the community, more opportunities in school, and more

jobs in the county would bring vibrancy back to the community. Furthermore, the participants felt that more attempts that are serious should be made to reverse the historical economic decline of the region, and the region needed more diversity of culture to thrive.

In this section, I reviewed the outcomes of my study on how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices from the perspective of individuals who grew up in working class families in Southwest County, Pennsylvania. Participants perceived the Southwest School District did not adequately prepare them for higher education. The participants perceived they were not as well positioned as others to compete in college due to the lack of academic and extra-curricular opportunities in the district. Through their everyday life and upbringing, participants utilized and built capital. In terms of financial capital, most recognized and discussed how their families could provide for their basic needs but they had to earn their own money to pay for luxuries beyond basic necessities. However, if financial capital was limited, natural capital was abundant and most participants commented on how they used the natural environment to learn, grow, and play. Participants also reported spending most of their time in unstructured play and unorganized activities, often playing with others in their neighborhoods. These participants illustrated how their parents adopted a “natural growth” style of parenting, allowing the participants (as children) to play freely and unsupervised (Lareau, 2003). The lack of academic and extra-curricular opportunities and style of parenting used by working class parents helped sustain inequality. The skills, resources, and social networks participants accumulated while adequate within Southwest County created a perception of inadequacy when participants measured themselves

against peers who had access to more opportunities. The perception of inadequacy negatively influenced education and career decisions.

Not only did participants feel ill-prepared for the educational and career decisions they made, they also expressed concern about the continued decline in the number and types of employment opportunities. Aside from natural resource extraction, public service sector employment constituted the largest sector of employment opportunities in the county. The lack of employment opportunities in Southwest County creates a disincentive to stay in the county as suggested by a former Southwest County Commissioner who during his tenure observed an out migration of young people.<sup>12</sup> Individuals who decide to stay in Southwest County have a choice of less employment opportunities and lower wages or making a daily commute outside the county for more employment choices and higher wages.

### **Life Lessons That Empowered Participants**

Individuals make choices about their future and the environment in which they live influences those choices. Family, school, and community have a significant amount of influence shaping pathways and choices for the future especially educational aspirations and careers. For instance, structural conditions and constraints influence parenting decisions. Schools in working class areas are often ill-equipped to guide young people and the community can be isolating and create barriers. Many participants in this study found a path to post-secondary education and a career because they never gave up and when barriers were encountered, they found a way to redefine success.

Even though an individual's habitus weighs heavily on education and occupational aspirations and outcomes, the individuals in my study, who were raised in a

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<sup>12</sup> Citation redacted to protect the identity of participants.

working class family and community found a way to succeed in their own way.

Individuals who grew up working class have many sources of social and cultural capital they can draw from when facing everyday challenges. The participants in my study told stories that showed they have a deep reservoir of imagination, grit, strong family bonds and most importantly determination.

**Imaginative and Unstructured Play.** Annette Lareau (2003) describes “concerted cultivation” as the process by which middle class parents manage the development of their children through organized activities and experiences. She explains middle- and upper-class youth lead busy childhoods by way of their managed development. On the other hand, working class and the working poor socialize their children through “natural growth” where children create their own activities to occupy the significant amount of unstructured time. The participants in my study were not burdened with a busy structured childhood. Most participants described the experience of a “natural growth” style of parenting which provided the opportunity to discover their own way to fill unstructured time. Through their everyday life and upbringing, participants utilized and developed capital. Natural capital was abundant and most participants commented on how they used the natural environment to learn, grow, and play.

All but one participant described spending the majority of their unstructured free time with imaginative play by themselves or with a small group of friends. The streams, woods, and wildlife around the house played an important role in occupying their free time. One participant recalled spending his summers outside playing in streams, riding bikes, or in a game of capture the fort. Charles said, “you were just outside all day, all the time, and the only time you came home” was when it was supper time. Like other study

participants, Valerie's parents encouraged her to play using her creativity and the natural playground that existed just steps away from her home.

