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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

TOWARD AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE POOR:
CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE IN THE MARGINS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

BY
ROBYN DENT DRAPER-PRAETZ

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
JANUARY, 1995
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As much I would like to claim sole responsibility for this dissertation, I cannot. No work of science or of art stands alone. Always it is co-constructed by myriad influences and feedback loops, conversations and illuminations which come over time and from many sources. This dissertation is like that.

In that spirit, I thank the many clients and patients, colleagues and co-workers with whom I have worked in a variety of endeavors and whose insight into human resilience I attempt to address in the following pages. Although it is truly impossible to name all of the people who have helped and influenced my thinking, I want to and will name a few.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Since 1990, the number of persons living below the poverty level has increased by 4.2 million, the highest rate in the nearly 30 years since the Johnson administration instituted the "War on Poverty" (Pear, 1992). The proportion of people living below the 1991 poverty line of $13,400 for a family of four, has increased in the last two years from 12.8% of the population to 14.2%. Nearly, 10% of U.S. citizens are eligible to receive food stamps.

Associated with the increase in poverty are the social problems of suicide, mental illness, family violence, sexual abuse, substance abuse, crime, school drop outs, teenage pregnancy, and school and youth violence (Carlson, 1992). Some researchers and clinicians who study poor people, find that the condition of poverty often socializes people to antisocial behaviors such as aggression, apathy, rebellion, negative world views, and hopelessness (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Harrington, 1962, 1984; Man, 1987; Minuchin, Montalvo, Guernez, Rosman, & Schumer, 1967). Others have explained the victim system (Pinderhughes, 1982), the societal projection process (Bowen, 1978), and the cultural double-bind (Draper-Praetz, 1989) to explain the operating and
functional dynamics of social oppression and environmental stress.

Occasionally, there are feature articles in the Sunday papers or on the late night news that tell the real stories of life in a homeless person’s cardboard shack (Fisher, 1991); or the struggle of a young, single mother to raise her children on AFDC, go to school, and get off welfare (Hoover, 1992). From these features, the non-poor are able to learn a bit about the strengths, adaptability, and resilience of human beings living in the worst of circumstances.

Nevertheless, one of the major neglected areas of psychological and counseling research is that of low socioeconomic status and how it differentially influences adaptation, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, values, and coping strategies (Gelso & Fassinger, 1992; Hill & Corbett, 1993; Lorion & Felner, 1986).

Poor people are isolated and economically marginal to mainstream culture and values. They are often viewed by gatekeepers of the mainstream as inadequate, lazy, and unwilling to better themselves (Harrington, 1962, 1984; Wilson, 1987). Lewis (1959) in his analysis of the "culture of poverty" suggested that poor people form a maladaptive cultural character that is resistant to change, and which includes distrust, hostility, family disorganization, criminality, poor ego formation, sex-role ambiguity, and
fatalistic thinking.

Lewis'(1959) conclusions based on his field work in Mexico, as well as conclusions reached by similar studies in U.S. urban ghettos conducted in the 1950's and 1960's (cited in Staples & Mirande, 1980; cited in Sue, Ito, & Bradshaw, 1982) led to three major problems in social science research and practice until the past decade: (a) an often negative view of both Mexican-Americans and African-Americans; (b) a failure to distinguish cultural traits based on ethnic group membership from those based on socioeconomic status; and (c) a negative characterization of poor people (Eames & Goode, 1977; Jones & Korchin, 1982; Staples & Mirande, 1980; Wilson, 1987).

The growing body of literature on ethnic minorities and multiculturalism has taken valuable strides in reversing these views of non-European-Americans and their contributions and world views (Claiborn, 1991; Staples & Mirande, 1980). However, the needed work on the strengths and contributions of poor people has yet to begin. The reality of poor people cannot be denied nor can the fact that within the reality of poverty there exists a history, a language, and a culture (Freire, 1970). In his book, Pedagogy of the oppressed, Freire (1970) suggested that economically marginalized people represent a segmented culture which is not independent of the society at the center but rather is dependent on it for its economy, for
evaluation, and for access. This dependence and the inability to act autonomously represents a form of violence that has resulted in "a culture of silence" (Freire, 1970).

The theme of silence was also described by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), in which the metaphor of silence appeared repeatedly in their book, *Women's ways of knowing*. Women kept speaking of "being silenced" and "not being heard" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 18). The authors found several frameworks for women's meaning-making experience and each was connected to profoundly different experiences of voice. In the least developed, lowest socioeconomic status, or most oppressed experience, the voice was silent. Voice and intellect were found to be related to such a degree, that the role of dialogue became a matter of critical importance in working with people who had been marginalized (Belenky et al., 1986; Freire, 1970, 1972).

**Social Class**

Socioeconomic status profoundly affects peoples' views of the world (Harrington, 1962, 1984; Kohn, 1972; Marx, 1885/1965). Socioeconomic status or social class is best defined by the relationship of an economic group in society to the means of production. The best four measures of class are occupation, income, and education (Gilbert & Kahl, 1987) and residence (Harrington, 1984; Loveland, 1991; Wilson, 1987).
Additionally, a person’s cultural or economic group influences the strategies and values he or she uses to bring meaning to the work of achieving economic survival. The values which are learned in the context of occupational experience, are also the ones people impart to their children (Goode, 1964; Kohn, 1972; Nye & Berardo, 1973; Reiss & Lee, 1988).

**Adaptation and Adjustment**

Adaptation is the process by which a people manage to deal with the contingencies of daily living. In an ecological sense, adaptation refers to the shifting balance between the needs of a population and the potential of its environment to meet those needs. The behavioral characteristics that foster the organism’s ability to survive within its environmental conditions are also part of the process of adaptation (Goldschmidt, 1974; Haviland, 1981).

In modern societies, where the technologies and often the access to resources are highly regulated and often privately owned, poverty can result because some people are excluded from the modal life of the community (Basham, 1978; Freire, 1972; Harrington, 1984). However, values, attitudes, and strategies are not inhibited. The mental and emotional life of marginalized persons are created and persist for the contingencies and necessities of life in the margin just as they do for those living in the center as
Freire (1972) suggests.

De Vos (1982) distinguished between adaptation and adjustment. He suggested that adjustment refers to those intra-psychical processes which relate not to social and ecological forces but to the structural and personality characteristics of an individual. Adjustment mechanisms assume the "... ideal progression of psychosocial maturation that is a biological potential for all human beings" (p. 76). The plethora of published evidence regarding psychological adjustment suggests that the endemic stress and deprivation occasioned by long term poverty often results in outcomes described by Lewis' (1959) "culture of poverty". The weight of the literature on the effects of poverty on personal development is highly suggestive of a relationship between endemic stressed created by low income and an increase in the incidence of mental disorder (King, 1978; Lorion & Felner, 1986; Mollica & Milic, 1986). There is evidence for the positive correlation of social class and results on measures of intelligence and academic success (Ceci, 1990). Ceci (1990) lists several alternative explanations for this fact including deferential treatment on the part of school officials, higher motivation to succeed in academic settings on the part of students from more affluent backgrounds, and a school process which influences intellectual structures in such a way as to differentially influence performance based on perceived
outcomes. However, the differences in academic outcomes "... have little if anything to do with their [students'] underlying ability to detect, store, and/or retrieve information and relations in their environment" (Ceci, 1990, p. 73).

Ogbu (1988) states that members of different cultures and subcultures engage in intellectual processes such as remembering, categorizing, and abstracting but they do so differently. They operate on substantially different material within their respective environments. Lower scores on intelligence tests and in academic settings earned by persons in lower socioeconomic groups are a function of the environmental demands between groups in various settings (Ogbu, 1988). It is not that poor people have lower scores because of genetic traits, but rather that the context of poverty creates a different set of environmental conditions in which the chances for academic success are less favorable (Ceci, 1990; Ogbu, 1988).

More than ever, psychologists and counselors are seeing in therapy non-voluntary clients who have been mandated for therapy or family counseling or drug treatment by the criminal justice system, child protective services, or school personnel (Deveaux, 1992; Haley, 1992; Mascari, Danziger & Gross, 1992; Sandau-Beckler, 1992). However, economically marginal people often are unable to be helped by a system of mental health delivery which is mainstream
culture bound, tied to a pathology model, and often out of touch with the reality of life in the margins of society (Mason, J., 1994). Increased understanding of poor people is an imperative. Yet, there is a dearth of research on normalcy and psychological strengths among poor people (Gelso & Fassinger, 1992).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the dissertation was the discovery and description of the adaptive characteristics and strengths of poor people. Specifically the epistemology of the poor; reflected cognitive strategies such as values, beliefs, attitudes, coping strategies, and meaning making systems; were explored.

Additionally, the dissertation was designed to describe the context of economically marginalized persons from their own phenomenological perspective. Often an extraspective view of another's culture results in inadequate observation and interpretation (Belenky et al., 1986; Freire, 1970).

A third purpose of the dissertation was to provide a framework for therapeutic interaction and dialogue between helping professionals and poor people based on the examination of the epistemology elucidated through observation and conversation with the participants.

The assumptions which guided the investigation were:

1. Poor people have strengths and adaptive qualities which have not been well described in the psychological
2. The epistemology of poor people is adaptive to their economic reality and different from that of people in other social classes.

3. Observation of and dialogue with poor people can inform and enrich the field of counseling psychology.

**Definitions**

The epistemological terms used were proposed as variables which have properties of divergence and overlap. In general, beliefs, values, and attitudes are highly interrelated cognitive and valuative processes based on the internal sense of consistency and the social experience of the person holding them (Bem, 1970).

Meaning making was broadly used as the way in which people come to experience life as satisfying or worth living. Meaning seems to be tied up with a sense of the future (Belenky et al, 1986; Peseschkian, 1985).

Finally, problem solving and coping strategies were used to denote the behavioral components of cognition (D'Zurilla, 1988; Sternberg, 1985). Taken together, these cognitive functions were seen as aspects of epistemology (Mahoney, 1988).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter II of the dissertation is a discussion of epistemology. The chapter outlines two historical lines of epistemological thinking in psychology and five primary ways...
in which current psychological literature uses and links the term epistemology.

Chapter III is a discussion of poverty organized in three parts; (a) A discussion of the causes, parameters, and current proposals for solutions to poverty; (b) a review of the psychology journals to outline the knowledge base of the psychological dimensions of the effects of poverty and to present information on strengths of poor people; and (c) a description of poverty in central Contra Costa County, California where the research is being conducted.

Chapter IV is divided into two parts. First, it introduces the methodology employed in the investigation, a description of the participants, and an explanation of the data analysis method. Secondly, Phase I, the ethnographic portion of the study, is presented.

Chapter V presents the focus groups' discussions which magnified, deepened, and detailed aspects of the observations made in Phase I. Phase II followed from the findings in Phase I.

Chapter VI describes the individual opinions, beliefs, ideas, and commitments of the participants. It is both more personal and more specific in its content than Chapter V.

Chapter VII summarizes the findings and the conclusions of the study. It discusses the limitations of the study and it discusses implications for further research.
CHAPTER II

EPistemology: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

"Of course the brain is a machine and a computer - everything in classical neurology is correct. But our mental processes which constitute our being and our life, are not just abstract and mechanical, but personal as well - and as such, involve not just classifying and categorizing, but continual judging and feeling also (Sacks, 1985, p. 20).

Epistemological "... questions are concerned with the sources, nature, and validity of human knowledge and knowing..." (Lyddon, 1991, p. 588). The primary issues taken up by philosophers of knowledge have been the possibility of knowledge; the sources of knowledge; the properties of knowledge, (e.g., truth, justification and falsification); procedures for confirming and disconfirming knowledge; and the separation of knowledge from such non-knowledge things as lucky guesses, false claims, and distortions (O'Donohue & Smith, 1992). Until recently these were thought to be unscientific concerns and the purview of philosophy or at least the philosophy of science but not of scientific psychology (Lyddon, 1988; 1991; Rychlak, 1985).

In the history of the philosophy of psychology there have been two lines of epistemological development which
have been construed as mutually exclusive, and which have acted as a conundrum both for theory generation and methodological debates. The noumenal and the phenomenal; the real and the ideal; the mechanistic and mentalistic are different ways of stating the apparently irreconcilable approaches to epistemological understanding in western thought.

The mechanistic view has been widely associated with "pure science", logical positivism, determinism, empiricism, and behavioral traditions (Lyddon, 1988; Mahoney, 1988; McCauley, 1988). In this paradigm, knowledge is based on an extraspective, realistic, and mind-independent understanding of the world (Lyddon, 1988; Mahoney, 1988; McCauley, 1988; Smith, 1985). "Man [sic] looks out onto a world that has an independent existence" (Rychlak, 1985, p. 17). The empiricist approach has been the more dominant tradition until only recently (Lyddon, 1991; Rychlak, 1985). Researchers in psychology have elevated facts over meaning (Karlsson, 1990). The mechanistic theme equates scientific knowledge with the inductive method of questioning and hypothesis testing. It is viewed as a direct map of reality as it exists out there (Lyddon, 1991). The noumenal or received view of knowledge essentially holds that what exists, exists whether or not people think or conceive of it (Rychlak, 1985; Smith, 1985). The activity of knowing is that of correctly describing objective reality, independent
of the knower or observer (Smith, 1985).

The idealist view on the other hand is linked to rationalism and teleological traditions, gestalt theory, and a mind-dependent view of reality (Lyddon, 1991; Smith, 1985). In this tradition, there is no reality except that which the knower ascribes to the world. The knower and the process of knowing cannot be separated (Rychlak, 1985; Smith, 1985). There is no absolute truth which underlies our observations, there are only various points of view with which persons differentially experience or describe the phenomenon (Smith, 1985). The phenomenal stance views the perspective taking capacity of the individual as beyond the "black box" of its cognitive machinery and information processing components. Phenomenologists suggest a meaning making capacity (Lyddon, 1988). "Man [sic] looks out on a world of his own making. Knowledge is primarily an act of creation" (Rychlak, 1985, p. 17).

These two views have led to a dichotomous knowledge base in psychology, the so-called nature versus nurture controversy. The environmental, realist point of view holds that the world creates the person; the idealist, nature perspective says that the person creates the world (Lyddon, 1988). The two views have been referred to as exogenic and endogenic by Gergen (1985) who traces the former to the philosophical, logical empiricist tradition of Locke, Hume, and Mills and "...assumes that knowledge copies the contours
of the world" (Gergen, 1985 cited in Lyddon, 1988, p. 139).

The endogenic view is associated with the philosophies of Kant, Nietzsche, and Spinoza and assumes a human tendency to perceptually re-organize stimuli using "...processes endemic to the organism" (Lyddon, 1988). However, Lyddon (1988) cautions that it would be false to think simply because of shared language (e.g., organismic processes), that cognitive psychology is therefore linked to the phenomenal perspective. Cognitive science adheres by and large to the positivist tradition.

Information-processing approaches to cognition and knowing are emerging (Lyddon, 1988). Constructivist thought, the synthesis of the two, is also being advanced from various sources, including philosophy of science, scientific psychology, and cognitive science. Both of these newer epistemological approaches have links to the classic lines of divergence in western thought and to each other. Additionally, three other emergent epistemologies which are presented in the psychology literature are the symbolic systemic model (van Gigch, 1990); the genetic developmental model of Piaget (Vuyk, 1981); and the relational therapeutic models (Gelcer & Schwartzbein, 1989; Royce & Powell, 1983 cited in Lyddon, 1991).

**Information-Processing**

Information processing theory relies on several key concepts including, schemata (Lyddon, 1991), mapping,
selecting, and mental representation (Sternberg, 1985). Information process is also a paradigm of inflow of information through the sensory systems and the meaningful transformation and patterning of the input in order to make appropriate motoric responses (Lyddon, 1988). It is essentially a linear in/out model with intermediate connective functions, embedded in neuroanatomy which act like switchboards, schemata, executive programs, storage and retrieval mechanisms. The information processing epistemology is an analogue or computer model of the brain (Lyddon, 1988). The brain in this model is an impassive recipient of the stimuli from the environment (Lyddon, 1988). It is a mechanistic philosophy, a "hardware" model. However there is no agreed structural mechanism in the brain which carries out these tasks (Ceci, 1990).

The most developed theory of information processing is as a component of Sternberg's (1985) Triarchic theory. Triarchic theory proposes the interaction of information processing mechanisms, experience, and context (Ceci, 1990). It is therefore a constructivist model. Sternberg (1985) states that information processing is the mechanism by which intelligent behavior is performed. An information process acts on internal representations of objects or symbols transforming them from sensory to conceptual and from conceptual to motor outputs. Components are classified as one of three types of functions; (a) sensory input functions
involved in knowledge acquisition; (b) executive functions such as planning and monitoring; and (c) performance or output motor functions involved in task execution (Sternberg, 1985).

Karlsson (1990) suggests that psychology has advanced only to the degree that it includes a central processing role within the physicalist, reductionistic model. Encoding by any other name, he suggests, is still a basically mechanistic task.

The question which continues to arise is whether epistemology, a philosophical endeavor, can bear up under the rigors of scientific scrutiny without losing its essence - the formulation of general principles of belief and domains of knowledge (McCauley, 1988). Specifically McCauley (1988) fears the loss of certain normative traditions and especially folk psychology if the tasks of epistemology are given to cognitive neuroscience.

**Constructed Knowledge**

Seeking to integrate into one science of biology, cognition, and epistemology Berman (1989), in his review of Maturan and Varela (1987), says that they have introduced a concept of perception which bridges the centuries old conflict between the realist and the idealist by suggesting it is a "... reciprocal and interacting phenomenon, a 'dance of congruity'... between a living entity and its environment" (p. 277). "Knowledge arises not from the self
alone or the world alone but from the interaction between them ... reality is simultaneously discovered and constructed" (Jones, 1992, p. 224). The thrust of the constructivist view is that "... we participate in the construction of the reality we experience and in a methodological sense both theory and empirical tasks are embedded in the province of the other. "Theory is observationally inspired ... observations are theory-laden" (Harman, 1991, p. 191). In the constructed knowledge view of things, humans create their personal realities and these representational models "... become the experiential frameworks from which the individual orders and assigns meaning to new experience" (Lyddon, 1988, p. 146). Constructed knowledge differs from noumenal and phenomenal explanations in that it uses objects in the external world for service in projects which originate internally (Jones, 1991).

Returning to Sternberg’s (1985) Triarchic theory of intelligence, which is a constructivist model, mental activity is viewed as involving three partially overlapping, hierarchically related activities, adaptation, selection, and shaping. Adaptation is viewed as the individual’s attempt at achieving a good fit with the environment; selection a process of choosing among alternatives when adaptive processes fail; and shaping an exercise in recreating the environment when alternate selections are
inadequate (Sternberg, 1985).

The constructivist model suggests that "... cognitive structures form representational models ... the individual's only possible means of establishing a relationship with the outside world ... the human knowing system cannot discriminate between external events and their internal representation ... models of reality represent not only the perceived world but also any possible 'imagined' world ... (Guidano, 1988, p. 318).

Thus the constructivist model offers itself as a compromise and a synthesis of the age-old dilemma. It does not see itself as replacing or discarding as much as transforming and complementing the other paradigms (Shames, 1990).

A third way of integrating or handling the apparent irreconcilable difference between empiricism and phenomenalism is put forth by Piaget and discussed as genetic epistemology.

**Genetic Epistemology**

Although Piaget has been criticized for marginalizing philosophic endeavors outside those of scientific ones, he nevertheless is credited with generating a scientific, genetic epistemology closely related to developmental psychology (Vuyk, 1981). To discover the answer of the quintessential philosophical question "how is knowledge possible?", Piaget details three periods in epistemological
history. The first era was articulated by scientist-philosophers, who thought about the "how of knowledge" question in a scientific way, using scientific methods. The second era of epistemological development was conducted by pure philosophers who felt that the constraints of scientific methodology were restricting the approach to inquiry. The third era, according to Piaget, the scientific epistemological period, takes up matters of scientific knowledge in scientific ways and leaves the broader issues and their rational analysis to the philosophers (Vuyk, 1981).

Piaget's concern was with truth and verification. He began to see knowledge as non-static and emergent, such that both the universe of knowledge and the individual human structure for developing knowledge were emergent, i.e. developmental processes. The key difference in epistemologies was a methodological one. Verification, not reflection, intuition, or introspection were seen by Piaget as the method of science. "The goal of genetic epistemology is to link the validity of knowledge to the model of its construction" (Vuyk, 1981, p. 26). Thus the necessity of knowing and linking the development of cognitive structures with the adult categories of thought.

Vuyk (1981) implies that Piaget's thinking reflects the idea that the psychological endeavor is an epistemology which links the biological with the social, in which both
the individual unit and the group population are involved in internal mental acquisition and external expression, through language and education of thought and knowledge. In his work with children, Piaget came to realize that the question of children's mental operations which he observed were not the sole consequence of environment and learning nor of organic activity and organization, but rather the result of continual interchanges. Piaget's genetic epistemology is a subtype of constructivist epistemological thinking. However, the constructivist sees his or her epistemology as primarily linked to the realist paradigm (Harman, 1991). He states "...constructionism seeks not so much to supplant the realist/empirical paradigm as much as it seeks to complement it" (p. 234). Genetic epistemologies are more properly aligned with the phenomenologists in the belief that "social life is a necessary but not sufficient condition for cognitive development" (Vuyk, 1981, p. 32). The child is stimulated by the world and society of adults "...but he [sic] must then construct his own solutions" (Vuyk, 1981, p. 33). Although, Piaget was concerned about structures of genetic development, a clearly mechanistic pursuit, he was more fascinated with the way children develop their own meanings, values, and ways of acting at different stages of their development. Mind, though dependent on mechanism, was clearly the center of Piaget's epistemology (Feldman, 1988). To elaborate even further,
Piaget saw thought as transforming structures which then allowed for the re-organization of information out there. Piaget's constructivist position appears to link environment and biology through thoughtful activity in a developmental process (Feldman, 1988).

Piaget described four basic cognitive concepts; schemata, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration. Schemata are structures, bio-entities which develop and mature by a process of adaptation and re-organization to the environment (Wadsworth, 1989). Assimilation is a process by which people input, transform, and integrate knowledge; while accommodation results in the change or creation of schemata. Equilibration is also a process, one which allows for external experience to be incorporated. It is an internal mechanism that motivates and stimulates the person's continued construction of knowledge into schemata through the processes of assimilation and accommodation (Wadsworth, 1989). Another factor in cognitive development, which Piaget viewed as essential, was social interaction (Wadsworth, 1989). This relational aspect of thought and meaning represents yet another dimension of epistemology.

**Family and Relationship Epistemologies**

Both cognitive therapy and family therapy have developed epistemological descriptions of their respective schools of therapy. The cognitive therapists suggest three cognitive styles, fundamental ways of knowing, which are
employed and to which individual therapists may find themselves naturally inclined. These styles are based on Royce and Powell's (1983) theory of knowledge (cited in Lyddon, 1991). They are thought to develop from differing cognitive processes and abilities and entail different standards for evaluating the validity of knowledge (Lyddon, 1991). The epistemic styles are:

1. The empirical approach, which entails a sensory approach to knowing the world and to acquiring knowledge about it. It relies on perceptual skill and ability and looks to observation and inductive reasoning to validate its inferences.

2. The rational style uses analytic skills in gaining knowledge about the world and involves logic, consistency, deduction, and synthesis as its main tools for validating knowledge.

3. The metaphorical approach uses symbolic experience as its way of relating to and acquiring knowledge about the world. Validation occurs through processes of generalization and universality. It utilizes analogic comparisons to find meaning rather than either inductive or deductive reasoning.

