5-2000

Subsisting on Non-livable Wages: Women in Pittsburgh's Public Housing

Laurel Jeanne Person
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation
https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/8329

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
SUBSISTING ON NON-LIVABLE WAGES:  
WOMEN IN PITTSBURGH’S PUBLIC HOUSING

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by

Laurel Jeanne Person
B.A., University of Pittsburgh, 1993  
May 2000
MANUSCRIPT THESES

Unpublished theses submitted for the Master's and Doctor's Degrees and deposited in the Louisiana State University Libraries are available for inspection. Use of any thesis is limited by the rights of the author. Bibliographical references may be noted, but passages may not be copied unless the author has given permission. Credit must be given in subsequent written or published work.

A library which borrows this thesis for use by its clientele is expected to make sure that the borrower is aware of the above restrictions.

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My greatest wish is that my mother, Mary Levan Person, could be here to share the joy of my accomplishment. The only careers available to her were nursing, teaching, and homemaking. As such, she always encouraged me to endeavor in any of the world's occupational fields. Her love and inspiration remain with me. Thanks goes to my father, Charles Lindbergh Person, for standing by me without questioning my agenda. Heaps of gratitude go to my sister, my friend, and my biggest fan, Martha Miller. Her cheering on the sidelines kept me on course.

I am forever thankful to Sam Sheen, whose love and understanding sustained me through the ups and downs of this process. Thank you Sam, for being so patient and accepting the person I needed to become. Your visits to the land of humidity, cockroaches, and Jimmy Swaggart were my salvation.

Without the sober guidance of my advisor, Dr. Steven Hoelscher, this thesis would not have been realized. His open-mindedness and encouragement have served me well, and so I sincerely thank him. My committee members, Dr. William V. Davidson, Dr. Joyce Jackson, and Dr. Miles Richardson, have my gratitude and respect for their suggestions and insightful comments. Numerous friends in the Department of Geography and Anthropology helped me by providing empathy, challenges, laughter, and much needed editorial comments. Special thanks goes to Meg Streiff, who took me in when I needed temporary shelter. Her unabashed passion for cities and interest in low-income housing have inspired me. If not for her many
acts of generosity, completion of this thesis would have been much more precarious. Rain Ayala also deserves thanks for assisting in the creation of the maps herein. Her knowledge and talents eased my cartographic anxiety.

I also thank the Robert C. West Graduate Student Field Research Fund, whose grant allowed me to engage in interviews that at times, were much more telling than any archive on the subject. This funding was key in making these women's voices heard. To the women who gave of their time by answering my questions and shedding light on their experiences, I thank you again for letting me into your lives and helping me to understand your perspectives. I truly hope that this work will spur public policy changes leading to the economic security of all marginalized persons.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... ii

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................ vi

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................. vii

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1

2 THEORETICAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY .............................................. 8
   Feminism as a Theoretical Approach to the Study of Poverty .......................... 10
   Earlier Theory (1960-1980): Gender Only ...................................................... 10
   Structuration Theory ............................................................................................. 13
   Methodology .......................................................................................................... 13

3 THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY ........................................................................... 21
   Factors Contributing to the Feminization of Poverty ....................................... 28
   Economic Restructuring ...................................................................................... 29
   Public Policy ............................................................................................................ 30
   Demographic Changes ........................................................................................... 33
   Housing .................................................................................................................... 34
   The Geography of Labor: Women and Occupational Segregation .................. 35
   The Racial Element of Poverty Feminization .................................................... 41
   Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 45

4 PITTSBURGH’S RECENT HISTORY: ECONOMIC TRENDS ............................... 47
   Phases of Pittsburgh’s Changing Economic Geography ..................................... 48
   The Industrialized City (1937-1950) ................................................................. 48
   The Deindustrializing City I (1950-1973) ........................................................... 50
   The Deindustrializing City II (1973-1983) ......................................................... 51
   The High-tech City (1983-Present) ....................................................................... 54
   Demographics ......................................................................................................... 56
   Pittsburgh’s Economy Today ............................................................................... 58
   A Living Wage .......................................................................................................... 58
   Job Opportunities in Pittsburgh ............................................................................. 62
The Gendered and Raced Labor Market ........................................63
Conclusions .................................................................................69