Participants illustrated how their parents adopted a "natural growth" style of parenting, allowing the participants (as children) to play freely and unsupervised. The way participants played as children provided most participants with the freedom of creativity and independence. The "natural growth" method of parenting also provided most participants with a different perspective in which to solve problems later in life.

**Building Grit and Family Bonds.** Many participants did not perceive themselves as poor but their parents did not have many financial resources beyond basic living needs. Individuals who grew up working class described the positive lessons learned from their economic struggles. For example, some participants talked about how they used natural capital (in the sport of hunting) as a form of economic relief and strengthened family bonds. In Southwest County, participating in the sport of hunting is one way in which families supplement their household income and pass on cultural capital to one another. In the case of hunting, families take advantage of the abundant natural capital in Southwest County. Participants like Charles and Bonnie talked about passing on skills and knowledge of hunting to their children, which not only provided income and food for the family but also the opportunity for family and friends to connect on a personal level and enjoy the outdoors.

The majority of participants identified the strength, resilience, and sense of personal accomplishment in overcoming financial struggles learned in their childhood as ways of behaving in their adulthood. Presently, most of the participants talked about financial struggle due to college debt or just making ends meet financially in the

workforce. For instance, Robert had to cope with limited financial resources while he was training for a new career. He credits his parents with setting an example that “struggling isn't necessarily always a bad thing” because it helps with developing skills to manage or overcome the roadblocks in life. Most participants at some point in their life reported they relied on friends and family for financial and emotional support.

Not only was the sport of hunting used to pass on values, traditions and ways of being from one generation to the next, hunting served as a financial relief as many participants reported their families saved money by eating the wild game. To relieve costs of food, families shared and traded the harvested wild game within their social networks. Owning guns and hunting are important to residents of Southwest County and provide supplemental income to many families. The strength, resilience, and values gained by some participants also provided determination and ways to deal with education and career setbacks.

**Determination and Redefining Success.** Although the majority of participants had the perception that they were not as well positioned as others to compete in college, all exceeded the educational attainment of the general population in Southwest County. Every participant pursued some form of post-secondary education even if not all completed a degree. Some participants matriculated to a degree-granting program immediately after high school and finished, some did not finish, and others experienced a gap between starting post-secondary education and degree completion.

One participant credited her work ethic and determination as the means to persevere through college and onward to an advanced professional degree. In comparing the high school experiences of her friends and peers, Mary perceived their high school

experiences were superior to her own and provided them with an advantage. Even though Mary carried doubts about her ability to compete she graduated from a state university and went on to a prestigious university where she said, “I ended up graduating in the top of my class there and then I’m like, okay so I was really just this smart all along, but I didn’t know.” Like Mary, several participants noted feeling less prepared than college classmates. However, the majority of the participants eventually overcame their perceived lack of advantages to complete a post-secondary degree.

Ryan went to college for a couple of years and worked in a small industrial plant in the summer “just to earn some extra money.” Ryan said, “I was not doing well in college so I decided to take some time off.” He started to work full-time at the plant and Ryan said, “one thing led to another...and I never went back to college because I had a good job that allowed me to work my mind and body.” Ryan initially believed college was the pathway to success but later found success in a full-time plant position. Most participants believed attending college was the key to success after high school. Some participants like Mary, completed college while others like Ryan found success elsewhere. All the participants have some post-secondary education experience and are more educated than the general population in Southwest County.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study aimed to explore and better understand how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices therefore, I explored these elements through in-depth face-to-face interviews. The advantages of this study were the ability to collect a large amount of information about the participant’s experiences and its meaning to the individual. The disadvantages were the possibility that

some participants were not fully open about their experiences and the inability to collect perspectives from other sources. Including the perspective of the parents and siblings, school administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, or community/business leaders, although likely informative, was beyond the scope of this research. However, including additional sources of information is a logical follow-up study to this research. Future research should include different sources of data to provide a well-rounded representation of all the components of the community. It is important to gain data from other key sources mentioned above. It would also be informative to include the perspective of a similar cohort of individuals who shared the same event of growing up working class but instead of remaining in Southwest County left the community.