In relational application of epistemological undertakings, knowledge involves a procedural and pragmatic component that ultimately involves relationships in the social world. Assuming that different clients and people in
general have different styles and respond to different
treatment (Lyddon, 1991), there remains the probability that
personal epistemologies, the very stuff of relationships, is
yet another strain of knowledge discovery. For social
psychologists the realm of cognitive psychology is
"...considered but a temporary way station en route to an
autonomous and fully genuine form of social psychology" (Gergen, 1989, p. 464). The cognitivist approach has been
criticized by social psychologists because "...it is not the
world as it is that determines action, but one's cognition
of the world.... To put it another way, the cognitive
perspective reduces the social world to a projection or
artifact of the individual cognizer" (Gergen, 1989, p. 465).
While this statement appears to negate the phenomenal
perspective, it is as circuitous as the earlier statement in
which the cognitivist heralding of the of organismic
processes might have easily been misconstrued as linkage
with the idealists.

In social or relational epistemology, knowledge is
neither in the individual mind, nor in the mind-independent
material world, nor is it constructed as one acts upon the
other eternally assimilating, accommodating and
equilibrating; rather it is in the patterns of social
relationships (Gergen, 1989). For social epistemologists,
validity and truth in the sense of verifiable and
predictable knowledge are not of critical concern. Rather
values, ethics, real world relevancy, and critical social processes are the matters of greatest concern. The epistemological questions are on the order of wondering whether life would be enriched or diminished if certain theories or operationalized concepts were adopted. The questions might center less on the neuronal nature of knowledge and more on epistemic questions of "... conflict, cooperation, intimacy, conformity, social influence, social movements, aggression, peace, power, oppression, revolution, and the like" (Gergen, 1989, p. 465). Another view of social epistemology comes from the family therapy tradition. Referring to the epistemological split in western thought, Auerswald (1987) aligns himself with the "new science" paradigm he describes as the ecosystem approach, intimately linked to cultural evolution, synthesis, and heuristic. The ecosystem approach is anti-mechanistic, anti-reductionistic and instead sees itself as part of the person-in-society continuum. The helper enters and becomes part of the ecosystem, becomes part of the event in order to promote the desired end.

The critical aspect of relational epistemology may be the distinction it makes between two definitions of identity. The first refers to independent identity, separate from its context. Relational identities on the other hand refer to those which can only be defined in relation to a context. The contextual arena for the study
and genesis of knowledge is the social ecosystemic arena. "Epistemologically, the things we see (people, objects, etc) exist only in relationship, and when analyzed microscopically, they, too, are best viewed as relationships" (Cottone, 1988, p. 360).

**Symbolic/Systemic Epistemology**

The last area of epistemological thought which was developed to some degree in the literature of the past decade is the symbolic/systemic epistemology. Symbolism and the underlying process of abstraction is thought by many systems thinkers to be critical to the epistemology of systemic thinking (van Gigch, 1990). Humans are thought to progress in intellectual development from representations of objects and events to images and symbols - this progress is the act of symbolization. The individual is seen as "the nodal point in the integrated, organization, information system ... which ties together all human beings in the organization and beyond" (van Gigch, 1990, p. 124). Systems models create knowledge by greater levels of complexity and at higher levels of abstraction. For example, beginning at the intervention level "... evidence is used to define a descriptive model" (van Gigch, 1990, p. 125). From the level of intervention, abstraction moves to the level of observation and hypothesis generation which generates explanation. The third degree of abstraction is referred to as a designer level and is the theory development level of

Thus the philosopher has some territorial attachment to epistemology, its meanings and development; while the cognitive psychologist wants dominion over cognitive science. The social psychologist seeks to define epistemology not in the individual mind but rather in patterns of human relationships (Gergen, 1989).

What are the precise definitions or multiple definitions of cognitive science, epistemology, social epistemology, cognitive psychology, knowledge, psychological operations, and meaning making? The study of knowledge has created language which is still awkward and terminology which overlaps and which is borrowed and used somewhat imprecisely and with great poetic license. There are, as in Triarchic theory, great areas of mutually shared meaning among the terms epistemology, intelligence, cognition, mental activity, and information processing. Knowledge for humans is "... directed toward the purposive adaptation to, selection and shaping of, real-world environments relevant to one's life" (Sternberg, 1985, p. 45), seems to be a common thread in all the concepts.

The optimistic implications of all ... is that the knowledge of knowledge compels us to recognize that (Descartes notwithstanding) certainty is not proof of truth, that there are many worlds (realities), and that things will change if we live differently. This then calls for, tolerance - the affirmation that other peoples' world views are as valid and legitimate as our own ..." (Berman, 1989, p. 280).

Another way to state this, and for the purpose of the
current research endeavor, is that people do live differently from one another. They do not share world views. Yet each view is valid and legitimate within its context. The meaning of epistemology that is employed in this paper is one most closely associated with constructivist and ecosystemic views. The assumption which guides the current investigation is that people both create and respond to their personal and collective realities and assign meaning to their experiences. The next chapter explores in some depth the context in which the epistemology of the poor is constructed.
CHAPTER III

POVERTY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Writing more than 30 years ago in The Other America, Michael Harrington stated that "... it [America] is not impoverished in the same sense as those poor nations where millions cling to hunger as a defense against starvation.... That does not change the fact that tens of millions of Americans are ... maimed in body and spirit, existing at levels beneath those necessary for human decency" (Harrington, 1962, p. 9).

Twenty years later, Harrington made a distinction between poverty and scarcity, saying that poverty is the result of being excluded from the modal life of the community, the means of producing a living, and the normal patterns of economic adaptation within society (Harrington, 1984). Poverty, in the sense of being marginalized, emerged during 19th century industrialization and the shift to private ownership of the means of subsistence. For the first time, poverty and inequality were linked (Engles, 1972; Freire, 1970; Marx, 1965). It is the marginalized definition of poverty, rather than the starvation sense of poverty that is used in this paper.
This chapter explores the definition of poverty, describes the populations of people who are poor, and summarizes the current understandings by social scientists about the causes of poverty. In addition, trends in poverty are discussed and their explicit and implicit links to psychology. The economic review is based on a purposive sample of journalistic, sociological, and economic literature during the post World War II years. Relying on at least two sources in each of the three economic eras defined by Ellwood (1988), the review will describe and define the parameters of poverty and the solutions which have been proposed and attempted over the years.

The second part of the review is introduced by two critical lines of psychological research which emerged around 1980. The first, by B.S. Dohrenwend and B.P. Dohrenwend (1981), was a pioneering attempt to isolate the causal link between poverty and poor emotional health. The second was Aaron Antonovsky’s (1979), research on coping, stress, and health. A thorough literature review of the psychological journals, available in the Psych Lit data base, between 1988 and 1994 is presented, discussing research on the difficulties, strengths, and coping skills of poor people.

A third part of the review chapter is a discussion of poverty in central Contra Costa County, California and the implications for this research and sampling strategies.
The Three Eras

Ellwood (1988) outlines three eras in the growth of poverty in the United States since World War II. The first he refers to as the foundation era, which actually had its roots during the depression. He defines the time frame as 1930-1960. During this period poverty was basically encapsulated, affecting the elderly and the disabled, including war veterans. The systems of social security, unemployment compensation, and disability insurance, which had been put in place during the 1930’s to respond the conditions of the depression, were highly popular and entrenched. Veterans benefits were added during this period and all four programs remain today, largely unchanged. The poor, during the foundation era, were seen as "deserving." The most problematic group during this period was widowed, women-headed households. Even though the adults were able bodied, it was a time in economic history when women who were raising families were not expected to work (Ellwood, 1988). These programs existed in an economic boom period and represented 6.9% of the national income.

The second era, was the period 1960-1976 which Ellwood refers to as the takeoff. He is referring to the "takeoff" of welfare. The civilian unemployment rate began to rise during the 1960’s to about 6% and so did the gap between the affluent and the poor (Myrdal, 1965). This came about for three main reasons: (a) advances in technology which
reduced the need for labor, (b) increases in the labor pool by virtue of the entrance into it of the first wave of the babyboom generation (Myrdal, 1965), and (c) the role of racial discrimination in preventing new urban dwellers from advancing (Ellwood, 1988; Harrington, 1962). During this period, many programs were begun including head start, the job corps, model cities - all part of the vision of the "war on poverty". None, as it turns out, was sufficient to assure security for the healthy poor and unemployable. Huge increases in welfare expenditures occurred and the recipients were largely targeted populations of returning disabled veterans, who were unable to work; black people, who were discriminated against in the job market; and mentally ill persons recently released from institutions to "least restrictive environments" (Ellwood, 1988; Loveland, 1991). Government expenditures for benefits rose $38 billion during that period of 1960 to 1976, to 15% of the national income (Ellwood, 1988).

Then as now, a litany of social and psychological ills befell the poor including crime, gambling, substance abuse, and mental illness (Myrdal, 1965). There were two types of poor, according to Harrington (1962); those who acquired poverty by virtue of bottoming out through the changes in technology and those who were born poor, who came in with a ceiling. It was in response to this unveiling of the poverty problem by Harrington, that the Johnson
administration began the "War on Poverty" (Donovan, 1967).

The third era is noted on a structural economic level by a shrinkage in the economy. The boom years are over. Tax revenues are down, inflation was up initially, then down; and more technological change has further eroded the job base. At a time when more poor assistance was needed in the early 1980's, three other trends undermined the willingness of government to increase the welfare system - the increase in single-parent (woman-headed) families, the mass entrance of women into the labor force, and the increase in drug and alcohol related poverty and homelessness (Ellwood, 1988). The poor people of this era were seen, in contrast to the poor of earlier eras, as "undeserving" poor (Ellwood, 1988; Wright, 1991). They were viewed as somehow choosing poverty by substance abuse, unwed pregnancy, and divorce.

**Trends in Poverty**

Two of the most striking trends in poverty in the last decade are the increasing feminization of poverty (Ellwood, 1988; Loveland, 1991; Rodgers, 1986) and the increase in homelessness (Goodnight, 1991; Loveland, 1991). Additionally, the poor in the United States can be categorized into several groups which Wright (1988) refers to as "deserving" and "undeserving". These subgroups are (a) two parent working families, (b) single-parent families, (c) the ghetto poor (Ellwood, 1988), and (d) the homeless,
composed largely of single, non-working men, many of whom are mentally ill and/or drug and alcohol addicted (Loveland, 1991). Each group is poor for a set of partially independent and partially overlapping reasons (Ellwood, 1988; Loveland, 1991; Wright, 1991).

1. The poor, two-parent family, is poor for one of three reasons: (a) insufficient wages at full time work, (b) low wages from part time work and caring for small children under school age, and (c) illness, disability, or retirement, who represent 21% of the total poor. Type "a" families represent 44% of poor, two-parent families. The second type, 35% of the total, comprises partially employed or unemployed parents. The instability of the low wage job market contributes to frequent bouts of unemployment, further undermining the economic stability of the family. However, the two-parent family is most able to respond to changes in the economy when jobs increase or wages go up.

2. Women-headed households, statistically virtually equal to single-parent households, represent about 28% of America’s families with children, and 25% of American children live in these families (Bennett, 1994). Approximately 50% of these children live under the poverty line (Ellwood, 1988; Rodgers, 1986). Four factors contribute to the poverty of these families: (a) low wages and unemployment, (b) balancing the dual roles of parent and breadwinner, (c) a stigmatizing, isolating, and inadequate
welfare system (Ellwood, 1988), and (d) failure of the absent parent to provide child support (Ellwood, 1988; Rodgers, 1986; Walters, 1988).

3. The ghetto poor, although surely comprised of both single-parent and two-parent families, are seen in Ellwood's topology as a special case of poverty, with a different set of causes and solutions (Ellwood, 1988). This group is the so-called black underclass which is excluded from mainstream society both economically and residentially. They experience themselves as "...excluded from society, reject commonly accepted values, suffer from behavioral as well as income deficiencies (Ouletta, 1982, cited in Ellwood, 1988, p. 189). Among African-American poor people, 84% live in isolated, poverty census housing tracts. In contrast, only 8% of poor whites live in poverty areas. Under stress, social groups living in close proximity respond in some fashion to achieve survival and equilibrium. In addition to institutional racism, the causes of ghetto poverty, are twofold: a) the result of massive layoffs and unemployment in the early eighties, from which the black, working-class has not recuperated and which has resulted in concentrated poverty; and b) isolation in high crime, high underground economy, high drug trafficking areas, from which stable community institutions have all but disappeared (Wilson, 1987). Despite public opinion and media hype, the ghetto poor represent only 10% of total U.S. poverty (Ellwood,
4. The homeless represent a growing segment of the population and is certainly the most visible segment of poor people. Goodnight (1991) refers to the homeless as "not a 'won't work' group, but a 'can't work' group". The homeless, like the poor in general, can be classified into several groups, including the mentally ill, the disabled veteran with emotional problems, the chemically dependent, the runaway and throwaway youth, and families of both the one and two-parent variety (Loveland, 1991). When this population is defined as those without regular access to shelter, their numbers are estimated to be from 250,000 to 2.5 million (Loveland, 1991). The mentally ill represent from 35% - 60% of the visibly homeless in the U.S. (Loveland, 1991). They are largely not employable, they are critically undeserved by the social, community based, and mental and health care systems. Many of them are Vietnam era veterans with physical disabilities but they are not getting benefits from the Veterans's Administration and they have few job skills and fewer still coping skills (Ellwood, 1988; Loveland, 1991). Many are single men, unattached to children or families (Goodnight, 1991).

Macro-economists analyze reasons for these trends and the growing gap between the have-s and the have-nots. Many blame the loss of jobs on the increase in high technology and the exportation of manufacturing jobs to overseas
markets (Ellwood, 1988; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987). Others suggest that the cause of poverty can be linked to the epidemic rise in drug and alcohol addiction and its cost in able bodied workers and community devastation (Loveland, 1991; Wright, 1991). Others suggest that unwed, teenage motherhood which has doubled in the past two decades, is the main cause of current poverty (Bennett, 1994).

Prior to 1960 poverty was fairly well encapsulated, affecting the retired, the temporarily unemployed, and the disabled. The social welfare system which developed during the years of the great depression was established to assist these groups (Ellwood, 1988). At the same time, the helping systems did not conflict with what Ellwood (1988) refers to as four American value tenets: (a) the autonomy of the individual, (b) the virtue of work, (c) the primacy of the nuclear family, and (d) the desire for a sense of community. These values translated easily into public policy goals (Ellwood, 1988). Needs and goals based on these values do not obtain as easily in this era, because policy makers see welfare and other public assistance programs as eroding traditional values and as incompatible with them (Ellwood, 1988).

Solutions for the subgroups of poor people are different according to the different set of assumptions which operate for each of them. There is an ongoing debate about the causes of poverty and it is split between
structuralist and personalist analyses. The conceptions of society, the proposals for intervention, and the political orientation of the approach parallel this fundamental split (Ropers, 1991). From the early 1960's, when economists, policy makers, and sociologists began the post war analysis of poverty and the income gap between the "haves and have­nots" this split has been apparent (Gilder, 1981; Harrington, 1962; Myrdal, 1965; Ropers, 1991; Valentine, 1968).

**Structural and Personal Views**

The structuralist, "system blaming" (Ropers, 1991) argument, goes like this: specific, definable social and economic factors can be shown to contribute to and to cause poverty including institutional structures and regulations; political policies and programs; beliefs advanced through the educational, cultural, and ideological media of the society; patterns of social interaction such as racism, sexism, and classism (Ropers, 1991); and de-industrialization through increased technologies and resulting unemployment (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982, cited in Ropers, 1991). Solutions tend to be focused on the structures of the economy and the society and are largely held to and put forth by those of the liberal to radical political stance. These include such things as increasing the minimum wage, guaranteeing a minimum annual income, guaranteeing child care, providing job training programs,
and increasing welfare benefits. The common thread among them is that no program currently in place to relieve poverty is sufficient to bring people out of it. They just keep people at or below the poverty line (Ellwood, 1988).

The personalist, "victim blaming" (Ropers, 1991) point of view suggests that the poor are "... predominantly unmotivated, undisciplined, undeserving able-bodied men and women ... who take advantage of the system of public assistance (Ropers, 1991, p. 11). Other related views link poverty with mental illness, genetic defects, character and moral defects, loss of family and traditional values which accounts for teen pregnancy and violence, divorce, family violence, sexual and physical abuse, increase in school drop out rates, and inability to compete in the labor market (Bennett, 1994; Murray, 1992, cited in Bennett, 1994; Murray, 1990, cited in Ropers, 1991), and welfare itself as a reinforcement of and reward for all of the above (Bennett, 1994; Gilder, 1981). The solutions proposed range from providing services to rehabilitate individuals and families, to political changes which increase penalties for deviant behavior, reduce incentives for staying on welfare, and cut out benefits all together for many who fail to meet certain contingencies (Ellwood, 1988; Ropers, 1991; Wright, 1991).

Poverty and Emotional Well-being

Cultural anthropologists use the term adaptation to refer to the ability of a people to interact successfully
with their environment and its resources in order to meet their survival needs. In industrialized societies, where the resources are privately owned, poverty and economic marginalization result from loss of resources rather than from loss of ability (Draper-Praetz, 1989). Without a doubt, poor people suffer a greater percentage of burden and stress from lack of access to nutritional foods, adequate shelter, health care services, and education. They suffer disproportionately from health problems and mental health problems brought about by continual exposure to extreme stressors such as instability of goods and services as well as social isolation (Harrington, 1962, 1984; Kosa & Antonovsky, 1969; Myers, 1982; Wilson, 1987).

Lewis (1959) suggested an actual "culture of poverty" based on his research in Mexico in the 1950's. He described this culture as a maladaptive response to the conditions of poverty such as low participation in institutional life of the community, like schools and churches; over-representation in the welfare and criminal justice systems; and the development of characterological defects such as distrust, hostility, violence, low family organization, poor ego formation, sex role ambiguity, and a fatalistic attitude toward life. These traits were then passed on generationally in an ever intensifying and inflexible downward spiral which left poor persons unable to take advantage of opportunities when they did occur (Lewis,
Subsequent researchers in anthropology and sociology have disputed many of Lewis' findings because his methods were not sufficiently emic or holistic. He failed to contextualize the issues or present them from the point of view of the population (Basham, 1978; Eames & Goode, 1977). Yet the term "culture of poverty" persists without criticism, as do the largely negative assumptions about people who live in poverty. Poverty is seen as either or both an illness inducing state or a social deviancy inducing state (Ellwood, 1988).

Other researchers have responded by placing more emphasis on the role of the society in causing maladjusted behavior and have placed the onus for change on the institutions of society and policy makers (Freire, 1970, 1972; Jones & Korchin, 1982; King, 1978; Martin, 1986; Wilson, 1987).

Most agree that living in the conditions of poverty do often cause people to lose hope and psychological equilibrium, which then results in loss of self-esteem and motivation. However, adaptationists, Mechanic (1974) among them, states that "... we also know that even under the most desperate and unencouraging circumstances men [sic] succeed in developing competing forms of social organization that allow them to resist their oppressors..." (p. 35).
Psychological Literature

Psychological research reflects the same conundrum which political, sociological, and economic pundits face in defining both the problem and the solutions to poverty. This parallel process denotes the reality which many therapists face, namely that in their role as therapists they cannot change the system. They do the best they can with individuals as they come to them for therapy (Haley, 1992).

The work of the Dohrenwends in the 1970's and early 1980's was an attempt to answer questions concerning which factors of a constitutional nature contributed to the poor mental health of people with low socioeconomic status (LSES) and which factors could be said to derive from social causation. With race controlled for as a confounding variable, the Dohrenwends proposed that if poor mental health among the poor was caused by predominantly social factors (i.e., racial discrimination and prejudice) then there would be higher levels of emotional disorder among nonwhites than whites at all levels of economic strata. On the other hand, if the social selection model (i.e., impaired ability to adapt to cultural demands) was true then there would follow higher levels of emotional disorder among whites at all levels of SES. "Independent of ethnicity, upward mobility would be expected of individuals who are economically disadvantaged but constitutionally 'strong'.
Reciprocally, downward mobility would be expected of individuals who are economically advantaged but constitutionally vulnerable" (cited in Lorian & Felner, 1986, pp. 747-748). Thus, since whites are not blocked from upward mobility by social constraints, failure to be upwardly mobile is ascribed to constitutional factors and the rate of mental health problems would be higher among whites at low levels of SES. Additionally, high SES whites could better support and prevent downward drift of members who are experiencing constitutional problems. The Dohrenwend's research strongly implicated the social causation factors. Nevertheless, the role of environmental stress differentially affects persons of varying constitutional predispositions (Lorian & Felner, 1986).

Emotional disorder is a large and imprecise term. It is quite likely that degrees of internal and external factors differentially contribute to various types of emotional disorder. For example, genetic influence may be more highly implicated in schizophrenia and other Axis I disorders, while environmental factors contribute more to personality disorders (Lorian & Felner, 1986).

Antonovsky (1979) studied the interaction of stress, tension and resources for coping. He wanted to understand better how some people in the most oppressive of circumstances, for example the holocaust, found the strength to survive. He used the term salutogenesis, in contrast to
pathogenesis, as a descriptor of the process by which people do well in spite of terrible life events. He described two factors which largely predict a person's ability to develop adaptive strategies and internal resources for coping. The two were tension management and a sense of coherence. They contributed to salutogenesis more profoundly than other factors. Tension management was the ability to use resources to successfully overcome stress. A sense of coherence was defined as repeated experiences which generate a global, enduring feeling of confidence in the predictability of one's internal and external reality and a belief that there is a good chance that things will work out.

Antonovsky (1979) posited two types of resistance resources; general and specific. General resistance resources (GRRs) refer to adaptability in the social, cultural, psychological, and biochemical sense. They connect individuals to communities and families and concrete other people. Specific resistance resources (SRRs) include knowledge, rationality, flexibility, and farsightedness—cognitively based coping strategies. While GRR's are preventive in nature, SRR's are immediate response resources. In general, Antonovsky found that some groups were more likely to have access to or be bearers of these resistance resources and poor people are not among them.

Helplessness was described as a loss of control over
resources and was often seen to precede giving up and hopelessness. Even when an environment was stressful, if it was orderly and comprehensible, learned helplessness could be avoided (Antonovsky, 1979). Antonovsky differentiated between helplessness and hopelessness. He viewed helplessness as resulting from feelings of loss and abandonment following externally caused events; and hopelessness as a belief that one was somehow personally responsible for the cascade of negative events and no one could change things (Sweeney, Tinling, & Schmale, 1970, cited in Antonovsky, 1979).

In contrast, Engel and Schmale (1972) suggested that "giving up" could be a quite adaptive response when a person is either on emotional overload and is unable to input numerous and complex stimuli; or when he or she is on "underload" and experiences insufficient information and input (cited in Antonovsky, 1979).

Kohn (1969, cited in Antonovsky, 1979) suggests that work routines which are nebulous and which provide conflicting information about judgement making and decisions have a substantive and causal impact on psychological functioning, flexibility, values, self-concept and relationships with others. Alternatively, when work is self-directed, has some meaning, is consistent and predictable and the worker possess a sense that problems can be worked out, a sense of coherence, manageability, and
reduced stress ensues (Antonovsky, 1979).

When either stress is high or GRRs are low, a cascade or cluster of events are likely to co-occur along with psychological duress including all that has already been linked to poverty. Both the Dohrenwends's (1981) study and the Antonovsky (1979) study suggest that endemic stressors are key factors in defining the relationship of negative behavior and poverty. These five factors: degree of stress, work environment, information overload, information underload, and hopelessness, all contribute to pathogenesis. Resistance resources contribute to salutogenesis (Antonovsky, 1979).

The review of the psychological journals uncovered multiple articles which address poverty and its contextual relationship to families, violence, child abuse, mental illness, substance abuse, poor health, adolescent deviant behavior, prevalence rate differences among different racial and ethnic groups, and homelessness. Only two articles, however, were found that mentioned the strengthful coping capacities of poor people.