5 PUBLIC HOUSING IN PITTSBURGH .............................................71
Scale and Segregation .................................................................72
Bulldozing Broadhead Manor .......................................................74
The Degradation of “Little Harlem” ...........................................81
Survey Results .............................................................................85
Demographics ............................................................................85
Political Participation .................................................................89
Division of Domestic Responsibilities .......................................91
Neighborhood Reforms ............................................................92
Real Life Experiences .................................................................95
Irene .........................................................................................96
Pearl .......................................................................................98
Geraldine .................................................................................100
Charlotte ...............................................................................101
Frances ..................................................................................102
Conclusion ...............................................................................103

6 CONCLUSIONS ......................................................................107
Public Policy Implications .........................................................108
Further Research ........................................................................110

REFERENCES ..............................................................................111
APPENDIX ..................................................................................120
VITA ..........................................................................................122
LIST OF TABLES

3. Minimum Living Wage by Household Type ........................................................60
4. Fastest-Growing Jobs in Pennsylvania .................................................................61
5. Full Time-Full Year Median Annual Earnings by Education, Gender, and Race, Allegheny County, 1989 .................................................................68
6. Demographics of Survey Respondents .................................................................86
7. Political Activity Among Survey Respondents .....................................................90
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Pittsburgh Neighborhoods .................................................................22
3. Downtown Pittsburgh Street at 9:20 a.m., Late 1940s ............................49
4. Pittsburgh MSA 1990 ........................................................................52
5. Male Labor Force in Allegheny County .................................................64
6. Female Labor Force in Allegheny County .............................................65
7. 1990 Unemployment by Gender and Race in Pittsburgh ......................67
8. Broadhead Manor, March 1999 ............................................................76
9. A Broadhead Manor Townhouse .........................................................76
10. HACP Poster Advertising its Section 8 Main Street Program ................77
12. OK Grocery Standing on Hillside, March 1999 ....................................79
13. High Security Entrance to OK Grocery .............................................80
14. Warehouse Sign Discouraging Traffic ...............................................80
15. A Positive Message from OK Grocery ...............................................82
ABSTRACT

With the largest per capita public housing stock in the United States, Pittsburgh has been wrestling with policy reforms throughout the 1990s. The federal Hope VI program was instituted by the Clinton administration in an effort to revamp the nation’s public housing system. Though the program’s intentions are admirable, the results in Pittsburgh have been injurious. Long-term residents have lost the only place they knew as home, families stay in shelters until appropriate units become available, and Hope VI diverts funds from restoration projects to meet the Housing Authority’s political agenda.

Given this volatile situation in the “Iron City”, I have investigated the ways in which gender and “race” affect the local public housing landscape. This thesis explores challenges for women in Pittsburgh’s public housing communities such as residential segregation, economic restructuring, and welfare-to-work programs. My findings reveal that certain demographic groups clearly have not benefited from the so-called booming economy of the late 1990s. This conclusion suggests policy recommendations -- such as enactment of living wage legislation -- with which these women may pull themselves out of poverty.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Rochelle’s monthly Department of Public Assistance (DPA) check is $403\(^1\). She does not pay her rent out of this amount; rather DPA deducts her rent from her transfer payment and sends it to the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP). In 1998, a mistake at the welfare office caused a lapse in Rochelle’s check. As a result, the Housing Authority took her to court, but dropped the case when DPA straightened out the problem. During the one day Rochelle had to go to court, child care was needed for her children, now ages one, four, and seven. Her mother, who was earning $7.35 an hour, lost a day’s wages when she took off to stay with Rochelle’s children.