Robert Merton's (1968) well cited theory of adaptation to strain has been used to study the ways juveniles respond to their family's poor economic position. The theory suggests that in the US, economic success is a goal all individuals are socialized toward. However, not all young people have equal means to achieving that goal. Thus, Merton suggests, individuals from poor backgrounds may respond to the feelings of economic strain in one of five ways (conform, innovate, ritual, retreat, and rebel). Almost all of my participants were "conformers". That is they accepted the goal of economic achievement but lacked access to the means to obtain the goal. Yet, they did not steal, cheat, reject, turn to drugs to defy the goals. Instead, they worked hard to achieve academic and career success even if it meant working harder and longer than others who had easier access to resources.

In a study of young working class men in the 1970's, British sociologist, Paul Willis (1981) found some working class youth conformed and others rejected the

“achievement ideology” of the larger society. There is a vein of individuals who grew up working class that was not represented in my study. To equate my study to that of British sociologist, Paul Willis (1981), my participants were similar to his description of the “ear ‘oles,” who, in Willis’ study respected teachers, followed school rules, and were committed to their education. On the other hand, Willis’ “lads” did not view academic work positively; in fact, they viewed manual work as superior to mental work, and displayed strong racist and sexist attitudes. The “lads” rejected the “achievement ideology” because they believed they were destined to a life of low wage industrial jobs. The grittier type of working class person exists in Southwest County. I know individuals from Southwest County who would fit Willis’ “lads” category but I could not convince them to participate in my research.

### **Implications**

This research contributes to social class reproduction literature by showing that in the new global economy, in a working class, rural, white area that has been devastated by deindustrialization parents have difficulty helping their children navigate educational and career systems, and schools are ill-equipped to prepare students for educational and career paths that differ from those in an industrial era. Moreover, there is little synergy between parents and schools in guiding young people in educational and career decision-making processes.

This research furthers an understanding of how working class youth make education and career decisions. The research illuminates how family, school, and community—the contexts in which people live—contributes to their decision making. Understanding how youth make choices about their futures can help youth and those

serving youth make more informed decisions about school-to-work transitions. In the following paragraphs, I suggest that changing the focus and number of guidance counselors in school districts and providing parents an avenue to become more involved in their child's education can help young working class people in their decision making.

### **Support to Mandate Focus and Number of Guidance Counselors**

Participants believed the school should provide earlier and more contact with guidance counselors to improve the career and educational development of children in the district. With the support of the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association, a bill was introduced during the 2013-2014 Pennsylvania legislative session to help increase the number of school counselors in school districts (Pennsylvania School Counselors Association, February 3, 2014). Public schools in Pennsylvania currently do not have a mandated student-to-counselor ratio.<sup>13</sup> Although the Pennsylvania General Assembly did not pass this bill, it is an indication for a legislative remedy to address understaffing of guidance counselors in school districts across Pennsylvania.

My research suggests more guidance counselors are needed in the Southwest School District. More guidance counselors, or a re-focusing of their priorities on providing academic and career guidance, are needed within the schools. Counselors have many responsibilities to include academic and career counseling; course selection and scheduling; and counseling and resources for youth facing family or academic problems, mental health, or drug and alcohol issues. School districts do not have to wait for legislation mandating a minimum standard for student-to-counselor staffing.

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<sup>13</sup> HB 1844, would have mandated counselor-to-student ratios (K-8: 375 students per 1 counselor, 9-12: 325 students per 1 counselor).