The first was a study of homeless mental health patients, many of whom were dually diagnosed with chemical dependency problems. It was found that when they were assessed and treated with respect, dignity, and a desire for discovering their strengths as well as deficits, many were willing to participate in their health and mental health
care (Kass & Silver, 1990). This finding contrasts with the prevalent behavior recorded by a number of research teams who report the opposite, i.e., that health care providers who hold rigid, negative views of the poor reap largely negative responses.

Two survey's of health care workers, residents and nurses, which were published in 1989, indicated negative views of the poor and beliefs that the poor were unreliable as to attendance at clinics and compliance with their treatment. The study suggested that these attitudes might contribute to the quality of care and to a negative self-fulfilling prophecy regarding patient involvement in their medical treatment (Price, Desmond, Snyder, & Kimmel, 1989; Price, Desmond & Eoff, 1989).

A second article, describing a study of welfare dependent Puerto Rican and Chicano families in Milwaukee, found that when there were strong kinship systems and involvement, even with increasing unemployment in the community and welfare dependency, other behavioral aspects of the ghetto, underclass lifestyle did not occur. Families were able to pool resources and counter the negative effects of poverty (Velez, 1992).

A third article, less a description of strengths as of introspective understanding, described the attitude of poor persons being served in a soup kitchen. Poor people were described by the middle-class servers as sometimes demanding
and angry in response to the volunteers' giving and helping behaviors. Researchers who were observing the interactions viewed the contrast between the negative and demanding attitude of the recipients, on one hand and on the other hand, recipients who felt that the servers were not really there to help them but to make themselves feel good. The "attitude" of the recipients and the wished-for-gratitude of the servers confirmed each party's conception of the other, i.e., that food pantry denizens were greedy and ungrateful (Stein, 1989). They also acknowledged the reality that for recipients of charity to acknowledge sympathy and offer gratitude may feel belittling to them (Clark, 1987, cited in Stein, 1989).

**Poverty in Contra Costa County**

Contra Costa County is the third largest of the San Francisco Bay area counties with a population of 803,732 (Regional Data Center Report, 1991a). It lies northeast of San Francisco and stretches from west to east approximately 60 miles. It is divided geopolitically into west county, central county, and east county (Leykam, 1989). West county is poorer, more urban, more culturally diverse than central or east county. In west county, the population by racial and ethnic group is 25.6% African-American; 51.4% White; 16.2% Asian or Pacific Islander and approximately 7% Hispanic, 69.4% of whom are of Mexican heritage. The 1990 census of west county was 213,268 compared to central
county's 413,858 (Regional Data Center Report, 1991b). The economy of west county is industrial, especially the petrochemical industry. However, 51% of the people are employed in lower paying service and retail trade sectors (Regional Data Center Report, 1992a).

East county in contrast, comprises large agricultural and ranching interests. In the past 5 years the population has more than doubled and minority group representation has greatly increased, especially from Mexican, Mexican-American, Central American, and southeast Asian cultures. Approximately 10% of the east county population is African-American. The White population is 80% (Regional Data Center Report, 1992b; 1992c). The incidence of poverty is proportionately greater in both east and west county.

Central county's population, representing more than 50% of the total county population is 88.5% caucasian (Regional Data Center Report, 1991a). The economy is industrially, commercially, and government based, housing all the major county offices and services. Although the majority of low income persons live in west or east county, a significant and growing segment of the central county population also lives below the poverty line (Ferris, 1992; King, 1992).

The central part of Contra Costa County is the most affluent part of the county. The median income for central county residents in 1989 was $27,767 and the average income was $40,513 (King, 1992). The range of median household
income across west, central, and east county was $36,637, $52,994, and $40,353 respectively (Report of the Community Development Department of Contra Costa County, 1994). The stratification represented by the differences between county regions and within central county is a representation of social and economic change in central county over the past decade (King, 1992).

Currently one of the Bay area’s most stratified counties, the reality of poverty causes more suffering due to the high cost of living. Nationally, the poverty line is drawn by tripling the 1960 average household cost of food, adjusting for inflation for a family of four (Ellwood, 1988; Gilbert & Kahl, 1987; Ropers, 1991). In 1991, the poverty line was drawn at $13,950. However, given the cost of living, especially housing, for a central county family of four to stay out of poverty it would need to earn $18,400 annually. Even those figures are bare minimums (Quigley, cited in King, 1992).

Loss of jobs in the highest paying and most stable sector of the central county economy, transportation and manufacturing, combined with skyrocketing housing costs, has resulted in (a) a quadrupling of welfare recipients in the past 10 years, (b) AFCD caseloads grew by 42% to serve 7,218 families, (c) new job growth in central county is in the low paying service sector which cannot sustain a family’s housing and child care needs (Ferris, 1992).
At least 17,200 of the people living in central county are living at or below the poverty line (Regional Data Center Report, 1991b) and 14,000 of them are on welfare. The number of homeless people has gone up but no one knows by how much. People are living in cars, in shelters, and under bridges; yet for the most part homelessness is not visible. Nevertheless 68% of central county residents agree that low and moderate income housing is a great need and 2/3 of residents believe that the gap between rich and poor is widening (Weeks, 1992). It is no longer unusual for people to spend 75% of their income on housing (Berenthal, 1992, cited in King, 1992).

The public health care system is at overflow capacity to serve the medically indigent of the county. Hospitals in the county served 155% more uninsured patients in 1988 than in 1887 (Weeks, 1992).

By every measure - increased unemployment, increased application for all forms of public assistance, increased homelessness and shelter occupancy, increased waiting lists for public housing, longer waiting time for health care appointments at public health clinics, increase in those eligible for low income child care subsidies and housing subsidies, increase in number of evictions from rental housing for non payment of rent, fewer persons covered by health insurance, increase in use of substance abuse and mental health services (Ferris, 1992; King, 1992; Weeks,
poverty in central county is not a myth. Surrounded by multi-million dollar homes, high technology business parks, the largest financial district in the area outside of San Francisco — the poor of central county are a microcosm of the nightmare of the late twentieth century American economy. The growing gap between rich and poor and its camouflage in the midst of affluence asserts itself as a strong justification for continued study of the poor.

Given the findings of B.S. Dohrenwend and B.P. Dohrenwend (1981) which suggested that racial oppression confounded poverty effects on individuals, it was decided to seek volunteers from the part of the county where the fewest number of poor people of color live, in order to view poverty qua poverty. The next three chapters represent the analysis of data collected by direct observation of and conversations with the long term poor of central Contra Costa County.
CHAPTER IV

METHODS, PHASES, AND RESULTS OF PHASE I

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation to systematically explore with poor people their way of life, their processes of knowing and making sense of their world in order to discover and describe their meaning making processes, coping strategies, attitudes, beliefs, values, and adaptive behaviors. It is designed in three investigative phases to discover through increasingly personal interactions with people living in poverty their strengths and characteristics of resilience.

Assumptions are strategies for framing and limiting the tasks, the activities, and the direction of the investigation (Patton, 1990). They differ from hypothesis in that they are not theory driven or used to test hypothetical-deductive generalizations. Instead assumptions, while certainly based on prior familiarity with the subject matter under investigation, approach natural settings with a holistic and context specific perspective (Patton, 1990). The assumptions which guide this investigation are: (a) that poor people have strengths and adaptive qualities which can be discovered and described
through observation and dialogue, and (b) the epistemology of poor people is adaptive to their economic reality and different from that of people in other social classes.

**General Methodology**

The method used for the investigation was designed to be able to explore, in three phases, the strengths, attitudes, beliefs, values, meaning making endeavors, coping and problem solving strategies of people living in poverty. The investigation used participant observation, focus groups, and semi-structured individual interviews. This three phase approach was chosen for several reasons. It paralleled the three phase approach recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in doing naturalistic. The purpose of Phase I was to act as an orientation and overview of the project. It was the most etic of the phases in which the investigator was most external to the experience of the participants (Fetterman, 1989). Etic perspectives are external and more distant from the object or source of observation. Etic perspectives are closely associated with the mind-independent epistemological view discussed in chapter two. The etic stance is outside the experience of the participants (Fetterman, 1989).

Phase II, acted as a more focused exploration of the themes and categories which emerged from the orientation phase and allowed for more involvement in the phenomenal world of the participants through a group interview process.
The advantages to using group interviews are that they lessen participant inhibition, they help to prompt idea formation, they cue forgotten information, and they provide for a wide range of responses (Green & Stone, 1977). A card sort was selected as an investigative procedure for the added advantage of helping focus and delimit the discussion.

Phase III was the most emic process, allowing the closest view from within the world of the participant through individual interviews. Emic processes are at the other end of the epistemological continuum in that they are concerned with the phenomenal or insider’s view of reality. Methodologically, emic techniques promote the researcher’s understanding of why people do, feel, and think as they do (Fetterman, 1989). Additionally, it provided an opportunity to confirm, expand, and amend the emergent whole (Spindler, 1982). The three phase approach further acted as a means of triangulating the methodology which Denzin (1978) sees as critical in cross validating data and providing multiple reference points back to the same location.

Observer bias, a concern in naturalistic research was mitigated in six ways: (a) by recording the researcher’s feelings and behaviors as well as those of the subjects who were observed in Phase I. This acted as a way to stand outside the investigator’s "own conduct and view it as a third party" (Denzin, 1978, p. 10) while at the same time clearly stating biases and frames of reference; (b) by
maintaining accurate transcriptions and the original audio and video tapes of all observations such that they are accessible for other researchers who may wish to expand, validate, or replicate this work; (c) by having three experts who together with the principle investigator, could validate the placement of themes into coding categories. A minimal 3/4 agreement rate was selected to assure placement of a word into a category; (d) by maintaining the highest quality of communication in the written report, so that its internal logic and linkage to the taped and transcribed data was apparent (Stone, 1991a); (e) by clearly stating the operating assumptions which frame, limit, and guide the investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982); and (f) by asking for participant comments on the written report to assure that the investigator faithfully captured the meaning (Lightfoot, 1983).

During Phase I, ethnographic observations were conducted in two locations where almost exclusively poor people gather - a food pantry and a public hospital waiting room. By observing and recording the activities of people while engaged in the two different activities, the observer was able to describe population characteristics with regard to coping styles, problem solving strategies, affect, values, adaptive activity, and other behaviors pertinent to this inquiry. This approach increased the possibility that theory or coding categories obtained by virtue of these
observations were grounded in the empirical world of repeating and regular activities within it (Denzin, 1978).

The conversations, social interactions, waiting behaviors, and problem solving strategies of the two groups were proposed as providing a rich narrative base upon which to build the subsequent phases of the investigation.

**Participants**

The participants for Phase I of the investigation were those who were present in the settings at the time of my observations. Only those who agreed to talk to me on tape were recorded.

Participants for the other two phases were sought at Contra Costa County offices and health centers. To achieve sample homogeneity for the purpose of maximizing control, congruity, and external validity (Kerlinger, 1986), rules of selection and recruiting were established. The researcher wished to maximize the chance that the persons who volunteered would be at least two generation welfare recipients, not disabled, and not elderly. Additionally, given the history and reality in this country of racial and ethnic group discrimination against people of color, some consideration was given to participant selection procedures which would reduce the confounding influence of racial oppression as an epistemological factor beyond the economic. Boyd-Franklin (1989) points out race and class are not the same. Cultural identity factors based on membership in a
racial or ethnic group provide meaning and ways of coping that are independent of class.

Therefore, participants were sought in the geographic area of the county where the greatest number of economically marginal Caucasian people live. However, it was also decided that no one who volunteered would be excluded simply on the basis of race or ethnic group.

To conform with this design, volunteers were sought at the waiting rooms of the following central Contra Costa County locations: the public hospital emergency room waiting room, the public hospital clinic waiting rooms and visitor lounges; the social service department waiting rooms; the Cambridge Community Center food pantry; the central county homeless shelter, and the central county Head Start program bulletin board.

A sign with tear off forms was posted at each site. Interested persons could write their first name and a phone number where I could reach them or leave a message for them. An envelop was affixed to the sign on the wall of the waiting areas into which the slips were deposited. (A copy of the sign is included in Appendix A.)

The volunteers who participated in Phases II and III were reimbursed $25.00 for their time and any transportation cost. However, the fact of reimbursement prior to talking with the volunteer was not advertised to avoid more people volunteering than necessary and to prevent more people with
a solely extrinsic motivation from volunteering, possibly affecting the quality of participation. Volunteers were pre-screened and selected in the same way for the focus groups as for the one-on-one interviews. Specifically, a phone call was made to the volunteer by the researcher after gathering the slip from the envelope. The researcher made a brief phone call to explain the project, answer questions, and assess for ability to participate. (See Appendix B)

Data Analysis

Following each observation session or interview session, field notes or tapes were transcribed and line numbered. From each transcription, the researcher located and described the emergent themes, using data reduction methods for qualitative designs, described by Bogdan and Biklen (1982). Events, episodes, categories, statements, or any discrete unit could be used to begin the process of selecting coding categories (Denzin, 1978). Bogdan and Biklen (1982) used a thematic approach to discover, from the empirical data, the emergent categories which were then coded. The themes which clearly emerged as salient were the ones used to complete the data analysis.

A modified use of this method involved several readings of the transcribed text, followed by collapsing the data into a finite number of themes for further analysis. The analysis of phase II for example, consisted of summaries of both the focus group categories which were derived from
Phase I and epistemic categories which were discovered through the focus groups in Phase II. The end product was an objective illustration of the researcher's summary interpretation of data. The major themes that were uncovered in each phase were then used in part to design the subsequent phases of the investigation, much the same way that items for scale construction are formulated following a complete review of the literature.

Each succeeding phase of the data collection and analysis was meant to further inform and guide the investigator in the design of the inquiry of the next phase. It was expected that characteristic values, beliefs, attitudes, coping styles, problem solving strategies, and decision making strategies which represent the world view and meaning making abilities of the participants, would become increasingly apparent. Through the process of pulling out and condensing themes, the investigator constructed what J. Warren Little, Assistant Professor of Education at UC Berkeley, calls a "transparent path of inference" (personal communication, February 18, 1992). The same method of data analysis was used for the tapes of the focus groups and the individual interviews.

The product which emerged from the analysis provided a rich narrative about the strengths and resilience of persons living in poverty. An ethnographic or naturalistic approach to research increases the possibility that any theories
obtained by virtue of observations are grounded in the empirical world of repeating and regular activities within it (Denzin, 1978). Furthermore, it allows for, perhaps inspires a degree of creativity and expansiveness in the writing style, further enriching the research and discovery experience (Stone, 1991c).

It was with this sense of wanting to enter the phenomenal world of those I chose to observe, and be in the experience as if in their mind, that I began. The essence of the naturalistic paradigm is that of moving into the scene "... without disturbing its order, with an open mind, looking, listening, watching, inquiring, feeling, interpreting, and noting, while at the same time drawing tentative conclusions, formulating possible explanations of what..." (Stone, 1991c) one has seen and constructing a theory from the emergent data. It is for this same reason that I now shift to a first person voice to illustrate and practice the naturalistic methodology.

**Phase I: The Ethnography**

I had no strict categories when I began my observations. Instead I hoped that themes and categories would evolve as I observed and took note of the array of interactions, gestures, activities, expressions, and conversations of the people I observed. I opted to take an inductive approach to the collection of data, rather than a theory grounded approach (Stone, 1991a), for the simple
reason that it is the purpose of the research to build theory where none exists. Paradoxically, the very reason for ethnography is to gain knowledge which others have. "Our ability to learn ethnographically is an extension of what every human being must do ... learn the meanings, norms, patterns of a way of life" (Hymes, 1982, p. 29). It is my hope that by doing ethnography, I can come to know and understand the meanings of the poor and marginalized. Assumptions based on case studies and anecdotal evidence becomes theory when systematically explored and validated (Stone, 1991b).

It was my intention during the observations to attempt two things. First, I was interested in noticing and describing those characteristics and values which are shared by all people regardless of their economic status or stability, but which might go unnoticed by casual onlookers or which might be camouflaged by the screen of cultural bias, or the static of differences in dress, grooming, language, or affect such as impatience or frustration.

Secondly, I was interested in noticing those characteristics which seemed different from mainstream or middle class norms precisely because they are a necessary or adaptive reality for the context of poverty. Stein (1989) in a study of the emotional interactions between volunteer staff and poor people at food pantries and soup kitchens, found that affect can be quite negative when the expectation
of the former for gratitude is not always met; and the expectations of the latter group for respect and dignity is not forthcoming. This dynamic can result in mutual anger and "attitude" formation. I hoped to be able to find the epistemological origins of and adaptive properties of things like "attitude".

Method

Participants

Participants were those people who were present at the sites where I conducted my observations. The first site was Merrithew Memorial Hospital, the county public hospital. I was a non-participant observer. I sat in the large waiting room outside the emergency room for an hour on a Saturday afternoon. Approximately fifty people were present at one time and the population changed over the course of the hour, swelling and condensing as people were served and new people in need of services arrived. A variety of ages, ethnic groups, genders, and family configurations seemed represented. About 50% were people of Mexican-American or Central-America decent; about 40% were European-American, and about 10% were of African-American heritage. While I sat, I acted as if I too were waiting for services and I took notes of my observations and impressions.

The second site was the Cambridge Community Center which is a not-for-profit, volunteer run organization that provides basic needs to homeless and economically marginal
people in the Cambridge neighborhood of Concord, the largest of the central county cities with a population of approximately 111,000 (Report of the Community Development Department, 1994). At the community center, about 100 people were present between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. on a Tuesday morning. They were engaged in the activity of procuring emergency food bags and used clothing. The people from the community were of all ages, genders, and ethnic backgrounds. Families with children, as well as single people, were present and waiting in line for supplies or visiting with each other after obtaining their supplies.

As a participant observer, I both watched and spoke with people who were willing to speak with me. No names or other identifiers were used.

**Equipment**

In site number one, the only equipment was a pen and yellow pad of lined paper. In site number two, I used a small tape recorder with a microphone.

**Procedure**

At the hospital site, non-participant observation was more feasible. I simply walked to the triage window and acted as if I signed myself in, then sat in one of several vacant seats and waited. I took out my pen and yellow pad and took notes. After an hour, I left. An in depth ethnographic description was not the purpose of this phase, but rather a sketchy development of broad categories. After
one hour of observation new information and descriptive material was infrequent. The fieldnotes I had constructed seemed sufficient for this very etic stage of the investigation.

At the Cambridge Community Center, I obtained permission from the director of the program several days prior to my observation and was introduced to several staff members who oversaw the actual distribution of goods. On the day of my observation, I arrived about midway through the time period that the agency designates as family emergency food day. This allowed me to enter the area of activity when it was most highly populated. It was expected that there would be people who were waiting but also many who had already received their food bag and might be more willing to talk with me. This procedure was suggested by the program staff and director who seemed to have a good sense of the population they served and could assure me that before getting the food bag and other needs attended to, people would not be available to talk to me.

When I arrived, I sat a picnic table off to the side. I was not able to be unobtrusive. I therefore approached people and engaged them in conversation and asked if they minded if I recorded our chat for a school project I was working on. Only those who agreed were recorded.
Results

Site One

Typical of the families assembled in the hospital waiting area is a Latino family of five, who sit in a rigid, motionless row looking like statuettes. At the center of the family portrait is the paternal grandmother, perhaps fifty years old, flanked by her sons who are in their late twenties or early thirties. The daughter-in-law held the infant and sat at the end of the row, next to her husband. The child was feverish and restless and it cried out now and again, the only voice to be heard in the family.

All of them either gazed forward in a straight line or downward at the tiled floor. They did not seem agitated or restless. Their expressions were unreadable, neither fear nor pain nor anger nor animation were apparent to me. Still, I believed there were thoughts, feelings, internal dialogues behind their eyes. I was left to guess if they were worried, sad, or exhausted. It was this silent knowing that I wanted to understand.

The emergency room waiting area is a newly painted, 3000 square foot room. The triage nurse, the admissions clerk, and the financial counselor each have windows which face into the waiting area from which they can interview the patients who sit in 20 chairs that face into each other in a rectangle. During the hour, 48 people came into the area joining the eight who were already there when I arrived.
Most people were still waiting when I left. The people were in groups of 1-5. It appeared that of those present, there were nine families with infant children, elderly parents or grandparents. Others were there accompanying a same age group friend or relative, five individuals were there alone.

Except for the sound of movement and the periodic call of the triage nurse, this was a quiet room. Families sat side by side with eyes down or tracking entrances and exits. They rarely spoke to each other. Elderly people seemed to watch the activities with more frequency and interest but they too rarely spoke. Single people seemed to gaze straight ahead. One person read. There were no magazines or books available. Besides reading, staring, watching, and talking to family members people engaged in eating, smiling, sleeping, occasional talking to a stranger, feeding a baby, giving a toy to a toddler but only if it had been brought along, as none were available.

Family interactions were infrequent and consisted primarily of comforting and supporting the sick one. Single adults accompanying age mates were the most interactive group - smiling and talking to each other with regularity. It seemed that no stranger sat next to a stranger, until no other seats were available and even then, many chose to stand or pace.

Staff interactions with patients were mostly perfunctory and directive in nature with little or no
assisting, explaining, comforting, or orienting. One nurse with a wheelchair approached an elderly man and facing him directly where he sat, she called his name, implying "get in the chair". He got up with pain and difficulty and was left to his own maneuvering, turning, balancing, and steadying. Once he was safely settled, he was wordlessly whisked away. I was feeling increasingly oppressed and suffocated as I passed the hour, in part this was due to my feelings of being the interloper that I was; but in part because of the conditions. I was surprised by the lack of interaction and communication. I developed an admiration for the steady resignation of the patients. I saw few signs of perturbation or irritation. The ambiance was flat and unhurried. One exception was a man who became quite agitated and angry when he felt that his place in the order of services was being repeatedly taken by others. Every few minutes he approached the triage nurse as she called names of people who had arrived after him. He continually inquired, each time in a louder and in a somewhat verbally threatening way why he was being overlooked. The triage nurse’s attempts to placate him only worked for so long and eventually he raised his voice such that I felt anxiety that he might become explosive. Others raised their eyes in apparent concern. At this point the nurse had him escorted into the Emergency Room to be served. I concluded that this was an example of (my behavior modification training not
withstanding) a coping strategy used by this man when dialogue fails and needs are not being met.

The tempo in the room changed at this time. I assumed it was because of the tense interaction between the angry patient and the nurse. People became more active, shuffling their feet, shifting in their chairs, increasing their eye contact with others, talking to each other. Non verbal communication also increased such as hand holding, touching, hugs from moms to infants, adult children to aging parents.

In contrast to my own often impatient and irritable waiting experiences, I observed and felt a resignation and endurance among the people waiting that day.

**Site Two**

At the Cambridge Center when I arrived with my tape recorder to observe, it was clearly impossible to do so respectfully and tactfully without engaging the people in my observations. Although again I had no preset categories in mind I was basically interested in gaining knowledge about the population.

There were about 50 families waiting to receive a bag of food or socializing with others after having received their food. The families were multi-generational ones, two parent ones, and single parent ones. Small children were being supervised in a play lot by volunteer staff, so that the parents and older children could wait and procure goods without distraction or competing obligations. The center
consisted of a number of one story stucco buildings set in rows and at right angles to each other on a campus typical of California’s educational institutions. There were grassy areas between and around the buildings where people visited with each other and children scampered about. Inside the buildings, volunteers had set up tables for the food items, which I was told were different every week and dependent on the neighborhood and grocery chain donors. Most often bread, rice, and beans were available. Fresh produce and meat were rare. The volunteers were always searching for more stores to give food and more variety. That day, I saw there was lettuce and everyone was spending time looking over the produce and making the best selection from the available stockpile.