Ophelia is living with two of her four children -- her youngest who is eleven and her second child, Rochelle who is twenty-three. Rochelle’s three children also share their Bedford Dwellings house. Until last year, Rochelle and her children called a two-bedroom apartment in Allequippa Terrace home. HACP had approached Rochelle and other residents of Allequippa Terrace with an offer to move. They were told that they could move into Section 8\(^2\) housing where they would have nicer places and backyards. HACP explained that the move was optional, and residents signed

---

\(^1\) In order to protect their privacy, I have used pseudonyms for all personal contacts. Names appearing in newspaper articles that I have cited remain unchanged.

\(^2\) Section 8 housing is a Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program in which the Housing Authority provides low-income residents with vouchers that pay a portion of rent (usually 30 percent) on the private housing market. The concept of the program is to disperse low-income residents, but oftentimes fails in that many lessors do not accept Section 8 vouchers.
paperwork with this understanding. But then HACP came back and told them that they must move out. Instead of nicer places in Section 8 housing, they were moved to deteriorating units in Bedford Dwellings. Moving in with Ophelia last year was not the only big change in these women’s lives. Rochelle began going to school as part of a welfare-to-work program. Although it is mandatory, she says that she wants to complete the program. In March 1999, she had an interview for a job paying $5.15 an hour with no health benefits. Her federally funded Medicaid coverage will last only two to three months after she begins working. Although the job would more than double the $403 she receives monthly from the Department of Public Assistance, the rent would be increased by $247.20. Rent in public housing is thirty percent of the household income or at least twenty-five dollars per month. Since Rochelle is not home five days out of the week, child care is needed. Ophelia chose to quit her full-time job as a trainer at McDonald’s to stay home with her grandchildren. She has been looking for work in the evenings but has not found anything that would pay her living wage of eight dollars an hour.

Ophelia and Rochelle are just two of many American women who struggle to meet their families’ minimum needs. Their experience – female heads of households relegated to low-wage employment – typifies the feminization of poverty. Feminized poverty is characterized by an increase in the proportion of women, particularly those who head their families, who are impoverished. For example, in 1983, the overall
poverty rate in the United States was 15.2 percent, while for female-headed households, it was 36 percent (Pear 1984).

Of course, these figures represent those living below the official poverty line. But, an income able to meet minimum needs (basic food, transportation, rental housing, clothing, child care, health care, and telephone) is higher than the government's poverty levels. Suffice to say, the rate of poverty is even higher than the official data would indicate (Bangs et al 1997). Since I found that the economic outlook for women is even bleaker than the U.S. Census Bureau statistics would have me believe, I have focused this thesis on the feminization of poverty.

I cannot tackle all aspects of the feminization of poverty, and so I shall sharpen my focus to women living in public housing. Whether they work for wages or not, public housing tenants are usually poor. HUD housing is based in a federal program, but it is administered on the local level. Considering this distinctly geographical issue of scale – city administration of a federal program – analyzing the effects of HUD policy on women in Pittsburgh's public housing provides insight into poverty's gender and racial bias.

Public housing has been a particularly volatile subject in Pittsburgh over the last decade. Discussions of suburbanization of public housing have elicited heated opposition from suburban residents and politicians. The resulting demolition of a large number of housing units has left many people in search of affordable housing.
HACP’s plan is to demolish units, replacing them with mixed-income housing. The ultimate success of this plan is far from settled, and as such, these new policies suggest several key questions that will guide this thesis:

- What is the extent to which the feminization of poverty exists in Pittsburgh?
- How does Pittsburgh’s public housing system exacerbate or alleviate women’s poverty?
- How does the welfare system exacerbate or alleviate the poverty of female Pittsburghers?
- How has Pittsburgh’s recent history of economic restructuring and of residential segregation influenced the feminization of poverty?
- To what degree is Pittsburgh’s labor market affected by gender and race, particularly in terms of occupational and residential segregation?
- How does political participation affect the financial circumstances of women in Pittsburgh?

As a way to address these questions, this thesis will adopt feminist perspectives, specifically as developed by feminist geographers. Of primary importance, and indeed deriving directly from this theory, are the qualitative methods that guide this case study. Feminist scholars have denounced the claims of supposedly “objective” social science. Census data can convey a great deal about the feminization of poverty, but left out are the experiential and interpretive details gleaned from the
individuals caught in its midst. Using qualitative interviews, this thesis aims to understand why poverty is unevenly concentrated by gender and by race.