The issue of adequate guidance counseling is not only relevant to Southwest County but for many school districts in Pennsylvania. Michael Race, speaking on behalf of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, addressed the issue of Pennsylvania students completing college. Michael Race said, “We have a lot of people who are not completing college” (Crawford, 2010). Some of the causes cited include: the cost of higher education; life events which take individuals out of college; adjusting to the post-secondary environment; and have not yet decided on a major and just languished without direction in college. The largest problem facing many Pennsylvania high school graduates is that they are leaving high school “without the academic skills they need to succeed in college” (Crawford, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, “less than two-thirds of students who enroll in a four-year college in Pennsylvania will earn a bachelor’s degree within six years... students pursuing an associate degree, only one in three will graduate within three years” (Crawford, 2010).

The type of service provided by guidance counselors in school districts is not helping working class youth. Where the middle and upper class youth have their parents, mentors, and other resources to map their education and career pathways, the working class and poor have few resources. Working class and poor parents believe the school, specifically the guidance counselor, should map their child’s education and career aspirations (Lareau & Conley, 2008, p. 109). The lack of guidance and information about jobs or schools is failing to address the deeper issue of who the child is and who the child wants to become. Addressing aspirations with children earlier in life could better prepare them for a more successful transition to an appropriate post-secondary and/or career opportunities (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 104).

## **Support to Encourage Parental Involvement in Education**

My research supports the need for the Southwest School District to improve their efforts to encourage parental involvement in career and educational decisions. The district also needs to provide resources and materials to parents to help improve academic performance. Although the Southwest School District has a low income and at-risk parental involvement program<sup>14</sup> there is no state law requiring school districts to have a parental involvement program or policy for every child regardless of income (Burns, 2014).

The Southwest School District's parental outreach efforts did not meet the needs of working class families in this study. Participants did not believe the Southwest School District did enough to empower them or their parents in navigating educational and career decisions. Parents play one of the most critical roles in shaping the life chances of their children. Parental social, cultural, and human capital will influence how the parent guides their child concerning career and educational paths. Not all families are created equally, and therefore parents do not possess the same social, cultural, human, or financial capital. As demonstrated in this and in other research, working-class and poor parents believe that the school, specifically the guidance counselor, should map their child's education and career aspirations. Yet schools, counselors, and parents can work together. Schools can provide parents with the resources they need to help their children make academic and career decisions.

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<sup>14</sup> Mandated by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This U.S. Department of Education program provides school districts with funding to meet the needs of at-risk and low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

## **Recommendations**

The following section presents two practical recommendations that reflect how the school district and the community can implement positive change in the best interest of working class families.

### **Improving Service to Working Class Families**

The district must help students and parents understand the district's role and collaborate with them in seeking resources for developing career or educational aspirations. Specifically, the school district needs to assist parents to increase parental awareness of their role in their child's education. The district must reinforce the message of the positive impact of frequent parent-child discussions about career and educational planning.

The school district should develop a series of workshops and documents to raise awareness about education and career goals. Workshops will raise awareness and assist parents and youth discovering career and educational resources. A separate workshop is recommended for school administrators and teachers responsible for curriculum development. The workshop for school administrators and teachers is needed to assist in developing curriculum to include career guidance and information. Teachers and guidance counselors should assist youth in understanding how social class affects aspirations and opportunities and provide access to resources necessary to reach their educational and career goals.

The Southwest School District should be concerned with program improvement and accountability. This could be accomplished through establishing a longitudinal study of cohorts or a simpler program evaluation based on the experiences of students after they

leave the school district. The school district currently does not have an evaluative method in place to assess the outcome of the district's effectiveness. The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) only requires the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) which measures attendance or graduation rate, academic performance, and test participation. The purpose of AYP is to hold districts accountable for preparing students for the future with the necessary reading and math skills (Pennsylvania Department of Education, February 3, 2014). The Southwest School District nor current federal or state laws require an examination of the district's educational or guidance counseling programs after the student graduates.