I spoke with the people waiting in line without regard to racial or ethnic characteristics but based on their willingness to talk to me as I worked my way through the line. I discovered a variety of difficulties. Language differences and the unavailability of people who speak Farsi, seemed to be a major barrier for one woman in trying to be understood by the volunteers and in getting her needs met for clothing for her family.

Someone else mentioned transportation as being his main obstacle to meeting his needs for food, clothing, and shelter. He was laid off recently and has not found work. He is newly homeless. He said there are enough food
distribution centers and soup lines around, but getting to them is hard. If you have no car or bike, and if you have no cash for the infrequent busses that do run, it is very difficult to take care of business. Something about his demeanor, eyes down, shoulders slumped was suggestive of lost pride. I ask about pride. A false and useless emotion for him now, "... not if I can get help, food".

Another man I spoke with had been jobless, homeless for many years. He recently migrated to this part of the county because his girl friend did and to get away from the level of violence in the community from which he moved. He was astounded at how friendly and open people were here. Most days he stood out at the corner with the jobbers who waited for the pick-up trucks coming to hire day laborers so he too could work. He always watched how the other people in the neighborhood obtained work, food, and clothing. Then he asked and found that people were helpful. Where he came from, people were frightened, mistrustful. No one was on the street wanting to help, they were either involved in criminal activities or they were hurrying to get out of the way. So for him life is safer and "... they have more stuff here, which is good...."

People seemed to be kind of laid back and smiling. There was little apparent tension. There seemed to be enough food to go around and no one seemed fearful that if they were last in line that the items would be gone. People
appeared to offer help easily to each other - carrying things, watching things so the owner could take a load back home and return. Volunteers ran snacks of bread, juice, and cookies to the children. There didn’t seem to be an atmosphere of shame or apology, people were frank and assertive. They seemed comfortable with the program and its expectations.

Although people had no choice as to what was in their food bag, because that depended on what was available, people were able to select from the tray of day old bread, which loaf they wanted. I felt that people felt they had some power and respect here. It was not just undignified charitable giving. People were looking at the possibilities and choosing the most appetizing or appealing items. They were not, as the volunteer suggested, just taking what they could get. Although in a literal sense they surely were limited to what they could get, the perspective of the volunteer, which seemed like pity, was different from that of the "shoppers" which looked like intention.

Usually the children were expected to take some responsibility for watching the bags which have already been gathered. They do it well, without complaint. I watched one boy, surely no more than four years old, who was told by his mother to stand guard over the food bags while she searched for other services or goods. He took his job quite seriously while he paced around the bag, and sifted through
the things inside it. Although he watched the activity around him, he did not leave his post until his mother returned 15 minutes later.

I also noticed that people asked each other for directions or information. There seemed to be more egalitarianism among the adults and less a sense of them being dependent on the institution. One woman with two bags of groceries and three kids running around needed some information about available services. She persisted in asking one of the volunteers to go get the information she needed and bring it back to her, rather than dragging the children and bags with her to the other side of the campus. The look on her face was kind of, "you guys figure it out and let me know, you're the one who gave me the wrong information in the first place." Her demeanor drew my admiration because of her assertiveness and insistence and in her ability to get results. I reflected upon my own habitual behavior in a similar circumstance and realized my value of being apologetic in my quest for services so as not to be judged by anyone as "needy".

Despite the focused directedness of the people's behavior, it did not feel competitive or pressured. There seemed to be an air of trust, born of experience, that there would be enough. I observed a slow and methodical pace to comb over, select, and bag up goods in a general atmosphere of good will. It seems that this is more than a shopping
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Hospital</th>
<th>Food Pantry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences</strong></td>
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<td>.frequent visitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.having extended family</td>
<td>.routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.isolated</td>
<td>.use one service</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.family support</td>
<td>to locate another</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.communicate with touch</td>
<td>.use freebies to save cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behaviors</strong></td>
<td>.pace .wander .stare</td>
<td>.send kids off .low interaction while in line</td>
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<td>.mill about .wait</td>
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<td>.read .eat .play</td>
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<td>.talk .sleep .watch</td>
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<td></td>
<td>people .interact with others</td>
<td>.gesturing</td>
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<td>.comfort</td>
<td>.signing</td>
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<td>.asking</td>
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<td>.look for jobs</td>
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<td>.do for kids</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.relax .have fun</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.socialize</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emotions</strong></td>
<td>.anger .agitation,</td>
<td>.proud, pride,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.humor .humiliation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.frustration .quiet</td>
<td>.happy .honest</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.relaxed .patient</td>
<td>.curt</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes</strong></td>
<td>.resignation .self-sufficiency</td>
<td>.use resources</td>
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<td>.silence</td>
<td>.persist</td>
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<td>.relaxed</td>
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<td>.assertive</td>
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</table>
trip, hurried and impersonal — as are my shopping trips — but rather a social gathering, in which work and pleasant interaction are achieved jointly, reminiscent of the open street markets of Europe and the middle east.

After transcribing my notes and tapes, and line numbering the text, I reread the information several times. Each time drawing out more of the impressions and themes and categories which were evident in the text. Table 1 is constructed directly from my field notes and is a condensation of them.

Table 2 represents the selected card sort words based on the criterion stated above. Words which were mentioned by only one or two of us were not selected.

Based on the analysis of my field notes following the observations, and with the assistance of three experts — an urban anthropologist, a psychologist, and a licensed marriage and family counselor specializing in substance abuse and mental illness — ten key words were selected for the card sort to be used in the focus group discussions in Phase II of the study. The actual words chosen for the card sort were those that were selected by at least three of us.
Table 2

**Key Concepts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column One</th>
<th>Column Two</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pride/proud</td>
<td>practical</td>
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<tr>
<td>resigned</td>
<td>friendly</td>
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<tr>
<td>fun/relaxation</td>
<td>deferential</td>
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<tr>
<td>persistent</td>
<td>defensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>family</td>
<td>forthcoming</td>
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<tr>
<td>resources/resourceful</td>
<td>solidarity</td>
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<tr>
<td>silent/silenced</td>
<td>sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humiliation</td>
<td>accepting</td>
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<tr>
<td>waiting</td>
<td>curt</td>
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<tr>
<td>anger/angry</td>
<td>adapting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>limited</td>
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<td></td>
<td>smart</td>
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<td></td>
<td>isolated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>honest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** In the left hand column are the words used in the card sort. In the right hand column are the words which did not meet the selection criteria.

In an ever more reductive process, data analysis led to the ten word card sort. After selecting 15 words that I believed to be representative of the thoughts, experiences, behaviors and attitudes, I asked each of my expert judges to do the same based on their reading of my field notes and categories. The words which eventually were used for the card.

This ethnography and the subsequent data analysis was planned to be a critical first step in the process of my coming to know the world of the people in my study. However, at this point it was still in the stage of
conjecture and had not yet been made substantive by the voices of the poor. The next chapter discusses the methods and results of phase II, the focus groups discussions.
CHAPTER V

PHASE II: THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Phase II of this investigation was designed to provide a group forum for people to discuss those key concepts which emerged as salient from Phase I of the study. It was planned that this phase would provide a more personal and deeper treatment of the nature of poverty and the ways of thinking and surviving that poor people have developed.

Method

Participants

Forty people responded to the signs. Each was contacted by phone or letter when no phone number was given. Nearly 75% were lost to actual selection due to moving, phone disconnection, not fitting the criteria for age or length of time in poverty, and in a few cases due to loss of interest.

Three groups of six were actually arranged. Of the six people who agreed by phone to come to the first focus group only three came. Of the three who no-showed, only one was eventually rescheduled. For the second focus group, six people again were scheduled, but only three people came. None of those three was able to reschedule. Group three had the same 50% turnout. This resulted in three groups of
three people each or a sample of nine people. The first group (g1) was composed of three Caucasian women. The second group (g2) was composed of one Caucasian man, one African American women, and one Caucasian woman. The third group (g3) had an African American man and woman and a Caucasian woman in it.

The nine participants had an average age of 35.2 years and an age range of 28 to 43 years. No Mexican Americans or Central Americans or Asian Americans who volunteered fit the criteria. All but one of the members had grown up in the Bay area.

Although no one could state the income of their parents when they were growing up, all were either on welfare all or most of their childhood. As adults all were currently on welfare and all had some experience of working part or full time and producing income below the poverty level during some part of their adult lives. The range of income which people currently earned was $188.00 a month to $607.00 a month. Both of the male participants, but none of the females, had occasional and inconsistent time periods when they were earning income above poverty level at a highly skilled construction job in one instance and as a chef in the other case.

The seven to two female to male gender ratio was representative of the respondents who did not participate and probably reflects both the higher rate of poverty among
women compared to men; and the higher rate of participation of women in the health care and social service system (D'Ecrole, 1988).

**Equipment**

The materials used were a video cassette recorder on a tri-pod, an audio tape recorder, and ten, 10" by 14" flashcards each with one word on it. The words were: pride, angry, silent, resourceful, resigned, persistent, waiting, fun, family, and humiliation.

**Procedure**

Participants were given a copy of the informed consent to read upon arrival and a short demographic questionnaire. Once all members were present, I read through the forms and answered questions. Copies of the forms are in Appendix C and Appendix D respectively. The consent asked for permission to both audio and video tape the focus group and all members agreed. Participants were seated in a circular arrangement. I sat somewhat outside the group and presented flashcards to group members, one at a time for their discussion. There was one word on each card. When each member had commented and no further remarks on that subject were forthcoming, a new card was presented.

Before presenting the first card, I introduced the study and our reason for being there in the following way:

As you may have experienced, people who live in poverty or who are on welfare are often talked about by the press, politicians, and people in general as lazy, stupid, crazy, criminals, druggies, drunks, and
irresponsible. There are statistics which show that there is a relationship between poverty and mental illness, poverty and substance abuse, poverty and poor grades. Hardly anyone talks or writes about the strengths of poor people, their coping skills, their values, their ways of thinking about their lives. Psychologists, even if they were born and raised in poverty, aren't any longer poor by the time they have their degrees. They may not be able to think about how life is on a day to day basis for people who are in poverty. I believe that how a person thinks, believes, feels, and acts has a lot to do with what they do to make a living, including being on welfare or out hustling for money or food. I have invited you to help me say more about the positive qualities and strengths of poor people so your voices may be heard.

Each focus group lasted about one and one-half hours. Following each focus group, participants were provided with a list which is published in the local newspaper, of community resources for support, self-help groups, low-fee counseling centers, and educational classes. They were also offered the opportunity to meet again and read my report and offer additional feedback. All of the participants signed a form indicating they would like to be contacted again. A copy of the form is included in Appendix E.

Data Analysis

Using the data analysis method outlined earlier two sets of categories emerged. One is based on the card sort words which are referred to in the analysis as the focus group categories (See Appendix G). The other, based on the epistemological themes which emerged from the data, is referred to as epistemic categories (See Appendix H). I then summarized each category, which are a digest of the groups' discussions on the items in the card sort. The
epistemic categories, are inferred by me and are representative of epistemological and cognitive process categories (Mahoney, 1988; McCauley, 1988; Shannon, 1988). The path of inference is traceable back to the original words and thoughts of the group participants. The summaries that follow refer to the transcribed text of the group interviews.

**Results**

During the course of the focus groups, participants enumerated many of the difficulties and "catch 22's" that they are forced to endure. Poverty is a vicious circle without apparent escape and the very systems that are expected to help solve the problems instead perpetuate them. One woman described her relationship to the welfare system as similar to being in the passenger seat, without control. And because she had no control, she was doubtful that she would ever get out of poverty or off of welfare.

In addition to the structural problems which intensify the struggle of poor people, are the attitudes of the service providers which were described in entirely unflattering ways. They are experienced as stereotyping, judgmental, unhelpful, enjoying the power which results in humiliation, containment, and restriction. The participants experience one dirty look after another, clerks who are all too ready to ignore them or take advantage of them.

These difficulties unfolded in the dialogue of the
groups and offered the members an opportunity for expression, camaraderie, and validation in an otherwise all too lonely world where it is easy to lose faith, become resigned, adopt a hopeless attitude, begin to isolate from others, and fall into the grip of powerlessness. The participants revealed over and over again the ways and reasons they have for rebounding, persevering, and coping despite the dreadful contingencies.

**Summary of Epistemic Categories**

1. Many of the group members were very colorful in their speech, using *metaphor* and simile to help illustrate their ideas and experiences. Some of the metaphors brought forth images of being impotent such as comparing being a welfare recipient to being a "passenger" not a driver. Others clearly made distinctions between different aspects of the same experience, for example referring to isolation as a castle surrounded by a moat separated and distant; while solitude is like being on a mountain - surrounded but not distant. Finally, metaphor was used to describe hopeful feelings and a belief that with effort, things could change for the better. As one young mother put it, "persistence is like childbirth, just when you think you can't do it any more, you give one last push...."

2. A person's *world view* is a set of assumptions about the nature of truth and reality which together frames and shapes the way they see themselves, the world, and their
participation in it (Belenky et al., 1986). World view is culturally embedded. Culture for its part is a system of symbols and ideas; rules and cognition which together equal a system of meaning (Rohner, 1984).

Group members' world views seemed to organize themselves into three distinct areas: a) views about the rules of power, influence, and their relationship to both, b) views about relationships with people, and c) views about themselves, their own voice for empowering themselves to persist.

The group members relying on their experiences and impressions, were eager to engage in what seemed to me to be political analysis. They seemed to share a view that power to access and distribution of goods was not theirs to have. "It may not be possible to get off welfare, because you're not in control", a statement made by one member, was affirmed by others who believed that jobs were not available to them, or not available at all. Others expressed the idea that living on welfare gives you a different view of reality and you live that reality which is less powerful and assertive. Government, and by implication social services, around which much of their lives are organized, is viewed as silencing, uncaring, not listening. People even view government as actively repressing any voice they might have. They experience their ability to speak up for their needs as a risk often too great to chance for fear of loss or
reprisal.

Yet, people experienced a dilemma in the struggle for self empowerment and non-reliance on the government. One woman put it this way "silence is a two way street, it can be used against you if you speak up, that is you won't get what you need; yet it is sometimes necessary to take the risk in order to get what you need." In short however, the predominant view expressed by group members was that government, which personifies power, is resigned to the needs of the poor and "... that's why people die in doorways."

With regard to views about others, people were both self protective about being stereotyped and yet able to engage in stereotyping as a way to meet their own needs for self-esteem and pride. It was important that poverty and hopelessness be understood to be a problem of external proportions in which causal factors were equalized whether as a result of earthquake, fire, or joblessness - these are all equal and not characterological. "Just because someone is homeless because of the Oakland fire, doesn't make them better than us." There was a strong view that persons ought to be judged and befriended based on the person, not the category, i.e., poor or homeless.

At the same time, group members readily agreed that their own capacity both for surviving catastrophe and for qualities such as love, far outdistanced that of rich
people. "The rich don't have feelings, they don't love as we love ...." However, people were willing to entertain the idea that if they had the power and the money they might behave no better than the rich do now toward them. Apparent in the discussions about other people in the world, was the notion that individuals struggle to balance their views of themselves and their need for self-esteeming statements; their ideas of fairness toward others and the willingness to take the perspective of others.

Finally, self encouraging statements permeated the world view of people's cognition and meaning making. These self-statements seemed to range from the hopeless to the divine, and maybe most poignantly stated by a woman who said "sometimes it seems that it is not me that keeps going, but that little voice inside that says '... it's going to be alright....'"

The negative world views are often reinforced by experiences such as having "doors bang shut just as you see a glimpse of hope". Participants find a way repeatedly to counteract the effect by self-statements like "persevering makes you strong" and "don't let pride get in the way". Despite many nights of falling asleep midway between a hope for a better tomorrow and a prayer to "let me die in my sleep" there is a deep reflective, silent inner space that people say they can retreat into and find strength and be able to "... look back and see progress, be thankful for
your blessings of life and for your mind."

In short it seemed to me that the world view of those with whom I spoke was one of hope tempered by healthy cynicism and activated by self-reliance and love.

3. **Values** refer to the desirability of things, whether attributed or intrinsic. The things often have sensate qualities to them which are describable like shape, color, feel, smell, movement. Values are the opposite of both bad things and indifferent things (Jarrett, 1991). "Values are personal beliefs about the 'good', the 'bad', and the 'beautiful' which propel us to action, to a particular kind of life and behavior" (Lewis, 1990, p. 6).

Although the question of values was not a specific topic of discussion, value statements permeated the discussion and were especially prevalent in the area of pride, family, and resourcefulness. Perhaps the most salient observation was the fact that certain ideas about the worth and meaning of life seemed to transcend the all too concrete and dismal reality of day to day life. These transcendent qualities seemed also to play a role in shaping and guiding behavior and thinking. For example, one man made the statement that the main goal was family and love not getting out of poverty. In fact the notion of having a goal, however dim and however distant, seemed to be a major value. A goal was expressed by some as a certainty if one tried hard enough, and by others as a sine qua non for
living as in the statement made by a woman who said, "don't resign yourself or you'll die."

Pride was another value expressed in many ways but was most often expressed as an opposing influence that could act as a barrier to survival and goal attainment. At the same time, there was strong agreement that one should take pride in whatever one does and not let people put you down for being poor, homeless, or on welfare.

Families, children and love and devotion to them was another value expressed repeatedly, despite the admission by many that their families were dysfunctional and that they chose to maintain a distance from them. "Families get you through hard times" was a statement with dual meaning. On the one hand a recognition that family members do the work of helping you when you are having a bad time, and on the other that your own love for family motivates you to persist through bad times. One women gave the example of having to choose between two values. One was for her family and the fact that at an early age she had to raise her younger siblings. This forced her to give up another deeply held desire, that of completing her education. Family superseded personal desire.

However, several others iterated the necessity of occasional letting personal desire overcome duty by making impulse purchases after the bills were paid. One participant said that she sometimes weighed the pros and
cons of food over bath oil and sometimes went for the bath oil.

Another value mentioned by some group members was that of sharing information and providing service for others. This willingness to share seemed for some to be linked to a strong spirituality and belief in God.

4. Basch (1988) distinguished between affect and feeling by ascribing a cognitive component to the latter such that the visceral is linked to the experiential by the mind. While feelings of anger, and at times hopelessness were expressed by all the members, especially when referring to the attitude of the government and the social workers they have to deal with, these negative feelings were not the only ones.

The positive experience of feelings seemed to be linked to the necessity to maintain self-esteem as a part of the survival mode. "... don't feel humiliated, but rather [I feel] ashamed for those who try and humiliate me," is the way one woman expressed her way of dealing with negative affect. Others acknowledge the heaviness of their emotions and give themselves permission to take a break ... to have some fun, to make up silly games with their children, to experience laughter.

Anger was experienced not only as a powerful and negative reaction to being misjudged or stereotyped as someone ripping off the system and living in luxury, but
also as a constructive means for mobilizing oneself to take action, resolve problems, or speak up for oneself.

5. **Beliefs and attitudes** are similar to each other in that both refer to a mental position a person takes with regard to a fact or a situation. While belief implies a conviction without certitude, an attitude implies a feeling or emotion about the situation (Merriam-Webster, 1993). Bem (1970) suggested that beliefs are products of direct experience and link the relationship between two things. Most fundamental beliefs are taken for granted, unnoticed until challenged. People tend to hold internally consistent patterns of beliefs.

The focus group participants articulated a wide range of beliefs and attitudes about work, social services, the government, poverty, family life and children, spirituality, self-esteem, survival, and the future.

Work was an area about which people had strong attitudes, seeing it as a goal and necessity but at the same time unattainable and insufficient to support themselves. "GA (general Assistance) earns you more than you can at KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken)". Once you subtract the medical and food stamp benefit it's not financially beneficial to work at minimum wage jobs. "You can't get out of poverty without a decent job," stated another participant. In the end, a general belief is that without power and opportunities, such as exists when one is on AFDC, you are
programmed, people ask less of you." It is like a vicious downward cycle. "Since you are not in the driver seat, you can not get out of poverty," said one woman.

Social service is viewed and experienced with great negativity and was the single most frequent referent during the focus groups. Social service - welfare - is viewed as the umbilical cord to survival and social workers as the gatekeepers to that lifeline. However, the experience of most group participants is that social workers deny access, have hidden resources that they do not share, fail to take the time to really help or listen, enjoy their power over you, are ignorant of what it's like in poverty, and treat you with a degrading and humiliating attitude.

Poverty is a constant struggle between the need to work and pay the bills and the need to be dependent on a hostile social service system. They see themselves as victims of circumstance on the one hand, yet possessed of a level of love and sensitivity unavailable to the rich who are seen as unfeeling. Most agreed with the statement made by other group members that being rich is not their goal, but just being able to pay their bills. Poverty intensifies loneliness which is connected to isolation, silence, and depression.

Devotion to family and children seemed to be the single most critical influence in people's lives to regain and maintain purpose and perseverance through all the struggles.
They expressed pride in their children's accomplishments, a desire to provide for and protect their children in ways that were not available to them, in material things, in terms of teaching them to hold their heads high and not feel humiliation, and in providing guidance in growing up which they themselves did not receive. There was a fierce sense of protectionism when it came to their children. One single mom expressed her belief that no one could raise her kids like she could. That fact justified staying home with them and receiving welfare, rather than returning to work and going into debt over the cost of day care. Families, even when described as dysfunctional, were units of fierce loyalty and people with whom it was important to be able to speak to about your feelings - unlike the situation where it might be safer not to do so with people in positions of power over you.

Survival seemed driven not only by this commitment to family - "I will go hungry at the end of each month for a few days, so the children can have food" - but also by a spiritual or inner force, a commitment to not "... let any one put you down," and see "love as the answer." One man said this, "... sometimes you say, 'what's the bottom?' and you think things can't get any worse, but they do - and then from somewhere [comes] an act of kindness, and things brighten."

6. **Coping strategies** refer to those behaviors which
are employed to solve problems or deal with frustration despite difficulties and dilemmas (Braswell & Kendall, 1988), and "catch 22's". Members described a number of strategies employed across many types of events and others which were developed uniquely for specific circumstances. Some were methods employed over the course of a lifetime and others were newly learned. Still others were assessed by members as no longer useful and had been discarded, indicating the ability and willingness to learn and change and be flexible to external and internal demands for change. The coping strategies seemed to fall into three categories: actions, thoughts, and feelings.

Feeling based strategies included expressing anger rather than holding it in; resigning oneself to things that seem unchangeable; relaxing when waiting for hours rather than getting impatient and anxious; blocking out pain; not showing emotion; being spontaneous and impulsive at times for fun and for buying oneself something; closing into oneself when under great pressure; not crying; and loving others.

Thought based strategies, many of which have either a feeling and/or behavior based component, include imagining someone who humiliates you in their underwear; keeping up one's self-esteem by remembering that no one is perfect; watching others both to pass time and to learn new ways of doing things; maintaining a belief in God; not giving in to
humiliation or bowing to authority; relying on your inner self not to accept humiliation; having daydreams and a fantasy life that is happy and goal filled like going to Disneyland or Hawaii; take things one day at a time; thinking about and applying logic to situations to sort them out; learning what to say and what not to say to people who can threaten you; making yourself human; fighting defiantly not to feel less than equal; refusing to buy into negative power; looking at the whole not just the pieces; and detaching and saying "oh, well".