Chapter two will outline my theoretical approach, in which I present feminist theory as it arose from the Women’s Rights Movement. Critiquing early theory’s racial and class bias, I adopt the more comprehensive current theory based on feminist thought. Then I present structuration theory, and its bearing on this case study -- my respondents’ everyday experiences are navigated by the dichotomy of structure and agency. These theories lead into my methodology. Since feminist theory emphasizes the individual experience, giving credence to each woman’s lifeways, qualitative interviews logically follow. Culling information from archival materials is an excellent way to unearth the structural forces influencing these women’s lives. But to come to understand the ways in which human agency directs a woman’s experience, interviews with the women themselves are imperative.

The third chapter will review the feminization of poverty. Defining various factors that contribute to this trend, I proceed to focus on a primary factor – occupational segregation. After reviewing recent studies on occupational segregation, this chapter addresses how the feminization of poverty is skewed racially. In closing this chapter, I conclude that a number of political and economic structures coalesce to perpetuate poverty’s gender and racial bias.

In chapter four, I will elaborate on the case study site, Pittsburgh. Intrinsic to this project is the city’s sweeping economic transformation. Once the major center of
steel production, then an urban wasteland, Pittsburgh has evolved into a city of high-tech industries. Though the shift from blue-collar to white-collar industries occurred over several decades, this transformation continues to be jolting to long-term citizens. The new service-dominated economy has shaped the pattern of poverty in the city.

As local officials remade Pittsburgh’s image through downtown revitalization, it neglected other parts of the city. Already declining neighborhoods became increasingly segregated by race and income. Public housing was relegated to these challenged neighborhoods, forming a distinctive geography of poverty. Chapter five critiques Pittsburgh’s public housing system, mentioning first its scale and segregation. Then, subsidized housing at the western fringe of the city and to the east of downtown’s central business district is reviewed, focusing on the demolition of homes and neighborhood change. After setting the context, I present the demographics of women who live in these communities. Then a brighter light is shone on their lives by providing their political participation, division of domestic responsibilities, and ideas for reforming their neighborhoods. To acknowledge the uniqueness of each woman’s financial situation, real life experiences of five respondents follow. The conclusion argues that Pittsburgh’s public housing system dampens poor women’s financial opportunities.
Chapter six makes final conclusions based on the previous chapters’ points. By using feminist theory partnered with qualitative interviewing methods, the lives of women in Pittsburgh’s public housing are demystified. Resulting from my interviews is the finding that the feminization of poverty is a continuing dilemma in the United States, and to an even greater degree in Pittsburgh. Further, it was determined that the local housing authority and welfare programs may in fact accelerate women’s impoverishment. The economic restructuring of Pittsburgh also oppresses the poor in that it has removed the abundance of the city’s low-skilled, high-wage jobs. Today’s local labor market remains inequitable in terms of gender and race. Finally, my data support the conclusion that political participation is related to socioeconomic status, in that the less educated and lower-income individuals are less active politically. It is through political action that disadvantaged groups may improve their financial conditions. This leads to a cycle in which a woman is not politically active because she is poor, and perhaps she is poor because she is politically inactive. Chapter six goes on to recommend public policy changes and suggests directions for future research, both of which could greatly increase the economic realities of women living in public housing.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Geographical research in the feminist tradition is shaped by the connection between a geographer’s worldview and her position as a woman in the world. Until the 1970s when female geographers became a recognizable, if small, percentage of the discipline, geography was dominated by a male worldview. It was not acknowledged that the discipline put forth a masculine interpretation, but that it presented a geographical interpretation. Even today, as geography remains dominated by white, middle-class, heterosexual men, female and feminist geographers are considered the “Other” and remain apart from a distinct orthodoxy (Rose 1993). It is in this light, that I relate to my respondents who represent the “Other” in American society.