### **Attracting and Sustaining a Diverse Economic Base**

Rural communities such as Southwest County need to diversify their economic base to insulate against the uncertainties of the global economic environment. Companies have devised numerous strategies to maximize their profits at the expense of the individual and rural communities. According to Flora and Flora (2008):

Low-wage labor and natural resources, the traditional strengths of rural economies, today offer little advantage, unless the natural resources are sustained and enhanced to offer amenities...The flight of manufacturing jobs to developing nations and the importation of low-wage workers are phenomena that demonstrate the rural labor has been drawn into competition with labor in other countries.

Leaders at all levels, within Southwest County and regionally, need to work together to attract and sustain a diverse economic base. One candidate for the office of Southwest County Commissioners recognized Southwest County was not growing economically like the surrounding counties. This candidate believed Southwest County should create a

comprehensive county level plan to reinvigorate economic development. The candidate mentioned above is correct because the old model of cannibalistic competition, when one municipality throws taxpayer money at companies to lure them away from a neighboring municipality, was never a sustainable economic development strategy.

### **Conclusions**

This research contributes to the work of social class reproduction literature by showing that in the new global economy a working class, rural, white area that has been devastated by deindustrialization, parents have difficulty helping their children navigate educational and career systems, and schools that are modeled on an industrial era are ill equipped to prepare students for a new economy. Moreover, parents and schools do not work together to guide young people in educational and career decision-making processes. In this study, for many of the participants, social class reproduction matters because of economic, social, and cultural capital transmitted from one generation to the next influences how individuals view the world and how they interact with social institutions and economic markets.

Macro forces do indeed shape individual lives and “in varying degrees reproduce social relations to power and inequality” (McLeod & Yates, 2006, p. 89). Individuals can be constrained and see no obtainable opportunities. Others are aware they face constraints but they persevere overcome their perceived barriers. Some do not believe they are constrained and are content with their own definition of success. I demonstrated in my study that interactions between the individual and social institutions and economic markets are key to understanding how free willed individuals resist or succumb to the structures in which they live.

This study described individuals who did not let social institutions and economic markets such as inadequate information and preparation by the school district or pressure to carry on family traditions to stand in the way of their aspirations. Some in this study could be described as individuals who attempted to break free of perceived barriers or constraints but could not achieve their definition of success due to social institutions and economic forces. Unfortunately, those who escaped the social and economic forces were the exception. Many participants described situations where they relied on the idea that going to college would result in a career that would meet their financial security needs but discovered the outcome did not match their aspirations and expectations.

This research is applicable to social class reproduction specifically working class reproduction and rural studies. This study provided insight into the perceptions of individuals that grew up working class in Southwest County, Pennsylvania. This dissertation explored how family, school, and community influence post-secondary educational and career choices of individuals who grew up in a working class family. This study can help future generations of working class youth and those working with them to recognize the influences that help shape post-secondary and career choices. Understanding how youth make choices about their futures can help youth and those serving youth make informed decisions about school-to-work transitions.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter/Email



Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Date

Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Brian Farester and I am currently involved in a research project to better understand how individuals from [Southwest] County perceive and reach their future education and career goals. This research is being conducted in conjunction with my pursuit of a doctoral degree through Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

I would greatly appreciate your input in this study. If you are willing to be interviewed for this study, I will come to your location at a time convenient to you. The interview will take approximately one hour and all findings will be kept strictly confidential.

Please email ([b.j.farester@iup.edu](mailto:b.j.farester@iup.edu)) or call me at 814-419-1184 if you have concerns that I may address. I will contact you to arrange an appointment at your convenience if you are willing to participate. Your participation in this study is voluntary. There is no cost to participate and participants are not compensated for participation. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your valuable input on this research project.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Farester

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent Form



# Indiana University of Pennsylvania

### Informed Consent Form

Thank you for your consideration of participation in this research study. The following information is provided to help you understand the nature of the study in an effort to assist you in deciding whether to participate or not.

The research study is part of my doctoral requirements for Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). The purpose of this study is to understand how individuals from [Southwest] County perceive and reach their future education and career goals.