Action based strategies included negotiating with social workers for getting breaks; calling state representatives and participating in politics to stop budget cuts; drinking, even though it doesn't work; escaping through drinking or drugs, school work, or changing geography; speaking up when necessary, especially with family members and staying silent when safer to do so; boycotting merchants who treat them badly; doing something productive every day; listening and learning from others about where housing and other resources are; reading the bulletin boards and gathering all the information possible; using the yellow pages to find resources; knowing the resources in their community; not patronizing places where people can stereotype you as poor; refusing to use drugs or alcohol; having fun with kids and friends; going for coffee with friends; going to counseling; having one caring person
you can talk to; being persistent; taking one day at a time; knowing and acting on priorities in terms of bills; buying food for the month with welfare check on the first day of the month; sharing resources with others; always having books and toys for kids when having to wait; being able to physically defend yourself from abusers; praying; withdrawing when one needs to protect ones self-esteem; taking walks to cool down when angry; learning to cook so you can eat cheap and alternate leftovers; finding small opportunities to work for cash; and trying to do nice things for yourself.

Summary of Focus Group Categories

1. One of the liveliest discussions in all three groups was the one dealing with resources and the members' resourcefulness. There was wide agreement between groups and within groups as to the nature of their work. They saw their work as being intimately linked with finding, using, and sharing resources. Among the many sources for basic goods were churches, food pantries, and soup lines. Everyone seemed to know where some were. Serendipidously, the focus group acted as a resource for the participants because everyone learned new information about where to procure goods. Garage sales, thrift stores, and community centers are also good places to find both clothing and toys for kids. As one mother put it, "... if I go to a garage sale and there's a bunch of toys, I'll buy them because I
don't want him (her son) to be deprived ...."

Another participant sees herself as doing research all day, checking bulletin boards, going to libraries and community centers, checking the yellow pages, and making phone calls, going to the state representative's office, talking to others at the soup lines and pantries, sharing, and gathering information. Food, clothing, shelter, and work are the main objects of information. One of the more innovative resources in the area runs like a cooperative. People kick in $13.00 each month and some labor and they have access to all the services and goods.

People generally were opposed to borrowing because they could not pay back. But a few will borrow from a family member on rare occasions. "... borrow from Paul to pay Mary, that's what you do ..."

To a person, group members agreed that the one place where they hoped and expected to get information and assistance about resources, but did not, was at the welfare office. People believed that social workers have knowledge of and access to resources which they do not tell them about. One woman desperately wanted help and a referral to a therapist, but she was not helped to locate one.

Another group member was taken off General Assistance for 30 days because he was five minutes late for an appointment, "... only ... a few excuses like being in jail or getting a ticket are sufficient. It seems they look for
ways to get you out, not help you - and it's their job to be a resource."

2. Freire (1972) wrote about a culture of silence when referring to the marginal, oppressed poor of Brazil. Belenky et al. (1986) wrote of oppressed women as feeling silent and voiceless. I asked the groups what silence meant to them and received a complex answer. There seemed to be three ideas about silence.

In the first case, silence was seen as a political act on the part of the government, "We are silent because we have been repressed to be silent" says one young woman. Another woman put it this way, "government silences us, gives us no say and takes away our speech." If they open their mouths to protest being treated badly or to demand rightful services, they believe they risk being hurt by the social worker, either by denial of services or by having services taken away from them. Despite the risks however, several members stated that silence was a coping strategy they increasingly did not use. They were no longer willing to remain silent when they experienced being insulted, stereotyped, or humiliated by social workers, shoppers, or clerks.

Another way in which members defined silence and its use was as a learned defense in family life. "I was taught as a child that silence meant don't show emotion in the family. But now as an adult I am learning that if I want my
emotional needs met, I need to speak up." Others shared that the result of being silent is often negative because everything builds up and then explodes. Several expressed the fact that having learned as an adult to speak up and not be silent in personal relationships, has helped them be more willing to speak up in institutional relationships as well, for example, to demand that services be given.

The third way in which people understood silence to be an intimate part of their lives was as an internal, reflective aspect to their inner lives. Some experienced it as solitude and meditation. Another woman expressed her experience of silence as a walled off, protective space where no one could hurt or touch her. Although this use of silence is chosen, rather than conditioned, it often goes together with loneliness and depression. However, when it is turned to meditation it can be enjoyable and it "... can make you stronger."

3. **Pride** was experienced by group members as both a positive self experience and a strong emotion that sometimes acted as a barrier to overcome in order for needs to be met. "Men have pride and ego," one participant said, "pride will keep you going, but it won't feed you." Too much pride it seems can leave you feeling worthless and humiliated when you have to ask for services or welfare. Yet once you decide that survival, or clothing your children requires it, you take pride in getting over false pride to get your
legitimate needs met. Neither of these senses of pride is to be confused with either bragging or feeling shame. "You don't feel proud at first, but you get over it," was how one informant put it.

Pride was also expressed as a personal accomplishment and sense of pride in children's successes, such as good grades, extra-curricular activities, or going back to school. It was sometimes easy to lose sight of the fact that when so much of life is organized around seeking and using the social service system, that a real life independent of 'welfare' goes on for these people and their families.

Perhaps the most upsetting statement that any group member made which so clearly describes the minefield of living on the margins of society, was that general assistance workers like to use their pride as power. As if linking this experience with the prior question of silence, several informants agreed that "... if I don't fight or argue with them [social workers], just let them treat me badly, then I would lose my pride."

4. I asked how group members experienced and expressed anger and again discovered a complex of responses. Anger was first of all an emotional reaction to the experience of being put down by others, through stereotyping, insulting speech or facial expressions, when needs are ignored or go unfilled, and when degraded for wanting what others want.
One participant said this about his ongoing experience of anger "... you know that they don't live their life the same way that they're trying to tell you to live your life." Anger was experienced as a destructive emotion when held in too long. Many knew it to be capable of exploding in screaming or fighting.

But anger also was viewed as a constructive emotion which mobilized them to insist that their needs be met by the social service worker when bargaining for access to scarce resources such as emergency food grants, bus tickets, or when waiting in line for health services. One couple shared their experience of conflict, internal and between themselves, when waiting for services in the emergency room. Their small children were with them. The healthy ones naturally were bored and running around. Dad horsed around with the children to keep them occupied and amused. However, the father's antics and the noise of the children, was upsetting to the wife. She worried that the family would be viewed with criticism by the nurses and perhaps reprimanded or asked to leave. Yet they had no option but to continue to wait in order to meet the health needs of the sick child.

Some individuals expressed the internal conflict that is revisited every so often in which they struggled with either externalizing the anger or blaming themselves for their situations and for their poverty. This internal
conflict seems to worsen around the holidays and results in walking around with a kind of permanent chip on the shoulder. Some had come to experience anger as a burden and even a luxury which weighed them down and prevented them from constructive action.

I asked group members how they coped with anger and mechanisms that were mentioned included especially movement and dialogue. Walking and exercise seem to dissipate anger and allow a return to normal levels of arousal and the increased ability to go on. Talking to others about the content and circumstances of the angry feelings and thoughts, whether with friends or directly to the source of the anger, were also primary means of coping. Sometimes just walking away from the situation was helpful. Nearly all the group members agreed that use of alcohol and other drugs was a method they had used in the past as a means of coping with extreme negative feelings but had found them in the long run to either not work or to make matters worse. As one man put it, "I used to drink to deal with anger, but it didn't work. I was still angry when I quit."

5. The group was asked to discuss the concept of resignation and the extent to which they resigned themselves to their difficult situations. The response of the members was "it depends". For everyone there was agreement that to "... resign is to die" if that becomes you're only and permanent position. Yet, there are times when resigning is
the only way to survive emotionally. The concept of letting go or detaching from things that could not be changed seems to be a healthy behavior which many have cultivated. Nevertheless, the persistent belief remains that resignation, failure to act on one's own behalf when change was a possibility, would result in hopelessness and death.

6. **Persistence** is both an internal state of mind and a strategic set of behaviors. For some it is a cognitive stance in which thinking, planning, sorting, and applying logic guide their movements and daily activities. For others, it seems to be more visceral and experienced as "... staying one step ahead of yesterday." But for everyone, persistence equals survival. It is a sense that if "I don't do things for myself and my children no one else will." It is an acknowledgement that survival requires behavior which does not match the self-concept, "... doing things I never thought I could do - like street hustle - in order to feed the kids."

To be able to persist requires that you "nit pick" the small details, ignore the self pity, use anger constructively, have a goal, and just don't give up. Most of all persistence is love, love of self and of family who rely on you to persist and not give up.

7. The ethnographic observations in Phase I revealed that poor people spend a tremendous amount of time waiting in lines for needs and services. I was curious about how
people cope. The answers were illuminating and included activities, interactions, reflections, and refusals. The activities mentioned were reading, sleeping, filling out forms, making "to-do" lists, people-watching, and relaxing. People indicated that they always come prepared to wait with books, newspapers, or toys for the children.

The interpersonal interactions most frequently mentioned were playing with their children and chatting with others in the line. Daydreaming, constructing fantasies of vacations to Hawaii or Disneyland, thinking and relaxing are other ways that people spend waiting time, which often feels interminable and is resented.

A minority of group members said they refused to wait. It made them anxious or aggravated and they could also find other things to do which felt productive. One man offered this solution as his compromise between waiting passively and doing something, "I watch the numbers and gauge my place in line and the way the numbers are moving, then I go have a cigarette."

For the most part it seems that waiting is a solitary activity and most respondents selected introverted over social activities to occupy their time.

8. I was curious to know more about how people relaxed and had fun. Sherman (1983) wrote that people in poverty have a strong oral tradition and a love for music and dance. In part to hear more detail about this and in part to have
people reflect on observations I had made of people waiting in line for the available goods at the food pantry I asked how they relaxed and had fun. There were basically two kinds of responses. The first was child centered - "I have fun if the kids are having fun." Some things members shared that they did with their children included relaxing and watching TV, going to the park, collecting recycle material for game or activity money, making up games with the kids, and laughter. The other was a discussion of the difficulties for adults to have adult fun which did not involve drugs or alcohol or which cost money they did not have.

Nearly everyone had a history of alcohol and drug abuse but found that it did not continue to be the answer to needs for pleasure and fun. Now they seek clean and sober fun, but find very little - alcohol is everywhere. However, there is a clean and sober bike club to which a few group members belong. There are parks and videos, fairs, and birthday parties.

Fun also is an occasional splurge on something unaffordable like bath oil beads or going out to dinner with the kids. For others it's a memory, like tree climbing as a child; or a wish like getting to disneyland; or a state of mind, like looking back from where you came.

9. There are two divergent views of family in the literature, one view is largely from a sociological and
anthropological perspective and suggests that the family and the extended family are significant factors of stability, support, and nurture among many ethnic minority groups, (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Man, 1987; Staples & Mirande, 1980), indigenous populations, (Haviland, 1981) and less economically developed cultures (Haviland, 1981; Minuchin et al 1967). The other view that has been described in the literature suggests that there is a relationship between poverty and family dysfunction and instability (Lewis, Beavers, Gosset, & Philips, 1976; Minuchin et al, 1967). The members of the groups seemed to affirm both views and suggested that these are not mutually exclusive realities when they were asked to discuss the meaning of family.

All participants spontaneously referred to their children and their mates, when they were in relationships, as their families. Their primary commitments and attachments were to their families of creation not of origin. Many group members referred to their families of origin, on the other hand as dysfunctional with regard to alcoholism, violence, and/or molestation. They were often now able to disengage from or reunite with parents in autonomous ways. "... my family is dysfunctional and distant ... there is no interdependence, but we do love each other ..." states a woman who now has three children. She and her mate are very committed to not repeating the dysfunctional patterns with which they grew up.
Some people disclosed that they continue to live with adult siblings because of the financial advantages of shared housing, even though it is not a good situation for them. Others prefer homelessness or shelter living to avoid the family dysfunction. Some have essentially no relationship with their families of origin, "I have blocked out my family and the pain of it", while others now are trying to re-attach to families after years of their own estrangement. Still others, acknowledging the need for family, find that their family now is people they have met in the shelters or on the streets. In all cases, feelings of love and anger; loyalty and pain intermingle when thoughts of family are expressed. "I have love. If I came out of a non-loving family, I’ll never do the same to my kids. I can’t always give food, but I can always give love," was a statement made by one group member, which drew nods of agreement all around.

10. My observations of people waiting at the public hospital waiting room led me to inquire about the members experience of humiliation. I was thinking in terms of being treated as second class citizens by the system of help givers and the public in general, but for some respondents the referent for their experiences of humiliation were family members, husbands, step-fathers - who had beaten them, intimidated them, and threatened their children or younger siblings. But for both groups it seemed that a pain
separate from the act of the one who humiliates - whether physical or verbal - was the dilemma of resignation or protest; of silence or fighting back.

The coping strategies people selected reflected this dilemma, one woman said that "it is often best to keep quiet or be humorous when being humiliated." But another stated she enjoys "... angering the one who humiliates me ... the social worker puts me down and I feel like beating ... her".

Despite the dilemma of how to respond, people articulated the reality that humiliation is the act of "ignorant people" who make uninformed judgements and who refuse to be educated about "how it is out here." The best way to cope is being willing to educate so that you can no longer be humiliated.

These categorical summaries reflect the essence and some particulars of the resilience and strength and wisdom of the people with whom I spoke. Based on the work of the groups and the data analysis, a questionnaire was developed for use in individual interviews which will be discussed in Chapter VI.
CHAPTER VI

PHASE III: THE INTERVIEWS

Introduction

Having engaged in observations of the population of interest from the distance of an ethnographer and having established some themes worth conducting a group discussion about it was now time to get to know individuals and engage them in conversation - free-flowing enough for me to learn their life stories, their coping strategies, their ideas, and values. It was expected from the beginning of the study that this phase in particular would provide depth and intimacy and an opportunity to join with the participant and gain not only appreciation of individual differences, but also an expanding view of the world and mind of poverty and of the ways peoples' experiences overlap and converge.

Method

The interviews were designed with elements of both historiography and phenomenography in mind. The former is different from traditional history in that the "... oral historians do not wait for the dust to settle. They get to the actors while they are still on stage. They rely on the spoken word...intensively, extensively, and probingly" (Stone, 1991d, p. 315). One of the main values of oral
history, and certainly the one which is being promoted here, is that of providing a place for alternative explanations to social events. The mainstream and traditional historical documents, reports, and archives often do not represent or give voice to the reality "... of minority groups or those at society's margins" (Stone, 1991d, p. 316), and to "... those who by virtue of being historically inarticulate, have been overlooked..." (Henige, 1982, p. 107).

One of the objectives was to provide an opportunity to hear and learn in a way that could inform and expand the limits of my own epistemology, which is often informed exclusively by my own middle-class contingencies and provides a truncated view of the reality of poverty. Many forms of educational and psychological research deny the complexity of experience and restrict our frame of reference (Edson, 1988).

However, even oral history interviewing, while closer to the lived experience of the individual, is still an extraspective view of reality. I had the additional objective of attempting to approach phenomenal experiencing through the introspective method of phenomenography.

Phenomenography is an approach to research concerning learning and thinking (Marton, 1988). It is a research method to get at what is thought about by the subject rather than on the general process of thinking or perceiving. In phenomenography, "we are not trying to describe things 'as
they are'... we are trying to characterize how they appear to people ... so the description has to be made in terms of the experienced content" (Marton, 1988, p. 181).

Two aspects of the phenomenographal interview method were adhered to: a) the use of open-ended questions so the participant could choose the direction of his or her responses and b) allowing the interview to drift from the standard questions at times in order to enter into the reality of the subject (Marton, 1988).

An additional feature of the phenomenal approach which I wished to capture was the description of a "multi-layered phenomena" (Denton, 1979, p. 3), in this case the epistemology of the poor which includes the experience, the behavior, the thoughts, and the values which in sum describe the adaptability and the strengths of the poor from their own perspective. It is the desire to know about the human condition and the characteristics of being human that allows for the particular understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Denton, 1979) - in this case - adaptation to poverty.

Denton (1979) states that "Once the phenomenon has become apparent, there will be events which are patterned, recurring, and frequent" (p. 9). It was the intrasubject patterns and the cross subject patterns that I hoped to identify and describe by virtue of these interviews. It was a primary objective of the methodology of the study to
attempt to experience the reality of and take the perspective of poor persons, not of the economically stable. I wished to put aside the efforts of many peers, neighbors, and colleagues with whom I shared the topic of this study. Many of them wanted me to ask and get answers to such questions as "why don’t poor people work?", "why do poor people stay on welfare?", "do they cheat welfare?", "do they make lots of money on the side?" - and the like. The quote for example is the view representative of many non poor people:

Is there or is there not a law forbidding the theft of shopping carts? Yes or no? Why is it then, that the "homeless" are allowed to steal shopping carts to live out of? Is it legal or is it not? It is not. "Homeless" people are breaking the law, with "politically correct people" allowing it to happen. By default all of the people who allow shopping carts to be stolen are guilty of "aiding and abetting" in the breaking of the law. Does it matter? Well, does it? Do we as citizens, or the police, get to pick and choose which laws to obey and to enforce? Dump the law or dump the carts. Once emptied the shopping carts need to be repaired, washed, disinfected and returned to their rightful owners. Shopping carts cost stores well over $100 each - not including repairs. Guess who pays? (Youte, 1993).

But that was not my purpose. I wanted to see through the eyes of the poor. The method of phenomenography was chosen to understand the insider’s view of grocery-cart-poverty.

Participants

The participants were five individuals who had volunteered to help with the research project. They were selected from the pool of people who had seen a sign at the
hospital and clinic waiting rooms and the welfare department waiting room. Although initially ten people agreed to be interviewed, only five eventually were able to participate due to loss of interest or failure to meet the criteria. Three women and two men were interviewed. Two of the subjects had also been members of focus groups. They were all European-Americans and ranged in age from 28 to 43 years old with the average age being 35.6 years. Three women and two men participated.

**Equipment**

The only equipment used in this phase of the research was the questionnaire itself and an audiotape recorder.

**Procedure**

In order to arrange the interview, volunteers were called by phone, told about the research, and given the opportunity to ask questions about it. They were informed, after agreeing to participate that they would be reimbursed for their time and input. I administered a standardized questionnaire to each volunteer at a counseling facility in central county that was not associated with any county service provider or government agency.

Prior to beginning the interview, each participant was read and given a copy of the informed consent form. Interviews lasted approximately one and one-half hours. The opportunity to drift from the question during and at the end of the interview was built in. In one instance, due to lack
of transportation, I conducted the interview in the participant's home. In all other cases the interviews were conducted at the same local counseling center as the focus groups.

The same screening tool, demographic questionnaire, and consent to participate were used in this phase as were used in Phase II. A copy of the Phase III questionnaire is in Appendix F. Participants were reimbursed $25.00 in cash for their time and contribution.

Data Analysis

After each interview was completed, the tape was transcribed and line numbered. Each participant's life story as told to me was summarized with the framework of the investigation acting as the guide. Additionally, responses to each question were condensed and summarized. Names were changed within the analysis to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Results

The poor people I spoke with do not think of themselves as thieves but as people trying to get by and use available resources. The extreme legalistic position asserted by Mr. Youte reflects the ideas and concerns of many who are financially stable. There is an attitude reflected that poverty costs the non-poor, more than it costs the poor. It is an instance of "blaming the victim" which is more frightening to many I spoke with than the poverty itself.
They fear violence and hatred against them. They fear living in the streets without protection.

**Life Stories**

**Loretta.** Loretta, lives with her 15 year old daughter now and a friend she has known for years. They decided to become roommates a year ago when both were homeless and living on the streets. Loretta is in recovery and finds her life centered around her 12 step work. At age 35, Loretta has seen it all. Her family of origin had nothing. She and her siblings were brutally abused by a stepfather. Her mother spent her growing up years in an alcoholic black out. Loretta raised her siblings. Often she would not go to school in order to care for her family. Sometimes she stole to feed them.

She was literally picked up off the streets of Seattle some years ago by a woman who taught her about self-esteem, alcoholism, and recovery. Right now she is disabled, though she is not receiving disability income. She has a ruptured disk in her neck and the pain she is in is palatable. Her health care has been inconsistent to non-existent. She moved recently to this county where there is a public health system which will serve her medical needs. She faces surgery to repair the ruptured disk. She is unable to work and is trying to receive AFDC for herself and her daughter who just moved here from another state. The daughter had been living with her father because Loretta was unable to
support her.

Loretta feels that counseling saved her life. More than other services to which welfare can link people, she believes that poor people need counseling to vent and talk about all the emotional pain, to learn about other ways to do things, to receive guidance that they did not get as children. She recounts for me the recent case of the desperate divorced man who jumped off the Golden Gate bridge with his three year old child. "... not a whole lot was known about him other than he was alone and his head was probably killing him and inside his heart and guts was just killing him and he suppressed it so good to the point that nobody knew ... ."

Loretta keeps going despite the pain and the poverty because of her support from and commitment to AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). Her neck pain is almost metaphorical for the weight of others' problems that she carries on her shoulders. She talks about taking the time to talk to street people and beggars, who may be mentally ill and talking to themselves on the street. She tries to give them the time of day. She is overwhelmed with disgust, disbelief, and fear about the recent burning of an old street person in the area by a group of young punks. She is very fearful of losing her place to live and being back on the streets at this time. She continues to live with the roommate who has become increasingly dependent on
prescription drugs because she is torn between her belief in
helping others and her fear of being alone and destitute.
She seems to me to be an example of someone who is able to
find little ways to ignore her own pain in order to respond
to the pain of others. She is angry at society for not
caring or doing enough, yet at the same time she is a strong
believer in taking responsibility for your own life and
doing your own foot work once you've been shown the way.

Mary. Mary is 31 years old, but she looks ten years older. Her long brown hair hangs loosely off her shoulders, her eyes sparkle with warmth and she exudes enthusiasm. She has two children, a ten year old girl and a five year old son. She grew up in California, as the middle child of five. Mary readily discussed the fact that as a child her family was dysfunctional, her father and mother were divorced when she was young and she recalls physical fights and alcoholism. She also disclosed that she was molested as a child by her mother's boyfriend. Child molestation for her is at the top of her list of immoral behaviors.

As a teen she was quite rebellious and she left home after dropping out of high school. She spent her late teens on the streets, doing drugs and "ripping and running". Her first husband was a batterer and she was badly hurt by him on many occasions. She stayed with him longer that she wanted to, but finally left after one incident in which he broke her nose with his fist, kicked her out of the house.
and took the children to his mother's, where the mother-in-law tried to prevent her from seeing them.

That experience became the beginning of change for her. She stopped using drugs, moved in with her own mother, obtained legal assistance, and had her children returned to her. She has been clean and sober now for five years. With the help of her mother, to whom she is now very close, and her welfare check she is able to raise her children and has returned to school. Her goal is the completion of a business and office computer training course at the local Adult Education school so that she can be employed and self-sufficient financially.

Mary says that although she has been a fighter and scraper all her life, her main way of staying on top of her life is her humor. When the kids are sick or cranky, she makes them laugh; when she thinks about being bitter about the past, she revives her sense of joy and gratitude for what she has. Mary is also quite cynical. She doesn't hold out much hope that poverty will ever end. The best that can happen according to Mary is that some poor people will trade places with some rich people. She does not think that all poor people are deserving. She strongly believes that many are using the system or preying on people's sympathy by panhandling. She believes panhandlers make about $1000.00 a week and she resents it. On the other hand, she feels strongly that AFDC should be a large enough grant, with
built in education, training, and child care so that "... they put those women to school, get them ready to graduate ... then put them to work, even if for the county."

From the time she was little she remembers not having enough. Even now, most months she goes hungry at the end of it until the AFDC check comes, in order that her children and mother can eat. On good months, she is able to earn a little cash doing babysitting for a neighbor's child. That extra money, about $18 a week, keeps the family going. After rent is paid and the groceries for the month are purchased, there is no more money. Mary looks forward to the day when she'll finish school and have a job. She doesn't want to become an unfeeling "rich" person who forgets how to love and to care.