A feminist approach to geographical inquiry departs from the standpoint as the “Other”. It acknowledges that the tradition of human geography has not been one of objective analysis, but of a subjective, masculinized analysis. Feminist theory seeks to advance the female point of reference, to assert that all spatial phenomena cannot be adequately explained from an exclusively male position (Cosgrove and Domosh 1993, Rose 1993).

Approaching academic inquiry from a feminist standpoint invariably locates the researcher within a political element. Out of feminist ideology have come notable political changes on the American political landscape. The Equal Pay Act, the Civil

---

\(^3\) From this point on, “white” refers to non-Hispanic white.
Rights Act, and the National Organization for Women (NOW) are political realities that emerged, at least in part, from feminist theory. Taking action, rather than simply postulating, is a central feature of feminist theory. Without using current and historical facts to formulate social theory, political change cannot occur. And so the connection between feminist theory and politics is unshakable. A feminist methodology follows this relationship, yielding results to be used to effect political change.

This chapter will review feminist theory as it arose out of the Women’s Rights Movement. First I will review the early years of feminism circa 1960-1980, and then will proceed to address recent interpretations of the feminist movement that have generated more dynamic theories. Structuration theory will be covered, as it applies to feminist thought. The routine activities of human agency are the places where a feminized view may be found. It is the everyday experiences of women that shed light on the differences between male and female positions. The reproduction of these practices constitutes social structures, which may work with or against women.

The second main section of this chapter links theory to method. My methodology works to engender an understanding of the economic obstacles faced by women in their daily lives. Allowing these women to express their unique lifeways reinforces feminism’s endorsement of non-androcentric views. Such qualitative methods explicate the formal structures of the public housing and welfare systems, revealing them as insurmountable barriers to financial stability.
Feminism as a Theoretical Approach to the Study of Poverty

Earlier Theory (1960-1980): Gender Only

The 1963 release of Betty Friedan’s groundbreaking book, *The Feminine Mystique*, dramatically altered gender relations in this country, simultaneously giving birth to the interdisciplinary field of gender studies. Friedan coined the term “feminine mystique” to describe the “problem that has no name”, which was the “plight of the trapped American housewife” (Friedan 1963, 15, 25). She suggested that women ought not define themselves in terms of their husbands and children. Instead, they should seek out their identities in their own right. She denigrated the suburban prison, proclaiming that women could find liberation in employment outside of the home. Her distinctly capitalist view that worth is defined by money and profit actually devalued women’s work in the home (Lord 1993, Chouinard and Grant 1995).

Another probable result of her publication is the perpetuation of the gendered wage gap. The idea that women wanted to work simply for personal fulfillment allowed employers to underpay women.

It was not until the 1970s when white middle-class divorce (a condition that oftentimes moves these women into the poor and working classes) became commonplace, that the feminization of poverty became an issue for feminist activists. This is one example how women are further marginalized if they are not white and middle-class. In fact, the women at the center of this thesis are at least triply
disadvantaged by being female, black, and poor. My informants who are not heterosexual, young, and able-bodied are positioned even farther from mainstream society (Chouinard and Grant 1995).

Feminist research of the 1960s and 1970s asserted that all women are the same gender based on their biological differences from men (Mitchell 1971; Dalla Costa and James 1975; and Wilson 1977). It neglected to acknowledge that gender identities are socially constructed for women of varying races, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, and classes. Rather, it was produced from the concept that feminist ethnographers relate to their informants based on their experiences as women. These academics did not consider that differences of race, class, or sexual orientation could bias their studies (Visweswaran 1997).


In her assumption that women did not want to be homemakers, Friedan excluded the many women who were employed at the time she published her work. She envisioned women having *careers*, not *jobs*. Working class and poor women oftentimes consider work outside the home as degrading and stressful. There is a critical difference between wanting and being able to work, and having to work (hooks 1984). The option of working for pay segues into Friedan’s anglocentric treatment of women.

Friedan’s concept of a “feminine mystique” was indeed a mystery to African American women. Throughout history, many black women have idealized work in the
home over work elsewhere. Considering work at home as humanizing, performed in a caring environment was a common view. Other labor (menial work such as domestic and custodial positions) was usually considered dehumanizing (hooks 1984).