The method of collecting data used is a semi-structured interview. The interview should only take approximately 60 minutes during which I will ask a series of questions (provided in advance). Unless requested otherwise, the interview will be recorded and transcribed. The names of research subjects will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. Your information will be held in strict confidence.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. There are no consequences for non-participation. There is no cost to participate and participants are not compensated for participation. Your identity and all identifying details about you will be kept confidential. You may refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. Even if you chose to participate you may withdraw at any time by notifying the principal researcher or advisor identified below. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. The information obtained in this research project may be published or presented at conferences but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

There are no known risks associated with this interview.

This study is being conducted as a research project for the completion of the requirements of a doctoral program. All work is supervised by Dr. Melissa L. Swauger, IUP Department of Sociology. You may contact her with questions or concerns at 724-357-0158 or [mswauger@iup.edu](mailto:mswauger@iup.edu).

Principal Researcher:

Brian J. Farester,

Doctoral Candidate, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

E-Mail: [b.j.farester@iup.edu](mailto:b.j.farester@iup.edu)

Phone: 814-419-1184

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (PHONE: 724-357-7730).

If you are willing to participate in this research project, please sign the voluntary consent form below. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have concerning participating in this worthwhile study.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Farester

Doctoral Candidate

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:**

I have read and understand the information on the above Informed Consent Form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this research study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number where you can be reached \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Best days and times to reach you \_\_\_\_\_

***(Do not write below this line, for Primary Researcher's use only)***

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, and have answered any questions that have been raised.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Primary Researcher's Signature                      Date

## APPENDIX C

### Recruitment Poster



# Indiana University of Pennsylvania

## **Tell your story about growing up in [Southwest] County**

### Why tell your story?

You can make an important contribution to academic research. The purpose of this study is to understand how individuals from [Southwest] County perceive and reach their future education and career goals. This research study is part of my doctoral requirements for Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP).

### Do you meet the following?

- Must be between 25 to 35 years of age
- Raised by at least one parent or guardian without a college education
- Identify [Southwest] County as the place where you grew up
- Educated in the [Southwest] School District
- [Southwest] County is your current primary residence

### What would you have to do?

Participate in a confidential interview. The interview should only take approximately 60 minutes during which I will ask a series of questions (provided in advance). I will meet with you at a convenient time and location.

### Your story is confidential.

The names of participants will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

### How to contact me.

Principal Researcher:  
Brian J. Farester,  
Doctoral Candidate, Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
E-Mail: [b.j.farester@iup.edu](mailto:b.j.farester@iup.edu)  
Phone: 814-419-1184

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have concerning participation in this worthwhile study.

### **Help me tell the story about growing up in [Southwest] County.**

*This study is being conducted as a research project for the completion of the requirements of a doctoral program. All work is supervised by Dr. Melissa L. Swauger, IUP Department of Sociology. You may contact her with questions or concerns at 724-357-0158 or [mswauger@iup.edu](mailto:mswauger@iup.edu).*

*This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.*

APPENDIX D

Research Questions and Interview Questions

	<b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>			
	1. How do individuals who attended the Southwest School District perceive the district's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?	2. How do individuals perceive their family's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?	3. How do individuals perceive the Southwest County community's influence on their post-secondary educational and career choices?	
<b>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</b>				<b>CONCEPTS</b>
<i>Individual</i>				
Tell me a little bit about yourself. Probes: Where do you live? Does anyone live with you? Are you married? Do you have a significant other? Tell me a little bit about your significant other. Do you have children? What are their ages?				<b>Background information</b>
Tell me about your current and past jobs. Probes: Where do you work? What is your job title? What do you actually do in that job? (What are some of your main duties?) Describe the place you work. (For example, factory or office) What does the company make or do? How have your employers treated you?			X	<b>Habitus Agency Resistance Cultural Capital Social Capital</b>
<i>Family</i>				
Tell me about your parents. Tell me about your siblings. Probes: What are their ages? Where do they live? Where do they work? What was the job called? What did they actually do in that job? (What are some of her main duties?) Describe the place that they worked. (For example, factory or office) What did the company make or do? How far in school did they go? While there is little agreement on what social class is, I am interested in knowing how you perceive your family's social status as it compares to other families around you. What can you tell me about that?		X		<b>Class Social Capital Family</b>
Describe a typical summer growing up.		X	X	<b>Habitus Family</b>