Even though she would love to be able to take her kids to Disneyland "before they're 35" and she often gets sick and tired of not having enough, she is able to cope by acting as if all is well. "I fake it, I fake it a lot, I lie to myself...." She is able to remember her own values of simplicity and necessity. She teaches her children that they aren't lacking for anything just because they are in last year's clothes. Additionally, she says that, "I go to sleep at night dreaming, "well tomorrow is going to be better."

Mary says that her family is everything to her. She also admits to being the adult in the neighborhood who all
the kids come to when they have to talk, "... I’m sort of the one they all come to ... all those kids around the apartment, they all come to me." Sometimes she wishes desperately for some solitude.

Mary, of all the people with whom I spoke, was unique in having a case worker who she did not feel belittled by and who she felt supported her and her efforts to use welfare to become educated and self sufficient. She definitely thinks that case workers have a role in helping people be aware of and gain access to resources.

Mary relies on her humor as a source of inner strength and her philosophy of life. "Just keep the humor ... just keep going, when you fall down, just keep getting up." Humor and her belief in god keep her going. She sums the interview this way.

"I think I’m the same as I was when I was a kid, its just that I think I’ve grown up and I’m in a woman’s body instead of a child’s now ... there is nothing that I can say that I’ve developed ... I’m still the same basic person I was when my brother stole my bike to make a bigger bike for himself, and I went home crying. I’ve learned to use what I’ve had all along to try and make myself better."

Roger. Roger and his wife invite me to their home for the interview and we sit around the kitchen table. The children, two school age girls, nine and seven, and a five year old son, are quietly watching Saturday morning
cartoons. Two older children live with his first wife in another state.

Roger, now 40 years old, grew up in the south, one of five children. His father drank while his mother "catered to his every want and need." He and his brothers and sisters were alternately beaten and ignored. There was no money and he learned how to survive. He had become an alcoholic by the age of seventeen.

Roger is a musician by avocation who spends time writing songs in the folk and ballad genre, when he is not looking for work, chopping wood, doing laundry, preparing meals, or helping with homework. His wife and he are taking turns with educational programs. His wife currently is in an RN program at the local community college. He is a Vietnam veteran whose addiction to alcohol and heroine worsened during his tour of duty. Now clean and sober 12 years, he is strongly committed to his recovery and to assuring that he does not extend into his children's generation the family history of alcoholism and dysfunction. He has decided that for him to remain sane, he must cut off ties with his parents because they have come too close to abusing his kids the way they did himself and his four siblings.

Although Roger lives on food stamps and Goodwill stores, he admits to times in the past when his pride let him feel shame. Now, he tries to help other poor people to
feel "... it's okay, you know, if you don't live on the hill, it's okay if you don't drive a new car, it's okay, you know. Are you okay? Are you off drugs? Are you off alcohol? Are you okay? That's all that matters."

Roger who was cut off from his family of origin because of their dysfunction and who lost his first family of creation because of his own - now is totally immersed in his present family. He places them above all else and is able to mentally, emotionally, and physically handle all the stresses of his present life, primarily financial ones, because of the closeness and love he and his wife have for each other and their children. To Roger it is more important to stay home with the children, while his wife is in the community college nursing program, than to try and work umpteen unskilled jobs and have no contact with the family and worse still have no fulltime parent in the home.

Roger feels blessed now and that he has gained perspective on his life. "I really appreciate that more than anything else because it has made me the person I am. It's made my values, my morals, and who I am. My whole make up is from my past, and even though it was so terrible, I was one of the fortunate ones ... knowing what I did not want to be, as opposed to what I was."

Dave. I began each interview with the request to have the person share their ideas and experiences with me. I also mention that often poor people are characterized as
"lazy, crazy, criminal, drug addicts, and alcoholics". Dave kind of chuckled when I said this and responded that it was true, that's how people deal with poverty. Dave is one of the most honest people you could meet. He is gritty and spunky. He asks no pity and he makes no apologies. If you were stereotyping - and getting to know Dave is a good reason to refrain from the temptation - he would fill the role of a red-neck, alcoholic, tattooed, wife beating, kid beating, animal shooting, tobacco chomping, loud mouthed, biker boy. He has done all of those behaviors. But Dave is more. He is sensitive, curious, interested. He responded to my sign because he figured he had something to offer since he'd been poor all his life. He also was curious and he likes to talk. At 43, he is aging out from a life of "drinking" and "drugging". He's glad to be settled down with his wife of seven years by common-law and her 15 year old son. He's never found steady work. But he finds jobs when he can. He relaxes when he can by going to the woods hunting and fishing with some buddies. He gave up drinking several years ago and is ever grateful for his wife who helped him do it.

When he talks about his worst fears, he says it's not knowing if you can pay your bills but having to tell your kid "'no', that's got to be the hardest, especially if they're real little. The bigger ones, they can half way understand and cope, but when you get them like two and
three and four and they don't understand, then it's real hard."

Dave has been married three times and has five kids. He tries to stay in touch with them by mail or phone. He sends gifts once in awhile. The family he has now is working for him and he's very grateful. He has even reconciled with his parents after many years estrangement and they help each other out between checks. Through hard experiences, including a tour in Vietnam, Dave has come to believe that "freedoms are important because that's what makes the whole country run and your family, you got to protect your family because family has to stick together because who's going to get help if your family don't, cause that's what it's about is helping each other and sticking together."

Terry. "I am not old, but my eyes have seen so much that I have to wonder - does any one else see what I see? Does anyone even look? If everyone's eyes were like mine things just couldn't have gone so wrong." Terry is 28 years old and she writes this for our interview. It's a paragraph in a five page, handwritten essay she entitled "America's Suicide". She wonders if I think she could have it published somewhere. She is so happy to have the chance to talk and the catalyst to write about her life and her concerns.

Terry is a single parent, raising two children. She
tried working and found after all her expenses, including
day care she was $1400 in debt after the first year and
someone less loving and caring was raising her kids. Now
she prefers welfare and section eight housing to the
insanity of when she worked.

Terry grapples with society’s judgement against her and
others like her. She tries to understand its point of view.
She wishes people would understand her. Compassion, being
her main value, her core of inner strength, is something she
wishes others had. Her best lifelong friend recently
abandoned her to a new relationship with a man who Terry
describes as having everything, including self-confidence
given him since he was a child. He is unable and unwilling
to see where Terry is coming from. "... people don’t see
that so many kids don’t get what they need and it didn’t
just start with my generation, it started with my mom’s
generation or before..."

She, like the others with whom I spoke, is devoted to
her children. Her greatest fear is that with so much
emphasis on her poor finances and her struggle to make ends
meet and put food on the table that they will learn that
"... money is the most important thing in life ...." She
doesn’t want to be rich because she fears richness would
result in her loosing her compassion.

Terry is a former drug and alcohol abuser. Her mother
was an alcoholic and she raised her siblings, while her
mother drank. Coming out of her teen years, Terry was able to see the pattern she was re-enacting and she found help at just the right time and was able to stop her own pattern toward addiction. If there is one thing Terry could teach to a class of social workers it would be that "... there is just a lot of hurt, the hurt is everywhere...how could those people be coping with life at all, how can they be alive after all of that ... everyone should show more compassion for each other."

**Summaries**

The questionnaire was also used to condense categories. Summaries were constructed based on certain epistemic categories which emerged from this portion of the investigation.

**Stress and Coping.** In the first two questions of the interview, I wanted to define the parameters of stress and coping. The first question was a request for people to list or describe their main stressors, and what they did to cope. The second was gauged to elicit information about what specific human and material resources were most significant for them.

Most of those interviewed mentioned the lack of money as their number one stressor, because of their inability to make ends meet or to predict which of each month’s bills could be paid. Additionally, they never knew if small cash jobs would be available when emergencies or children’s needs
would come up. Several elongated their answers to include the fear of being homeless, living on the street, or in their cars. For some this was a reality they only recently got out of. Living on the street was a matter of extreme fear for their safety and that of their children - fear of violence, and public anger. One woman mentioned the recent immolation in San Francisco of a homeless man. Another woman said that not money per se, but lack of education or ability to get ahead into a job that would support herself and her children acted as her main stressor. She feels better able to cope with her lack of income than with her sense of no way out.

Coping strategies varied from person to person but included comfort in the knowledge of ones family's love for them. Family mutual support was stated by 80% of the interviewees as a major factor for coping. Other more cognitive strategies, like having a fantasy life about future possibilities were also mentioned. One woman stated that you "fake it 'til you make it". She also acknowledges her fears rather than stuffing them. These to cognitive strategies have helped her cope. One man said he always tried always to maintain a sense of faith that something will come through each month.

Social strategies include what one woman expressed as making a point to be around people who have been or who are going through it, i.e. poverty - and who therefore do not
condemn. Additionally, people expressed the reality that talking about fear and hopelessness to family and friends was very helpful in the process of coping. Most people also had friends who were able to help them out with food or recreational things for their kids every once in awhile. Perhaps coping is best summed up, as one participant did, "take one day at a time."

**Survival Resources.** My next question was what were the resources, material and human, which were most critical to survival, the things which if they didn't have would prevent them from being able to survive. Resources people mentioned were material, social, and intrapersonal. The material resources included welfare and HUD housing, agencies which provided food, clothing, and extras for the poor at holiday time, like the Salvation Army and the local fire station.

Social resources included family members and close friends and 12 step meetings, provided the key to emotional equilibrium. Having someone with whom to share the difficulties, to talk to, and to help out seemed to be valued in a different way than all the others. It seemed that they could survive being on the street or living in a car - in other words even less stable than they currently were - if they had family or friends who cared and stood by them.

**Feelings, Experiences, and Values.** I asked a series of questions to understand better a range of feelings,
experiences, and values such as what things most frighten people and what things were most appreciated by them: (a) what things did they feel were worth taking a risk or dying for; (b) what did they judge to be immoral; (c) what was experienced as fun or funny; and (d) what about their lives would they not change even if they could.

To the first part, participants were most frightened not being able to provide for their children because of the unpredictability of income and the harsh reality of having to say no to their kids. Secondly, they feared the upsurge of violence on the streets. Those without close family ties, who were more socially isolated fell, into the second group.

People most appreciated the challenges and privations of their lives which caused them to grow and develop. Everyone I spoke with for example, mentioned their own history with chemical dependence and achieving a clean and sober life while being able to appreciate what they went through to get where they were today. "Love is everything," said Roger. "I am what I did not want to happen to me as a child, not what did happen to me." In other words, he learned from his own abuse how to be a good parent and not repeat the abuse in his generation.

Other values which people mentioned were nature - trees, rocks, walks in the woods; children - their own and others' - for their innocence; love for music; and their
families. "I most appreciate my wife, because she stopped me from drinking and drugging," said Dave, who also appreciates the great outdoors and the chance to go fishing and hunting to get away from it all.

With regard to morality and risk taking, people mentioned family as well as beliefs in freedom. Both the men I interviewed were Vietnam veterans. Both said they would not again fight in a war like Vietnam, where our country was not at stake and there was no risk of loss of freedoms. They would only risk war again if the country were attacked. For now, the risks would be for immediate family and to protect one's children.

Notions of morality and immorality also centered around belief in family, especially the thought of hurting or molesting children. The idea of hypocrisy, dishonesty, greed, and taking from someone else what doesn't belong to you were also mentioned. There was also some concern about the level of violence in the society and the increasing sense that people are immorally turning away from people in need. A corollary to turning away from people in need which was mentioned, was the general agreement that theft of food for children or even prostitution to support one's family, is not immoral.

Being able to laugh and laugh even at oneself, enjoying the simple pleasures of life like joking with and being with one's kids, going to a movie now and again; watching Bart
Simpson as a family "... let's us laugh a lot," said Roger, and "Ross Perot is a real hoot." Singing and playing the guitar were mentioned. Finding clean and sober fun and dances through AA is difficult, but an important part of life. Loretta said that "learning to laugh at myself and not take things too seriously" was an important lesson for her.

During the course of the interviews, it became apparent to me, that people living in poverty, like people not living in poverty, have psychological and habituated attachments to their reality. They were certain things about themselves and their reality they do not wish to change. For example, the sense of self as more loving and more skilled at basic survival, than middle class or rich people. These were self-concepts of which people were proud.

**The Good Things in Life.** The next question I posed was designed to discover if there are some things about their lives that they do not want to change. The matter of attachment to and pride in their values was seen as incompatible with being rich. Using and desiring only what they need and having compassion were examples of values which were dependent on being poor. A belief that greed and richness are connected and greed was rejected. Other spiritual values that were mentioned included compassion and the ability to care for and help others. These values were experienced as generated out of their own pain and struggle
and therefore not available to rich people who they saw as experiencing little pain.

Others mentioned the specifics of their sometimes abusive childhoods and dysfunctional families as arenas for their subsequent development of strength of character and the willingness and ability to do the opposite of what was done to them - including being a strong and non-abusive role model and parent to their own children, reaching out to others in needs instead of being told to stay within the confines of the family. Others mentioned their family of creation, their children and the many satisfying aspects of their lives like access to the great outdoors, freedom to be oneself. As Terry said "... as much as it is bad, its still good ... I'm satisfied, I'm comfortable."

**Typical Day.** I was interested in a description of a typical day. Did people do nothing or do something? For people who work, the day is organized around the hours of work, preparation for work, and travel to and from work. The remaining hours of the day seem to be about recuperating from work. What are some of the differences and similarities between working people and non working poor people?

It seems that everyone I spoke with established an organizing event around which their day revolved. For most it was getting the children up and ready for school and transporting them to school. The hours in between were used
for a variety of smaller or less central tasks such as cleaning, studying, reading, cooking, song writing, relaxing in front of the TV. For others, who attend adult school or who have the chance to earn a few dollars chopping wood or loading or who are looking for work, the central adult task takes place inside the time frame constructed by the school day.

Evenings are reserved for the family, doing homework with the kids, eating dinner, watching TV, maybe playing a game - then off to bed. Even when home is a homeless shelter, the cadence of the day is maintained around children's school first, with adult activity nested within the hours of school. Recuperative and family unity time follows.

**Families.** Several questions were asked throughout the interviews, which were designed to help me understand the complexity of feelings and realities about family life. The referent for family that the participant’s use is always the children and secondarily the adult partner, if there is one. If the partner is also the natural parent of the children, then family refers to the nuclear unit. Family of origin is seldom acknowledged as a primary attachment group. Often for those with whom I spoke, parents and siblings occupy a distant and sometimes estranged position within their current life situation. Many describe their family of origin as dysfunctional, abusive, and/or alcoholic. Many I
spoke with had been "parentified" as children to care for their parents and siblings while being abused themselves. About half the people I interviewed had come to terms with their parents and maintained some modicum of relationship. The other half felt as though they could not see their families without risking too much psychological pain. At the same time, they feel they have been able to detach sufficiently to live autonomous and healthy lives.

Many of those with whom I spoke had multiple, serial marriages or relationships. For the men, their children were living in several families with their mothers and often they had little contact with them. They experienced pain and sadness about this but knew of no way around it. Their children were often in other parts of the country. Though they felt some concern about their inability to support their children financially, they tried to keep in touch with them by sending gifts or making phone calls during the holidays. Some held out hope that sometime in the future they would have a chance to meet and get to know their children. Dave expressed his fantasy that one day his son would come to the door, introduce himself, and punch him in the jaw for leaving him. Then he, Dave, would punch him back and they would go drink beer together and get to know each other.

The greatest positive family life factor for all the respondents was the extent to which family members help each
other out, not financially but emotionally - listening, being able to get things off one's chest, advice giving, helping through thick and thin, (even when they had been strung out on drugs), letting them be honest with their feelings, "helping each other along." On the other hand, violence, alcoholism and drug addiction, over-dependence and failure to allow for privacy, and lack of understanding or acceptance of one's feelings and needs were the negative and hindering factors of family life and relationships. These negative qualities of family were largely ascribed to the family of origin or as reasons for failed relationships; but not to the current family constellation.

Solutions. Another set of questions was asked to elicit the thoughts of respondents about how society thinks of the poor, and what solutions and policies they would develop or implement if they had the power. To the first part, Roger gave the most graphic of responses, "I think society in general looks at the poor and the homeless like a person would look at a person if they had something coming out of their nose," indicating both disgust and denial by turning away. Society thinks poverty is a problem of individuals but, Roger thinks that poverty is a problem of society. For him there are only two classes - rich and poor. The middle class is a myth because if two parents must work to support the family then children have been robbed of a parent.
Terry agreed that basically society feels poor people are lazy and unmotivated, that poverty is an individual problem. Like Roger's metaphor of the "runny nose" she believes poverty is something people wish to ignore, "sweep under the carpet". She tries to have empathy for those who put the poor down but mostly she sees them as greedy and unwilling to have compassion for the many poor who are out on the street, maybe using drugs, who are unable to cope.

The experience of being treated cruelly, physically and verbally abused is compounded when they are downgraded and treated like a nuisance. "Not even the meanest animal on this earth should be treated that way ...", said Loretta, referring to a rash of violence against homeless panhandlers in the area.

It seems that being ignored, as if there is a mass social denial of the problem, and being actively vilified are two primary ways the participants in the study felt the poor are treated by society. "The media wants to talk, make 'little gestures' for the homeless and at Christmas time provide turkey dinners - throw a bone - but no one wants to do anything about it" says Dave.

Mary however, held a unique view that many of the homeless were so by choice and in fact made thousands of dollars panhandling. She believed that people drive by and give them money all day long. She believed there were two categories of poor people - those who wanted to be homeless
and panhandle for lots of money, and those, like herself who lived more conventional lives, used the available public resources, went to school, raised their kids, and tried to get ahead.

I asked the solutions question in several different ways. I asked the participants to say what they would propose if they were on a commission to solve the problem of poverty. I asked them to imagine that they were teaching a class for social workers and others in the helping professions. A wide range of solutions were suggested. They reflected the findings of Ellwood (1988) i.e., that poverty is caused by a lack of well paying jobs, a dearth of affordable housing, and inadequate educational resources to prepare people for the occupational market.

Solutions that were suggested included providing more of each - jobs, housing, and education - through totally reconstructing the economy in how money is allotted and where money goes. Roger spelled that out in more detail by suggesting that government priorities needed to change so that budget dollars went to housing and education. He felt that training programs and government purchased property could be used for the homeless to build housing for themselves. To fund these programs, people felt that the salaries and benefits of people at the top could be cut as a first step.

Another set of solutions was around the notion of
increasing domestic production, "make and buy American," said Dave. "Use schools to inspire and teach people to be more productive and to have more self respect." Even as people spoke of and generated solution oriented ideas, they also voiced a concealed belief that perhaps there was no solution, that poverty would always be around. Mary thought that the world was composed of underdogs and "overdogs". Overdogs had three jobs for every one of the underdogs. But the best that she imagined possible was that they might trade places, not that poverty would be eliminated. She believes that people are basically greedy.

As teachers, the main message to get across to helpers is respect. "Treat us with respect and dignity. Don't beat us up for being poor, we're not here by choice," said Loretta. For almost everyone, the enduring experience of the welfare system is one in which helpers do not want to help. Some felt they are treated like cattle. "Because they know you got to have what they got ... they can reject or accept you," said Dave. The re-education of social workers would involve asking them to "do unto others as they would want to have done to them. Teach them to talk to us and give us feedback," Loretta said. She understood that many of them were over worked and under paid, had a lot of job stress and many did the best they could, but still they needed to "...stop a minute and realize" that I don't have a job.
Participants expressed the notion that they are good people and willing to work as hard as anyone if given the chance. Terry said she wanted to teach them compassion and to be less judgmental. "There's a lot of healing that needs to be done all over, so much incredible hurt, it's hard to imagine how people cope at all," she said.

Roger thought that if the social worker could stand on the other side of the counter, and look at the world from his perspective then she or he would do a better job of serving. He said "I'm at your office for help, to try to make it. If you don't like your job, get another."

A final aspect to the "curriculum" which was expressed was that workers should not get discouraged or upset with "us". Realize that it's not us but the system that is the problem. We need to change and improve the system - more jobs, counseling, grants for school. Help them to "... see the qualities in people that they can't see in themselves ...," said Loretta.

**Unconventional Coping.** Another series of questions was designed to try to understand the unconventional ways that the poor sometimes deal with the reality of poverty and its many associated stressors. Two of the mechanisms, often mentioned by the media, referred to by the participants were (a) substance abuse and (b) use of an alternate economy for procurement of goods and services.

Everyone with whom I spoke had a history of substantial
alcohol or other drug abuse. All of them are now in a recovery process. They willingly discussed the role chemical substances have played in their lives. They stated that substance use did not solve the problems they hoped they would when they first started using. Eventually the abuse of substances created more problems.

Roger for example, grew up in an alcoholic family, was brutally abused as were his five siblings and mother. He described his mother as a great co-dependent, who failed to protect the children because she was so fearful of his father. He himself began drinking in his early teens and when he was drafted for the Vietnam war and spent time in combat there, he became addicted to heroine and marijuana as well. On his return from Vietnam he married, had several children, and continued to abuse alcohol and drugs. He eventually slid into a totally dysfunctional life style, and lost his family life and his job. Eventually he made it into a treatment program, was able to see the connection between his childhood and his current behavior, and after much hard work was able to establish a solid recovery for many years.

Roger's story is typical of the others' in four ways: (a) an alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional family life in their childhoods, (b) large parts of their adolescence and early adult years were spent under the influence of a wide range of mood altering chemicals, (c) a realization, at some
point, that their lives were unmanageable because of the chemicals, or that the chemicals were not helping them to make life manageable in the way they once had, and (d) a commitment to stop using with or without formal help.

Dave's story is typical of the use of the alternate economy. He lives with his common law wife of seven years and her 15 year old son, who he takes as his own. They are both unskilled laborers. She is on AFDC, which is insufficient for her to rent a two bedroom apartment for herself and her son much less pay other expenses such as food, clothing, transportation, and any niceties. By pooling their meager resources, Dave's family is able to skimp by. He works about when he can and seasonally, at unskilled construction jobs and is able to contribute to the household as well as send occasional gifts to his five children from three former marriages. His wife also occasionally is able to do some babysitting for extra cash at the end of the month, or when birthdays or holidays come up. For this couple, the dilemma of living in legal "sin", the risk of exposure and criminal consequences are minor, when weighed against the illogic of the alternative. She would have to live on the street or in a shelter with her child. He would get general assistance and live on the street or in a rooming house. They would forego the nurture, predictability, and stability of family life. The son would bond with no male figure and spend increasing time
away from the influence of stable adults.

On the surface level, this couple appears to flaunt and defy mainstream values; but on the deeper level they seek to replicate it by whatever means they can. Dave’s story elements, which are mirrored by the others with whom I spoke are: (a) an unstable and insignificant income, (b) a stable relationship with one or more people, (c) the other person(s) also have unstable or insufficient income, (d) a strong commitment to providing a stable environment for themselves and their children, and (e) a value decision to ignore certain values in law in order to support a higher value.

**Meanings.** The final set of questions was developed to elucidate the internal processes of thought, belief, and spirituality which people use, or not, to make sense of their world, keep themselves motivated, and help them have hope for the future. The focus group participants frequently referred to these aspects of their lives and I wanted to understand more richly their genesis and their composition through the individual interviews.

Many people mentioned that they rely on their sense of humor for inner strength, while others stated that using common sense and relying on their compassion and faith is what helps them in their darkest times and gives meaning to their lives. Except for Dave, the participants relied heavily on their spirituality and belief in God as a source
for strength. Though few are involved in a religion, they do pray, meditate, read the Bible, or engage in small internal or family oriented rituals of belief.

Dave indicated that he is rather cynical about God thinking that "... God gives one person the looks, the money, and the power while the other guy gets the ability to do the work so the first one can get rich." But he does not get discouraged by this, instead he has developed a philosophy of life based on the meaning of loss. For him, nothing is going to turn out right anyway, so he doesn't set expectations and he doesn't get bitter or angry or disappointed.