At the dawn of the women’s movement (circa 1960), Anglo American, middle-class women wanted to be liberated from the home by joining the labor force. Conversely, many black women wanted to be liberated from the paid work force to have more time with their families. Friedan’s ideas spurred white, middle-class, college-educated women to believe that motherhood was a primary inhibitor of women’s liberation. African American women, on the other hand, usually consider their sources of oppression to be racism, unavailability of jobs, and lack of education. Motherhood did not keep black women out of the labor force – black mothers have worked outside the home since slavery (hooks 1984). In sum, the women’s movement in the 1960s and 1970s has excluded, and therefore silenced, poor and black women (Lord 1993, Chouinard and Grant 1995).

Beginning in the 1980s, feminist scholarship opened its ears to gendered discourses that deviate from the white, middle-class, heterosexual experience (hooks 1984; Jaggar 1988; Alarcon 1990; Rose 1993; Kobayashi 1994; Chouinard and Grant 1995; Hanson and Pratt 1995; Peake 1997; Gilbert 1998). They have uncovered the
ways in which gender combines with other attributes such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity and race, and sexual orientation to create a variety of gender identifications.

**Structuration Theory**

The late 1970s saw the rise of a new social theory called structuration, formulated by sociologist Anthony Giddens to analyze human activity. This theory pertains to the dichotomy of human agency and social structures. It is not that structure impedes agency, but that the two elements work in conjunction to produce and reproduce social life (Giddens 1977). Certainly individual human agency cannot be dismissed. I believe that all women are powerful actors in determining the directions of their lives. But it cannot be ignored that the foundations of our androcentric, capitalistic society inhibit women’s spatial mobility and economic self-sufficiency. Human geographers such as Derek Gregory (1989) and Nigel Thrift (1983) have explored how social integration is shaped by time and space.

**Methodology**

In order to apply feminist ideals to social science research, and to understand the ways in which women negotiate a patriarchal society, qualitative interviews with women should be carried out. Learning the individual circumstances of women supports the feminist view that each woman’s experience is unique and valid. This methodology reflects structuration theory as it seeks to reject essentialist notions about women.
This project has led me into an inevitable intellectual quagmire. Using feminist theory as a framework for my study, I discovered contradictions between the theory and the reality of my work. Feminist research is ideally to be conducted with, not on, women. In an attempt to eschew the hierarchical nature of the researcher/researched relationship, my respondents should be active participants in the research process. In principle, I would review my questions and their answers, asking for their interpretation of the data. Once I had written my thesis, I would send copies to each woman, asking for their feedback on the draft. Then, considering their input, I would revise my writing to allow their voices to be heard (Billson 1991; Munro 1993). This sequence assumes that the respondents want to actively participate. And whose interpretations are more valid, mine or theirs (McDowell 1992; Munro 1993; Kobayashi 1994)?

Ultimately, I settled on a compromise between anonymous generalizations of these women and complete identification with them. The latter extreme is unattainable and the former stands in opposition to feminist goals of empowerment and political (personal) change. Detached general statements make interviewing obsolete. Without any open-ended questions, the richness of these women’s stories is lost. Ignoring the differences between the researcher and the researched is problematic as well. The research relationship is always skewed by the perceived power of the researcher, which ironically, speaks to patriarchal practices (McRobbie 1982, Stacey

---

2 While it would be too costly and time consuming to fully engage these women in my research, I did indicate to each respondent that I will send them a synopsis of my findings.
The researcher takes the data, leaving the respondent behind. The respondent has not necessarily been helped in any way. The respondent may experience the benefits of telling her personal stories, regaining memories, or appearing in a publication (Patai 1991). On the other hand, the respondent may believe that the survey is a waste of time. By offering a choice of gifts (as I detail below) to my respondents, I countered this affront to feminist ideology. The primary goal of my research is to advance the socioeconomic standing of these women, a goal that may not be realized. If nothing else, they received a tangible benefit to participating in my research.