				Agency Cultural Capital Social Capital Community
<i>Community/Neighborhood</i>				
How would you describe your neighborhood? What was your neighborhood like growing up?			X	Habitus Cultural Capital Social Capital Family Boundaries Community
Where there different racial and ethnic groups in your community?			X	Habitus Social Capital Cultural Capital Boundaries Community
<i>School</i>				
What was school like for you? What was your perception of how other students in your class saw you? (i.e. popular, athletic, a good student, trouble-maker) How did this make you feel?	X			Class Habitus Social Capital School Boundaries Resistance
Which track did you enroll in at school? How did you decide to take this track?	X			Family School
Describe any extra-curricular school activities you participated in during school. (i.e. Sports, band, student council) Describe any outside school activities you participated in during school. (Scouting, Boys' or Girls' club, 4-H)	X	X	X	School Habitus Social Capital Boundaries Resistance Agency
Describe a typical school day and weekend.		X	X	Habitus Cultural Capital Social Capital Family Boundaries Resistance Community
How important were good grades to you?	X	X	X	Habitus School Human Capital Resistance
Were teachers fair to you and students like you?	X			School Boundaries
Describe your parents' involvement in your schooling. Probes: How often did you discuss selecting courses or programs at school? How often did you discuss the things you studied in class? How often did you talk about school activities or events of particular interest to you?		X		Habitus Family School Agency
Did anyone help you decide what to do after leaving high school? What were your educational plans after high school? Probe: Were there obstacles? Did teachers or guidance counselors discuss career planning? If so, how often? How did they approach the topic? Did the teacher or counselor do enough or too much to "map"	X			Habitus Family School Agency Boundaries Resistance Aspirations Cultural Capital Social Capital Community

<p>your career or education?          Since you graduated, has the school ever contacted you to evaluate their career planning efforts?          If you did not continue your education right after high school, what was the main reason?          If you did go on to school, what type of school did you attend?          What field or major did you study or train in?          How did you find information about colleges or schools?          How did you find information about financial aid?          What were the most important factors in choosing a school you attended?</p>				
<p>What role (if any) do the county's businesses and community organizations play in the education process?</p>			X	Community Class
<i>Aspirations</i>				
<p>What did you want to do when you grew up?          Probes:          Do you do that now?          Have you done that in the past?          Were your parents supportive of you?          How much education did you think you needed to get?          Did you feel that you had enough skills at the end of high school for the job?          Did you feel in control of your future?          Did you feel you had the resources to achieve your goals?</p>		X		Habitus Family Cultural Capital Social Capital Agency Aspirations School
<p>Tell me about any role models you looked up to growing up.          Probe:          Why was this person your role model?</p>	X	X	X	Habitus Social Capital Agency Aspirations
<p>What are your current work and educational goals?          Do you see any obstacles that would keep you from reaching your current work and educational goals?</p>	X	X	X	Habitus Family School Cultural Capital Social Capital Community
<i>Community/Neighborhood</i>				
<p>Looking back at your community, what would you say about your upbringing there?          How did these experiences contribute to achieving your aspirations?</p>	X	X	X	Habitus Agency Boundaries Resistance Cultural Capital Social Capital Community
<p>Do you think life is different for someone growing up in your community today than when you grew up there? Why?</p>			X	Class Community

What changes would you like to see take place in Southwest County? Why?			X	<b>Habitus</b> <b>Family</b> <b>Agency</b> <b>School</b> <b>Cultural Capital</b> <b>Social Capital</b> <b>Community</b>
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