There was a great deal of individuality in formulating meanings or guiding philosophies of life. They covered a gamut of emotional and cognitive experience that seemed to summate for each of the interviewees the things they had already expressed about themselves, their resources, their coping strategies, and their strengths. For Mary, the theme was persistence stated as "... keep the humor and when you feel down and like quitting, just keep going, keep getting up. For Loretta, it was a matter of being independent and responsible, able to "... start with yourself if you want to get help. You have to do the foot work." Terry found her meaning of life in looking outward to others with a spiritual dimension "... and involves love, respect, and healing of people." Meaning is found in "... not so much
how you love someone, but how much you are loved." If you are loved, then it means you are a good and caring person, said Roger.

Love for others, persistence, hard work, self sufficiency, compassion, humor, honesty, and respect were the primary values and needs that people have. They also represented the values and strengths that they try to live by everyday. The means used to express the values and the resources available for demonstrating the strengths may be at odds with mainstream methods. However, the inner meanings which seem to motivate behavior and thinking seem to mirror that of the mainstream culture.
CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Adhering to the six bias controls built into the structure of the research design - segmentation of researcher's epistemology from that of participants, maintaining accuracy, using experts, relying on the clarity of the report, limiting and clarifying the operating assumptions, and getting feedback from the participants - I was able to provide, with some qualifications, through the voices of the participants, evidence for the assumptions which framed the study.

Summary

The strengths and adaptive qualities discovered through the series of ethnographic observations and interviews were found to be uniquely developed within the context of people's struggle to survive despite poverty. The traits described counterbalanced the traits which social scientists often use to describe poor people such as helpless, hopeless, negative, aggressive, alienated, hostile, with poorly formed egos, and a host of maladaptive traits that are intractable to change. While persistence, spirituality, resourcefulness, patience, loyalty, and honesty are not the sole characteristics of any one group or type of individual,
they are constructed in unique ways and under conditions of extreme stress and unpredictability by poor people. The participants described themselves in such a way that they manifested their flexibility, healthy detachment, ability to deal with paradox, willingness to assert themselves in matters of risk, and ability to judge appropriately when to be assertive.

Their constructive use of anger, their devotion to family and children, their ability to search for hope and meaning, their struggle to maintain egalitarianism, their willingness to express the positive outcomes from their lives of struggle such as love and compassion, together provided a basis for countering the depressive and paralyzing effect of the "culture of poverty" misnomer.

Findings

The study generated a number of findings which are traceable to the spoken words of the participants in Phases I and II.

1. Participants expressed ideas that seemed to be uniquely formed on the basis of their economic reality. These ideas included: (a) the sense that they (poor people) love more and have a greater and more satisfying emotional life, than do rich people; (b) that poor people have greater durability and ability to survive (in poverty) than do rich people; and (c) that the reason for one's homelessness, whether because of an earthquake or unemployment, is not a
matter of personal character but of chance.

2. These ideas appeared to have a strong affective component. The affective component seemed to link people to pride and self-esteem and the ability to self comfort so as to persist, resist feelings of shame and incompetence, and counter hopelessness and despair.

3. Participants expressed the fact that they were able to use the pain of their childhoods and more recent past to develop counter behaviors in their own lives and for their children. They were quite insightful about the effect of childhood abuse, neglect, and family alcoholism on their own adulthood. They reported that they were able to use their own pain and insight to change the generational pattern.

4. Participants revealed themselves as multi-dimensional – cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally. They disclosed pride, self-esteem, and self-confidence in who they were, precisely because of their pain and struggles. In some cases people were grateful for their past pain because it made them better people.

5. People in the study saw themselves as hard working whether they were seeking resources, caring for children and other family members, going to school, or giving a hand to people in even worse circumstances than themselves. They did not buy into the notion of poor people as welfare cheats or lazy. They challenged someone to give them a job that pays enough to have a decent life, and they would be happy
6. People in the study engaged in complex thinking about and discussion of ideas such as anger, silence, resignation, and solutions. They demonstrated an ability and a willingness to tackle difficult issues and to look at complex ideas from a variety of perspectives.

7. The individuals who participated demonstrated a sense of compassion toward others and an ability to take the perspective of others. They were able to reach out to help homeless or hungry street people but they also were willing to befriend affluent persons who had, for example, lost their home in the Oakland hills fire. One woman said she could understand why people who worked for an employer would resent her "living on welfare".

8. People enjoyed the opportunity to talk about themselves in a non judging setting, to explore ideas, to make new contacts, and to learn of new resources. Several group members exchanged names and phone numbers or addresses so they could remain in touch.

9. Setting and meeting goals, attaining education or training, and staying off alcohol and drugs were seen by study participants as the best things people could do to try to keep going. However, not everyone believed that these efforts would be sufficient. Most thought that there needed to be changes in the system if poverty was to be eliminated.

10. Several people thought that counseling was a
critical service that ought to be available through social services. Several had been in counseling and reported that it played a critical role in their survival - by getting them off the street, away from alcohol and other drugs, or help with depressive or suicidal ideas.

11. There was a great deal of resentment on the part of those in the study toward the system of social services and the helpers in that system. With some few exceptions, most participants believed that most social workers do not wish to help but prefer to humiliate, withhold, and aggravate the lives of the poor.

12. There was a general shared belief system that certain of society's expectations and mores could be ethically and practically suspended in order to promote economic survival, especially where children were concerned. There was a shared belief that no one who criticizes the means poor people use to survive, would volunteer to live with as few resources as they do.

13. Nearly all of the participants stated they relied on a deep inner life of meditation, solitude, or spirituality. Some defined it in terms of religion, others in their relationship to nature, others to shared ritual.

14. Humor is used by many of the participants as a significant internal coping resource.

15. Certain ideas about the worth and meaning of life seemed to transcend the all too concrete and dismal reality
of day to day life. These transcendent qualities seemed also to play a role in shaping and guiding behavior and thinking. Several of the respondents, for example, indicated they would not trade their lives, precisely because it made them who they are today — loving, competent, functioning, clean and sober, compassionate, caring, and unpretentious.

The findings were read by two of the participants both of whom reported that the content, with one exception, fairly represented their experience and their memory of what others in their groups had said. One women took the opportunity to disagree with the idea that poor people love more than rich people. She believed that to be a false claim.

**Limitations**

As important as these findings may be, transferability to individuals other than those in the study and to areas other than Contra Costa County, California must be made with caution. Additionally, other limits listed below suggest the need for further research of a replicative nature to assert that these findings are transferable to a significant proportion of people marginalized in poverty.

1. There were only 12 participants in addition to those who were observed in Phase I. Similarly repeated narrations are the rule of thumb for sample size in qualitative designs (Stone, 1991b; Rudestam & Newton, 1992).
Nevertheless, there were sufficient differences in perspective among participants about certain issues, that further investigation might provide further elucidation. These areas include role of spirituality, relationship to other poor people, and relationship to the social service system.

2. The focus group participants of African American heritage were not interviewed by an African American but by myself, a Caucasian woman. Cultural competency literature suggests that people from oppressed communities are more comfortable with self disclosure when interviewed by someone of their same racial or ethnic group (Mason, 1994, May; Boyd-Franklin, 1989). Similarly, the male participants may have felt less free to disclose honestly.

My perception that this was not the case, and the fact that one of the post hoc readers was an African American women, does not rule out the possibility that inhibiting factors were playing a role in the focus groups.

4. No trained experts were used to achieve rater agreement in the data analysis of Phases II and III. Including this as a design control feature may have improved the credibility of the document.

5. I maintained a distinct bias toward seeking only the positive characteristics in the pursuit of the epistemological questioning and analysis. While this was a stated purpose of the study, it obviously limits the
findings.

**Comparison to Current Literature**

Psychology has had a profound influence on the description, assessment of, and intervention with individuals in areas of assessment, diagnosis, and counseling. Counselors rely on their internal processes of valuing, meaning making, and referring to theory during the counseling process to inform and guide their understanding of clients and their intervention strategies (Caspar, 1990; Hill, 1992). They also utilize standardized measures like the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (WAIS-R) as part of their client assessment (Walsh & Betz, 1985).

The MMPI for the assessment of mental disorders and the WAIS-R for the assessment of intelligence are two of the most widely used assessment instruments for clinical and research purposes (Greene, 1991; Walsh & Betz, 1985).

With regard to the MMPI, few comparisons have been made between individuals based on socioeconomic status (Greene, 1991). However, mental illness is more highly associated with poverty and unstable income and living conditions (B.S. Dohrenwend & B.P. Dohrenwend, 1981; Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958; Kosa, Antonovsky, & Zola, 1969; Lorion & Felner, 1986; Mollica & Milic, 1986). The MMPI, a diagnostic instrument for certain syndromes and clusters of mental disorders, is largely silent on the influence of socioeconomic status on
predictive validity. The newly normed and revised MMPI-2 has been criticized for the relatively high socioeconomic status (SES) and educational attainment of the norm group, despite its proportionally higher frequency of use with lower SES individuals (Caldwell, 1991; Duckworth, 1991). With the possible exceptions of the depression and the hypochondriasis scales, the influence of SES on responses and interpretations is not available (Greene, 1991).

The WAIS-R, on the other hand, has been studied across economic classes and found to predict systematically people's academic achievement based on social class (Banas, 1992; Blau, 1981; Ceci, 1990). With regard to tests of intelligence, based on WAIS-R scores, it is widely conceded that evaluations of persons whose background is not white, middle-class, or western; is a major validity risk (Ceci, 1990; Ogbu, 1988; Walsh & Betz, 1985). Among the 11 subtests of the WAIS-R, information and vocabulary are thought to be especially sensitive to the SES of the test taker (Goldstein & Hersen, 1990). "Taken together ... the traditional ways of indexing intelligence have led to ungenerous views about the capabilities of much of the world's people..." (Ceci, 1990, p. 16). Lower IQ scores are disproportionately earned by low SES students who are in turn disproportionately represented by ethnic minorities. Yet, neither income nor ethnicity adequately accounts for the variance or explains the reason for the gap in between
group scores (Loehlin, Lindsley, & Spuhler, 1975). And few in the field maintain that intelligence is simply what IQ tests measure (Ceci, 1990; Sternberg, 1985).

Likewise, labeling of mental disorder, often on the basis of MMPI/MMPI-2 test scores, has also led to the less than equal treatment of poor persons within the mental health care system (B.S. Dohrenwend & B.P. Dohrenwend, 1981; Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958; Lorion & Felner, 1986; Mollica & Milic, 1986; Yamamoto & Kraft-Goin, 1965). Assessment instruments inevitably reflect the values, world views, and cognitive styles of the middle and upper middle classes to which most psychologists belong.

The notion of culture fairness and test bias have been widely investigated in the past two decades (Chronbach, 1976; Hunter & Schmidt, 1976; Novick & Peterson, 1976; Peterson & Novick, 1976). However, neither prediction issues, language issues, nor experience issues seem large enough concepts to tease out differences in meaning making or epistemology among the values, beliefs, strategies, and attitudes of test developers and those of poor people. The test questions and concepts they are meant to measure are framed through substantially different perspectives and experiences of reality (Ogbu, 1988).

A San Francisco Health Department Commission report of the Women’s Health Advisory Commission (WHAC) (1994) reported that attitudes of superiority and insensitivity to
the financial and job status of patients on the part of health care providers acted as deterrents for many to seek health care (WHAC report, 1994). "Intentionally or not, therapists communicate through their words and behaviors their views about a patient’s appropriateness for treatment. The low SES patient’s awareness about such messages may constitute a preliminary step in a negative self-fulfilling prophecy ... [while] providing the therapist with accurate information about the low SES patient’s needs, lifestyles, and therapeutic concerns produces increased empathy and expressed interest on the therapists part..." (Lorian & Felner, 1986, p. 752).

Implications

Evidence for the assumption that poor people have strengths, coping strategies and uniquely adaptive characteristics were presented. Evidence for an unique epistemology characteristic of a majority of people living in long term poverty was only weakly supported. The third assumption that framed the study, namely that the investigation could inform and enrich the field of counseling psychology, is discussed.

1. Practice implications include: (a) expansion of counselor epistemology to assist in counselor ability to provide reframes, empathic relating, and increased dialogue; (b) inclusion of data in curriculum on cultural competency and cross cultural awareness; (c) and an increased number of
strength based interventions by providers which lead away from victimizing and toward empowerment. This approach could have special impact in the growth of the wellness movement and approach to health care (Sobel, 1994). Likewise, the specific findings can inform the prevention and early intervention strategies that community based programs develop for working with at-risk populations.

Finally, since counseling psychology focuses on the strength model of human interaction and development, these discoveries can be incorporated by counseling psychologists who work with the poor into their own epistemologies.

2. The findings of the investigation can be used to benefit and have long lasting impact on society. Neither politicians nor social planners have effectively addressed the issues that impact the economically marginal. As long as social planners and policy makers rely on research which characterizes the poor as extremely difficult to change, social deviants, pathological, or unmotivated; it is unlikely that new programs will be developed to end poverty. Instead poor people will become increasingly criminalized and institutionalized. Implications for public policy include a transformational restructuring of the larger system - the economic structure, the educational system, the criminal justice system, the housing market, and the medical delivery system through incorporation of the voices of the marginalized people they are in part designed to serve.
3. Theory development. Assumptions which drove this study remain to be further developed and possibly transformed as theory. Theory implications include: (a) development of holistic, empirical evidence for poor people's epistemology as adaptive and unique; (b) expansion of the theories and methods of counseling to include this target population; and (c) clarity about how ethnic and racial group membership uniquely shapes economic adaptation.

4. Research possibilities include: (a) cross cultural replication of design and comparisons between the different homogeneous gender, ethnic, and racial groups; (b) replication in other geographic areas, i.e. rural, urban, and foreign; (c) hypothesis generation of variables which might impact treatment, such as counselor characteristics, interventions, and response modes; (d) inventory and test development incorporating coping strengths of this population; and (e) counseling process research and treatment outcome research based on a dialogical approach to counseling this population.

Discussion

Often society loses sight of the fact that it is not poor people themselves who have volunteered for the options of hunger, homelessness, crime, sickness, pain, emotional distress, frustration, or hopelessness (Freire, 1970; 1972). It is naive to think that one person's reform will produce change in the oppressive system (Freire, 1972).
Psychologists may believe they have a role in social change beyond that of reforming the individual (Haley, 1987). Deficient as we are in a basic understanding of the strengths, meanings, and phenomenal experience of poor people, because it is not well described, psychologists may be fettered by ignorance and lack the ability to engage in the transforming process of therapy with this population. Freire (1972) proposed three developmental stages in the process of using voice for transformation. They parallel those delineated by Belenky, et al. (1986), in women’s process of finding and asserting voice. The first stage is called "magical conforming" by Alschuler (1986). It is characterized by a sense of fatalism "... problems are seen as inevitable, unchangeable facts of existence" (Alschuler, p. 493). Causes are thought of as in the nature of things. Solutions aren’t possible because nothing can change. "Inaction is a form of passive collusion to maintain oppressive situations" (p. 493). In Belenky et al.'s (1986) stages of women’s development, at first women either saw themselves as without mind or voice and dependent on the words and explanations of others for all learning.

Alschuler (1986) calls the second stage "naive reforming" (p. 493). This stage is like Belenky et al.'s (1986) "subjective knowing" (p. 54) in which there is an experience of shame at owning one’s own opinion. Problems are viewed on an individual level and it is naively believed
that solutions lie with individual change in order to lessen the gap between socially prescribed roles, rules, and requirements. When these expectations are not met, people engage in self recrimination or blaming of others (Alschuler, 1986).

The third stage, "critical transforming" (Alschuler, 1986, p. 493) is marked by the emergence and use of critical intellectual processes in naming and describing the rules and roles which create the unequal power (Alschuler, 1986). This stage is the stage of critical dialogue. It parallels Belenky et al.'s (1986) stages of procedural and separate knowing. It is marked by gaining knowledge about the external reality, communicating the knowledge to others, speaking opinions aloud, and engaging in critical dialogue with others.

Counseling psychologists and clients are in these stages together. Counseling psychologists cannot think without the client or research participant or for the client or research participant, but only with the client or research participant, beginning with their themes and their voices (Alschuler, 1986). Only when both counselors and poor people engage in the critical dialogue stage together, can true systemic change begin to occur.

Many psychologists are caught between the two sides of the economic analysis. We think as structuralists but often behave in our work as personalists, not as victim blamers
usually, but as victim helpers, or what Freire (1972) might refer to as reformers. This dissertation is in part an attempt to find common ground between the two points of view and to redefine the parameters of our knowledge and our practice, whether as therapists, teachers, researchers, diagnosticians, or ethicists. The inquiry into the strengths and meanings of the poor is crucial to endeavors of social policy, therapy, science, epistemology, and culture.
APPENDIX A

SIGN
NEEDED:

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

* IF YOU HAVE BEEN POOR (ON WELFARE) SINCE YOU WERE A CHILD

* IF YOU LIKE TO TALK ABOUT YOURSELF

* IF YOU ARE 25 - 45 YEARS OLD

* IF YOU WANT TO HELP

PLEASE FILL OUT A CARD AND DROP IT IN THE ENVELOPE

thanks, Robyn Draper, a psychology student
APPENDIX B

VOLUNTEER SCREENING
DATE: ____________________________

NAME: ____________________________ AGE: ____________________________

PHONE: ____________________________ MESSAGE PHONE: ____________________________

BEST TIME TO CALL _____________. CAN I LEAVE A MESSAGE ______? 

Where did you see the notice: ____________________________?

Briefly describe your reason for volunteering
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Can you tell me a little about yourself and your experience living in poverty?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

volunteer seems good (date of meeting)

Not appropriate, thanks for your time

TRACKING NOTES:
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
Robyn Draper-Praetz, a Counseling Psychology PhD student is conducting this research and has asked me to participate.

She has explained that the purpose of the research is to explore with me and the other participants what it means to be poor in this county and to discuss our thoughts and feelings about our experience with poverty.

She has explained that she will tape/video tape our discussions and analyze our comments for the purpose of describing the strengths, attitudes, values, adaptive behaviors, and coping strategies of poor people.

As a person who has lived on welfare most of my life, I have agreed to assist her so that others may better understand our situation and our strengths.

I do understand that though there is no apparent risk involved, it is always possible that my comments may be misunderstood, that I may feel some invasion of privacy or disrespect from other participants even though there is no intention to cause harm and every precaution will be taken to prevent harm including those listed below.

I, _____________________________ by signing this form

understand that:

1. I will be interviewed either individually by Robyn Draper-Praetz or as one of several people in a group discussion which is led by her.

2. I agree to have the interview or group discussion tape recorded or video taped.

3. I understand that my comments and name will be kept confidential so that no future researchers who listen to the tapes could identify me.

4. I understand that only the researcher and her immediate advisors, research assistants, and transcribers will have access to the tapes.

5. I understand that my comments will be used but my name will not be linked to them. When necessary, the researcher will use a made up name to quote me.

6. I understand that other members of the group will be equally notified of the purpose of the group discussion and counseled about their rights and their obligation to keep any identifying information confidential.
7. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any questions or to withdraw from the project at any time.

8. I understand that I will have the opportunity to comment and make suggestions for changes after the analysis and report is completed.

_________________________________________      ____________
signature of participant                      date

_________________________________________
signature of researcher                      date
APPENDIX D

RECEIPT AND AGREEMENT TO FOLLOW-UP
I have received $25.00 for my participation.

I do ____ do not ____ (check one) want to be contacted to comment on the final report. Phone # _____________ or _____________.

__________________________  _________________________
signature of participant       date

__________________________  _________________________
signature of researcher       date
APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Level of Participation

_ Group  _ Individual

Gender Age____

_ Male  _ Female

Years in Contra Costa County ___

Years of Education _____ Mother's ____ Dad's ____

Your Source of Income: Parent's Source of Income:
(primary as an adult) (when you were a child)

_Public Assistance  _Public Assistance

_Disability  _Disability

_Workers Compensation  _Workers Compensation

_Odd jobs  _Odd jobs

_Part time job  _Part time job

_Full time job  _Full time job

_Other [(what)]  _Other [(what)]

Amount (say whether by month or year) Amount (by month or year)

_ _

Occupations (list up to 5)

Your's

Mom's

Dad's
APPENDIX F

PHASE III QUESTIONNAIRE
Introduction

1. introduce myself
2. go through consent form
3. start tape
4. make opening statement

My reason for wanting to speak with you is to have you educate me. I'd like to learn more about your viewpoints, opinions, and philosophy of life, based on the fact that you have lived your whole life in poverty. Especially I would like to know about your coping strategies, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, attitudes, ideas, and strengths. I have a set of questions I'm going to ask to better understand the stresses and accomplishments of your life in poverty and how you cope and deal with difficulties.

1. What do you consider to be the biggest problems/stressors in your life? How come? What specifically do you do to overcome them?

2. What things, persons, places, or resources are most valuable to you? (the things which if you lacked them would keep you from being able to cope?)

3. What are some of your thoughts about how society treats poor people? (government, media, movies, books, news, social service agencies).

4. What things about your life most frighten you? do you find fun or funny? do you judge to be immoral? do you most appreciate? are worth taking a risk or dying for?
would you not change?

5. If you could be part of a commission to solve the problem of poverty, what would you suggest?

6. What do you do on a typical day? Tell about each part of the day beginning with where and when you wake up.

7. Who do you consider to be your family? How do you get along? How has family been a help to you? How has family been a hindrance in your life?

8. "Getting out of poverty is not the main goal, rather progress, family, and love is..." is a statement made by one of the people I spoke with this summer. Do you agree or disagree? How come?

9. Many people on welfare have said that they experience a dilemma. On the one hand it is degrading and humiliating and on the other hand the available jobs are low paying, and no supplements like food stamps or housing eligibility are available. They express the fact that they act differently when on welfare and they are treated differently when on welfare. My next three questions are based on trying to get more about how you deal with that dilemma. I hope the questions do not feel threatening. If they do please remember that what you say is completely confidential.

a) What has been your experience (if any) with that dilemma?

b) Some people say they use drugs and or alcohol, music, TV, having fun as a means to escape from the frustration, humiliation, anger, and fear of
poverty. Do you have ways of escaping? What are they?

c) What do you do when the check is gone? What are various ways you have of getting what you need and want?

10. If you were writing a letter or teaching a class for social workers, store keepers, or people in general what would you want to say or to teach them about yourself and life in poverty?

11. What inner strengths do you rely on to cope and make meaning of your life?

12. What external resources do you rely on to cope and make meaning of your life?

13. What is your philosophy of life?

14. Does religion or belief in god have any role in your life?

15. What ways have you of keeping informed about current events, staying educated?

16. Is there anything else you would like to express?
APPENDIX G

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP CATEGORIES
The following statements, which are listed under a category, refer to a line or more of text in the transcribed tapes of the focus groups. G1, g2, or g3 refer to one of the three groups in which the statement was made. The number after the slash mark refers to the specific line of text where the statement began.

**Resources/Resourceful**

g1/534 churches, food pantries, soup lines  
g1/552 churches and clothing  
g1/557 garage sales  
g1/562 occasional borrowing from family  
g1/565 share with others  
g2/373 GA workers only take a few excuses like in jail, a ticket in hand, they look for ways to get you out not help you - they are supposed to be a resource  
g3/414 know who can help  
g3/426 look at bulletin boards for all kinds of help  
g3/427 "Share" program give $13/month - get food, clothes back  
g3/440 phone calls, phone book  
g3/443 check on research  
g3/459 talk to people  
g3/463 gp library, community centers, boys and girls club  
g3/478 thrift stores  
g3/482 keep after social service workers, they know stuff they won’t tell  
g3/487 call state reps office

**Silence**

g1/411 we’re silent because we’ve been repressed to be silent  
g1/413 silent so won’t get stepped on - if we don’t protest they (social workers) can’t hurt us  
g1/426 stay silent out of fear they will take away what I do have  
g1/442 if speak up for rights, risk losing if others or social worker want to hurt you  
g1/454 as a child silence meant don’t show emotion in family, now as an adult, I need to speak up if want needs met  
g3/242 the way to prevent myself from blowing up when very angry  
g3/247 in family life, silence not good, need to talk about what hurts  
g3/249 silence is like a steel wall that blows open by explosions after letting everything build up  
g3/257 silence is protective, deep, withdrawn, clicked off - where no one can get in my space  
g3/271 government silences us, gives us no say and takes away our speech
In family life there is a rule not to talk
not silent when stereotyped, humiliated or harassed
silent until pushed, then I’ll speak my mind
silence and depth go together because of loneliness and no one to talk to, so get so don’t want to get close
agencies don’t hear you you could talk forever
you get into depression living by yourself
silence is enjoyable when it’s meditation
silence makes you stronger

Pride/Proud
proud of self for doing well on my own raising kids on AFDC and daily babysitting $
proud of kids who succeed at school and karate
proud of school and self sacrifice
being poor is nothing to either brag about or feel shame about
not proud of being on disability
men have pride and ego, pride will keep you going, but it doesn’t feed you
pride is wounded when on GA you feel demoralized and depressed
pride can stop you
pride can make you feel worthless if you have little education, even if can work with hands well
pride injured when go to GA where I feel hostile
GA workers like to use their power - it’s their pride
if I don’t fight or argue with them, just let them treat me badly, then I would lose my pride
pride is not asking anything from anybody
pride is not asking anything from any body
pride gets in your way, keeps you from using a service that could help
pride in doing what have to do, even using free services
something you don’t feel proud of at first, but you get used to it
pride is real stubborn when it comes to asking family

anger/angry
at stereotype of poor people, lazy, live in luxury on AFDC and enjoy it, irresponsible, dirty, bad students
being put down for kind of work you do - manual labor
anger is a luxury, can’t carry it for long, keeps one down, is a negative power
g2/64 angry when don’t get needs met, when degraded, when can’t get what others have

\[ g2/83 \text{ cope with anger by walking and talking with others} \]

\[ g2/87 \text{ angry at catch 22 - no clock, no shower, no clean clothes for interview} \]

\[ g2/109 \text{ angry with self for being victim and getting into poverty} \]

\[ g2/127 \text{ anger is a new experience (for me) having to do with social worker failure to deal with crisis in living situation which endangered my kids} \]

\[ g3/ \text{ ang allows chp on shoulder because always treated negatively, worse at holidays} \]

\[ g3/45 \text{ good to talk or take a break when angry} \]

\[ g3/50 \text{ anger motivates me in a way to do something} \]

\[ g3/52 \text{ constructive anger motivates to find solutions to problems} \]

\[ g3/78 \text{ used to drink to deal with anger but it didn’t work, was still angry when quit} \]

\[ g3/81 \text{ haven’t figured how to cope with anger} \]

**focus group discussion categories, page 3**

**Resigned**

\[ g1/188 \text{ if you resign you die, I will never resign, you loose striving} \]

\[ g1/195 \text{ not resigned yet, still fighting} \]

\[ g1/218 \text{ feel the gov is resigned to no change for needs of americans} \]

\[ g1/225 \text{ when you resign you turn to drink/drugs because you’re so far down, then life is hopeless} \]

\[ g1/230 \text{ we refuse to resign, we are fighters} \]

\[ g3/86 \text{ resigned to be on AFDC for awhile} \]

\[ g3/99 \text{ resigned to go along with the program, roll with the punches, otherwise you loose it} \]

\[ g3/124 \text{ resigned to GA and medical vs 4.75 at KFC} \]

\[ g2/132 \text{ resigned to do it their way so get what I need, even when don’t want to} \]

\[ g2/136 \text{ resigned to picking one important action over another when in conflict - i.e vs care of family} \]

\[ g2/146 \text{ resigned to living with the humiliation and catch 22 of welfare} \]

**Persistent**

\[ g1/485 \text{ persistence is getting thru day after day} \]

\[ g1/487 \text{ think, sort out and apply logic} \]

\[ g1/489 \text{ keep achieving to reach goal, don’t sit in the middle or quit} \]

\[ g1/499 \text{ nit pick the little things} \]

\[ g1/509 \text{ persistence is love} \]

\[ g1/534 \text{ if one source of help not available, find another} \]
g3/314 not giving up, even when it's not the best choice
g3/319 doing s.t. when know s.t. is going to break, but not me
g3/322 do what can every day, always be productive, do s.t.
g3/345 stay on it, keep calling, don't be forgotten, i.e. HUD
g3/368 love of family who relies on me keeps me persistent
g3/ ignore feelings of giving up, self pity - get up, think of fam - every day
make a difference
g3/387 doing for family

g3/395 p. is the way out of hopelessness - anger helps coping and keep going

g2/301 is automatic survival instinct that kicks in

g2/327 doing things never thought I could like street hustle - to feed kids

g2/322 do for self - no one else will

Waiting

g1/601 book
g1/606 sleep
g1/616 book
g1/619 toys for kids
g1/632 day dream
g1/636 fantasy escape to oceans or mts.
g1/639 paperwork
g1/642 watch people
focus group discussion categories, page 4

g2/499 book
g2/502 count cars
g2/503 think
g2/517 gauge place in line, go have a cigarette
g2/517 talk to the person next to me
g2/520 read newspaper
g2/521 make lists of things to do
g2/529 think about a trip to disneyland
g3/515 get up and leave won't wait
g3/528 don't wait when could be doing something productive
g3/538 don't mind waiting for $ I've earned but hate waiting to cash check
that's not mine (i.e. welfare)
g3/544 my anger comes out when I wait
g3/554 I seldom just wait, I Ok for other resources in the meantime
g3/574 use waiting time to relax and be with kids
g3/583 I observe people

g3/585 observe people observing me like they want to they me how to be or act, it's embarrassing
Fun/Relaxation

g3/634 I have fun if kids are having fun
g3/639 no clean and sober and cheap fun for adults
g3/640 have tons of fun with kids
g3/657 if had $ could boat, ski, for sober fun
g3/662 with my partner don’t need $ for fun
g3/668 even in a shelter can have fun if have straight mind
g3/700 go dancing but not at bars or clubs
g3/713 splurge on out to dinner or bath oil
g3/772 look pack and see progress
g1/687 make up games with kids, laugh
g1/692 go to fairs, splurge occasionally, celebrate kids birthdays
g1/702 my good memory of childhood was a tree to climb
g1/709 I’m happy when kids are
g1/729 save money from recycling for recreation
g1/747 songs and singing
g1/739 clean and sober bike club
g2/574 simple things - park, videos
g2/584 fun is a state of mind
g2/586 out for coffee with a friend
g2/587 watch TV
g2/596 relax and enjoy what I’m doing
g2/600 make up your mind to have fun no matter how much $

Family/family orientation

g2/182 family is my children - who I can’t support but I send what I can hustle
g2/198 extended family is a couple of very good friends who give advice and help me out
focus group discussion categories, page 5
g2/226 live in grandma’s house with 5 sibs and our kids, it’s a hindrance but is our shelter
g2/234 some kids are grown, others are with brother
g2/236 family is a couple of friends who are in the shelter with me
g1/287 from family of many sibs, I live with mom, am close to only one sib now

g1/302 from fam of 3 sibs who don’t know or support each other as adults - no support growing up
g1/315 mon drank, I stayed home and took care of kids
g1/333 lived in fear for life from dad and step-dad
g1/352 there are non-family people who would do anything for me
g1/371 I have blocked out my family and the pain of it
g3/202 family is dysfunctional and distant, no interdependence, but we do love each other

180

g3/210 have friends who I consider my family

180

g3/213 people can’t understand about poverty because their family’s can help with cash needs

180

g3/223 family is a sore subject

180

g3/226 was born into a dysfunctional family

180

g3/230 I have love, if I came out of a non-loving family I’ll never do the same to my kids can’t always give food but always can give love

180

Humiliated

180

g2/603 social worker degrades me and puts me down, I feel like beating and kicking her

180

g2/609 enjoy angering the one who humiliates me

180

g2/631 often best to either keep quiet or be humorous when being humiliated

180

g2/659 try to keep self esteem despite humiliation by remembering no one is perfect

180

g1/795 humiliation is being beaten by husband then forced to walk down street bleeding and swollen

180

g1/821 an inner person inside me deals with the humiliation as a way to cope lets me take an avenue of escape

180

g1/832 have to recognize humiliation without letting it eat at you - if you give in then you are no better

180

g3/971 humiliation is ignorant people making judgements and refusing to be educated about how it is out here

180

g3/984 being different - as kid in cath school uniform

180

g3/1005 when willing to give knowledge and self then can’t be humiliated
APPENDIX H

SUMMARY OF EPISTEMIC CATEGORIES
The statements listed below under the subheadings refer to statements made in one of the focus groups. G1, g2, and g3 refer to which of the groups. The number after the slash mark refers to the specific line of text.

Metaphors

g3/100 welfare is like being in the passenger seat

g3/407 persistence is like child birth, just when you think you can’t do it any more, you give one last push

g1/905 isolation is like a moat around a castle, it separates and distances

g1/908 solitude is like being on a mountain, surrounded by, but not distant from

g2/2433 stay one step ahead of yesterday to persevere

g3/249 silence is like a steel wall

g2/584 fun is a state of mind

g1/112 ...keep climbing up

g1/169 anger is a negative power

g2/515 get a feel for the numbers

g2/236 family is friends in the shelter

g1/821 another person inside of me

World View

g3/256 silence is self protective and very deep

g3/270 government silences us, we have no speech and they do not listen

g3/412 persevering makes you strong

g3/846 may not be possible to get off welfare because you’re not in control

g3/884 when on AFDC you live differently than when you are not on it

g3/75 we do what we can, but nothing changes

g3/81 there is no way out of anger

g3/110 welfare is necessary but not sufficient for survival

g3/119 risk is always negative

g3/116 opportunities are not guaranteed

g3/134 there are jobs but know one gets them

g3/472 don’t let pride get in the way of need

g3/772 you look back and see progress, be thankful for your blessings of life and your mind

g3/1025 don’t stereotype anyone based on being homeless, know the person before categorizing

g3/1035 just because someone is homeless because of a catastrophe, (Oakland fire, earthquake) doesn’t make them better

g1/411 we are silent because we have been repressed to become

g1/218 the government is resigned to needs of Americans, that’s why
people die in doorways

g1/462 silence is a two way street, can be used against you if you speak up, that is you don’t get what you need; but some times worth the risk to get what you need

g1/849 would we, if we had power and $, do it too (humiliate poor people)

g1/860 they don’t love as we love, rich people don’t have love, they don’t have feelings, don’t cry at funerals

g1/888 "we’re going to make it, we’re going to keep fighting"

g1/904 isolation is someone or something that distances you silent

g2/265 "...you know that they don’t live their life the same way that they’re trying to tell you to live your life."

g2441 you pray for opportunities and open doors and a glint of life, then it seems that the door always bangs shut as you step toward it.

g2/453 you go to sleep saying please Lord open the door of opportunity tomorrow or let me die in my sleep - you sometimes think about suicide, why bother day after day - it hurts

g2/474 sometimes it seems it’s not me that keeps going, but it’s that little voice inside that says "keep going, it’s going to be alright, if something would just open up

g2/287 silence makes you strong, is a time for reflection

Values

g3/1 "wouldn’t ask nobody nothing"

g3/9 don’t let pride stand in your way

g3/13 take pride in doing whatever needs to be done

g3/25 risk pride to survive rather than suffer

g3/143 security

g3/205 love of family

g3/205 distance form the family

g3/240 families get you through hard times

g3/327 be persistent

g3/368 family keeps me going

g3/377 don’t give into self-pity for too long

g3/393 work the best you can

g3/470 share information with others in need

g3/489 volunteer at thrift stores and food pantries

g3/734 weigh the pros and cons of food vs bath oil, some times choose self over need

g3/740 permit self to have small pleasures

g3/777 time and opportunity to be here

g3/792 if want something bad enough you’ll get it, even though a slow
process
g3/822 getting out of poverty is not the main goal, but rather progress, family and love
g3/1098 you can get what you need if you try hard enough
g1/187 don’t resign yourself to anything or you’ll die
g2/136 sometimes you have to choose between 2 values, eg family and education
g1 188 you have to strive for something
g2/1122 the Lord

Feelings

G3/15 pride feels good
G3/510 angry at SW
G3/535 patience
G3/anger comes out when I feel that I wait for nothing
G3/592 feel embarrassed around the negative judgements of others
G3/675 laughter
G3/682 don’t always feel light, sometimes I need a break
G3/725 good to be served and treated with respect
G3/915 feel put down
G3/1010 don’t feel humiliated, but rather ashamed for those who try and humiliate me

epistemic categories
G3/1116 more +, hopeful feelings - since so many are now homeless, the government can’t ignore us
G1/66 feel good that my kids love me
G1/121 anger @ stereotype that the poor live in luxury
G1/163 hurt when misjudged
G1/226 hopeless at times, but keep fighting
G1/228 low. feel like resigning
G1/237 like crying
G1/239 panic (at cuts)
G1/791 humiliation @ being battered
G2/6 wounded pride
G2/11 depressed and demoralized
G2/42 hostile and aggressive
G2/62 degraded
G2/243 no one listens, even when talk for ever
G2/259 silence can turn to depression
G2/407 feel like nothing
G2/445 suicidal, hopeless at times @ slammed doors
Difficulties

g3/143 health care insurance
g3/160 day care
g3/134 work
g3/335 stereotyping
g3/127 low wages
g3/389 school/training
g3/515 waiting
g3/546 clerks taking advantage of you
g3/587 how people look at kids and judge you
g3/595 negative looks
g3/645 no place for low cost, adult, drug free fun
g3/707 transportation
g3/1083 housing catch 22
g1/130 belief of others about welfarites
g1/207 no counseling for self or kids
g1/697 no memories of childhood
g1/790 no help for battered women
g2/46 social workers
g2/59 too many restrictions
g2/77 anger and coping with social welfare system
g2/87 catch 22 of welfare vs work
g2/212 employers won’t deal with disabled
g2/354 catch 22 on resources
g2/395 paperwork and contradictions

Beliefs and attitudes

g3/806 poor are better at dealing with problems than rich people
g3/839 poverty equals struggle
g3/945 no one can raise your own kids
g3/1060 homeless = homeless, no difference based on why
g3/48 even if do everything right, can’t get ahead
g3/74 call up state representative and complain to use constructive anger
g3/127 GA earns more than you can at KFC
g3/143 if worked (for minimum wage) would lose medical & food stamps
g3/193 red tape and rules (of social service system) discourage one from keeping at it
g3/190 catch 22 of social welfare
g3/218 people (unpoor) don’t understand that there is no one not even family to help
g3/245 be silent if speaking will cause you to blow up
g3/247 speak up within the family
if you need something, go after it, stay on them
"persistence is the way out"
when things are a little easier one can cope better, is less angry and less hopeless
social services doesn't share all their info on resources
social services denies some services
can't wait in line, need to be out producing, doing
if you're poor they assume you'll act, dress, talk, a certain way, if Black - assume you'll talk, dress, treat your kids a certain way
you can have fun anywhere if your head's on straight
it's good to look back from where you've come even when still struggling
key is if you want it bad enough then you'll do it no matter how hard
can't get out of poverty w/o a decent job which enough for a decent life - like others have
poor are better at dealing with life's difficulties than are the rich
you'll always have money problems
poverty = the struggle to pay and will never go away unless very wealthy
attitude changes (negatively) when on welfare
more opportunities when off AFDC, people ask for fewer qualifications of you
racism @qualifications and opportunities not a black and white thing but a AFDC thing
when on AFDC you are like programmed, everything is predictable
catch 22 of low wages, work vs lure of welfare without work hassles
humiliation = ignorance of people who have no idea what AFDC is like
sw's poverty level is they won't take time to help
being different = feeling humiliated
spirituality helps when humiliated
proud of self and kids for accomplishments
don't let anyone put you down
two ways to make it - be really poor and have nothing or really rich and have everything
don't give in, fight for needs
sw's only concerned if have alcohol or drug problem
when there are cuts - old and young suffer the most
unless go thru it, people can't understand
not given correct guidance as a child
some do abuse the system, that ruins for all
don't repress feelings, leaves bad experience forever, need
counseling

g1/391 drinking only covers up

g1/414 if don’t protest too much then won’t get hurt too much

g1/452 silence is golden because words can’t be used against you

g1/492 don’t give up on goals

g1/499 persistence = nit pick the little things with your kids, teach them to
do now, not put off

g1/507 persistence = say and show love

g1/547 go hungry a few days, even if dizzy, at end of month so kids can
have food

g1/557 buy toys for kids so they won’t feel deprived, even if can’t afford
them

g1/585 talk to people who are even worse off than you

g1/670 its scarier at social service offices now, lots of drug addicted,
selling, mentally ill

g1/676 splurge for fun with kids so they will have good memories, I don’t
have any

g1/734 money is man made - resent it’s power and influence

g1/768 if not happy, can’t bring happiness to others

g1/912 solitude does not = isolation

g1/914 isolation = not going out because of dysfunctional family

g1/963 we’ve got heart that rich people don’t

g2/1 most men have a lot of pride and ego which keeps you going but
doesn’t feed you

g2/21 if you have 2 hands, will always work and hustle

g2/62 degrading to be on welfare

g2/110 victim of circumstance, no matter how hard you try, you’re beat
down

g2/155 if I ever get off GA, I’ll never go back

g2/292 silence and depression go together and keeps you from getting close
to people

g2/298 loneliness is intensified due to pov - “nobody knows you when
you’re down and out"

g2/480 sometimes you say what’s the bottom, you think things can’t get
worse, but they do - then from somewhere an act of kindness and things
brighten

g2/486 dealing with lots of little things is worse than dealing with one big
thing - food, gas, phone clothes vs eviction

g2/542 waiting = patience

g2/584 fun is a state of mind

g2/679 don’t want to be rich, only well off enough to pay bills

g2/696 love is the answer
Coping Strategies

g3/18 doing what necessary if even if it hurts

g3/38 express your anger, don't hold it in

g3/44 negotiate for breaks

g3/71 call up state rep.

g3/78 drink to cope, but doesn't work

g3/88 resign self to being on welfare

g3/93 try really hard for what you want

g3/104 detach and say oh, well - remember you're a passenger not a driver

g3/107 participate in politics to stop budget cuts

g3/311 have silence to a point, then speak your mind, silence different in society than with a family

g3/304 don't patronize the merchants who assume I have no $

g3/323 do something productive everyday

g3/418 listen to other about resources

g3/423 read all bulletin boards for info on resources

g3/436 listen to everyone about job leads, shelters, etc

g3/450 get all the info you can even if can't use now

g3/453 use yellow pages, check on research

g3/660 know what happening in your community

g3/516 if line or wait is too long - leave and return

g3/573 relax during waiting time

g3/583 observe people, especially the profs while waiting

g3/602 you'll never know I'm poor by where I go

g3/626 confront people about their biased behavior

g3/716 splurge once in a while like we're rich

g3/635 have fun with kids

g3/644 no drink or drugs anymore

g3/1004 give to others with need greater than yours

g3/1134 always make a point, don't let people get away with their stereotypes

g3/1159 always make yourself human

g3/1163 fight defiantly to not feel less than (or more than) equal

g1/55 stock up with food for month on 1st

g1/74 hold head high and teach son to do the same

g1/169 don't buy into negative power

g1/170 look at the whole not just the pieces

g1/176 escaped thru good grades in school

g1/307 block out pain

g1/329 take geographic escape from bad childhood memories

g1/330 belief in god

g1/353 friends

g1/375 counseling
g1/385 1 caring person to whom you can tell it like it is

g1/387 use drugs and alcohol

g1/412 be silent so won’t be stepped on

ng1/455 don’t show emotion

g1/460 don’t be silent anymore

g1/483 learn what to say and what not to say to people who can threaten you

g1/485 take things one day at a time

ng1/487 think about and apply logic to situations to sort things out

ng1/489 be persistent by trying and achieving

ng1/511 "borrow from Paul to pay Mary" ie get what need now, put off "kiss my ass" bills

ng1/538 share resources with others

g1/601 book for waiting

ng1/607 adapt to situations, be prepared, do what need to do

ng1/619 I bring books, toys for son

ng1/622 contain anger @ waiting

ng1/631 daydream while waiting put self in another world

ng1/639 do paperwork

ng1/687 spontaneous fun with kids

ng1/692 occasional impulse spending

ng1/774 under stress or humiliation close eyes, no eye contact so not to cry

ng1/797 physically defend self from abusers

ng1/821 inner person does not let people humiliate me

ng1/824 escape don’t deal with humiliation

ng1/835 don’t bow or give in to humiliation

ng1/949 pray

ng1/957 isolation good sometimes protects self and a way to avoid self

ng2/108 take walks, cool down, get angry at self

ng2/122 belief in god, church, bible

ng2/132 resign and do it their way sometimes

ng2/173 make several pasta meals and alternate leftovers

ng2/200 friends like family in advice giving role

ng2/202 find work and give work when find small opportunities

ng2/320 try to persist and do nice for self

ng2/327 hustle on the street

ng2/409 be persistent, follow thru on instructions, ask to see supervisor if can’t get needs met

ng2 413 talk with so keep mind off things, take walks, read

ng2/435 make lists and check things off - feel accomplished

ng2/502 count cars, watch people, read, try to think about things

ng2/515 go out for cig or walk based on time estimate

ng2/520 newspaper, make list

ng2/528 fantasize about disneyland
g2/532 make dreams real - goal and reward
g2/572 learn new ways by watching others

fun = go to park, have cheap fun, video, out for coffee

if going to blow get away from it

reverse psychology

keep up self-est by recall no one perfect

throw things back at humiliator

imagine humiliator in underwear

remember I know more about survival than they do
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VITA

The author, Robyn Dent Draper-Praetz, is the daughter of Mary Frances (Bartley) Draper and the late Addison Dent Draper. She was born March 21, 1947, in Wilmington, Delaware. She was married to Peter G. Praetz on November 25, 1967. They have three children, Aaron, Noah, and Rachel.

Her elementary education was obtained at St. Raymond's grade school in Joliet, Illinois. Her secondary education was completed at St. Francis Academy, also in Joliet, Illinois.

In 1972, she was awarded a certificate in Medical Assisting from The Medix School in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Ms. Draper attended Viterbo College in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Science, Magna Cum Laude, in Psychology in December, 1984. In April, 1983, while attending Viterbo College, Ms. Draper presented her research paper, The effects of television viewing on concrete and formal operational thought on fifth and ninth graders, at the Psi Chi Symposium at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

In April of 1986, Ms. Draper was accepted into the doctoral program in Counseling Psychology at Loyola
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Between December, 1984 and August, 1987 Ms. Draper worked as a Substance Abuse Counselor earning her CDC (Certified Drug Counselor) from the Illinois Substance Abuse Counselor Certification Board in May, 1986. She received her AIDS Trainer Certification from the Illinois Alcohol and Drug Dependence Association in November, 1986. Between August 1987 and April, 1990, Ms. Draper acted as a consultant to several AIDS education, research, and prevention projects in the Chicago area.

Ms. Draper moved with her family to the San Francisco Bay area in 1990. She completed her doctoral course work at the University of California, Berkeley and John F. Kennedy University in Orinda, California. Ms. Draper has been employed by the Health Services Department of Contra Costa County since 1990 as a Substance Abuse Program Director. From March of 1993 to April of 1994, Ms. Draper completed her pre-doctoral internship in the psychiatric emergency unit of the Contra Costa County public hospital.
APPROVAL SHEET

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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