To arrive at my results I first had to locate women who would speak with me. The University of Pittsburgh’s University Center for Social and Urban Research (UCSUR) has a Survey Research Program in which they advise researchers who are using surveys to collect data. I consulted with employees of UCSUR to discuss ways of contacting potential respondents. They directed me to several local non-profit organizations that could connect me with public housing residents.

A volunteer at the Pennsylvania Low-Income Housing Coalition (an organization that assists low-income residents of multi-family dwellings on the private market) and an employee of the Alliance for Progressive Action (a public advocacy group comprised of unions, religious and community organizations) said that they knew some public housing residents they could call on my behalf. Alan of the
Housing Coalition provided me with the names and telephone numbers of two public housing residents who were willing to answer my questions. My contact at the APA was unable to locate any public housing residents who would speak with me.

Having only two women to contact, I decided to ask them for further references. This system worked well; each interview led to at least one other respondent. Reflecting on the small number of respondents referred to me, I realized that perhaps some women would refuse to speak with me. Even before this revelation, an employee of UCSUR recommended that I provide an incentive, as UCSUR does, for participating in my survey. He indicated that long distance calling cards are popular. But the surveys conducted by UCSUR span the socioeconomic gamut of Pittsburgh and surrounding Allegheny County. Since one’s income is related to one’s mobility (job opportunities are restricted by limited mobility), I knew that many of my respondents would not have connections outside of the greater Pittsburgh area (Holcomb 1984; Hanson and Pratt 1995; Gilbert 1998). Even if they did, the expense of long distance calling would discourage them from maintaining contact with out-of-towners. So I decided to offer a choice of remuneration for my respondents’ cooperation. They could receive a long distance calling card or a gift certificate to Giant Eagle, which is a local supermarket chain. It turned out that only one of the seventeen respondents opted for a long distance calling card. Despite the incentive provided, and my informing the respondents that their names would not be published, there was one woman who refused to be interviewed. This speaks to the volatile
nature of Pittsburgh’s public housing system at the end of the twentieth century.

Anonymity did not quell the fear or suspicion my call invoked in this woman. Perhaps she thought I would use the answers to my questions to have her evicted from her home (tenants who do not get along sometimes report one another to the Housing Authority, which evicts residents for certain violations). Or maybe she believed her statements would be relayed to the Housing Authority so as to influence its plans for demolition.

After locating respondents, I had to decide on an interviewing technique. Given time constraints and the fact that some women might be suspicious of my intentions, I chose to proceed with telephone interviews.

There are pros and cons of each surveying technique. Face-to-face interviewing is admired for its ability to glean sufficient large-survey data, while telephone interviewing is trusted in cases where small surveys are to be completed in a short period of time. Before the 1980s, interviewers would go to respondents’ homes, and the respondents would allow them inside. In more recent years, interviewers have become reluctant to enter unfamiliar neighborhoods, especially at night (which may be the only time when respondents are home). In conjunction, many people refuse to allow strangers into their homes. According to Goyder (1985), the telephone interview is an effective way of entering respondents’ “urban fortresses”. Additionally, in-person interviewing is more expensive than telephone interviewing (Bailey 1987).
Although interviewing over the phone does not cost as much as face-to-face interviewing, it does lack personal connection. At the same time, the physical appearance of an interviewer may bias respondents’ answers. Over the phone, respondents could assume that I am educated beyond high school by my explanation that I am conducting research. However, they could not necessarily detect my ethnicity over the phone. Every person I have interviewed is African American. If I had interviewed them all in person, they may have provided different answers, based on our social distance (Hyman 1954; Schaeffer 1980). A disadvantage to telephone interviewing is that the respondent may end the conversation at any time, simply by hanging up (Bailey 1987). This is where the importance of an incentive comes in. Knowing that they would receive a practical gift after completing the survey, none of my respondents hung up before answering all of my questions. In comparing survey techniques, the most important issue is the validity of respondents’ answers. Although telephone respondents may give shorter answers and tend to be more suspicious than face-to-face respondents, research has shown that discrepancies between telephone and in-person data sets are not statistically significant (Groves and Kahn 1979; Jordan, Marcus, and Reeder 1980; Sudman and Bradburn 1982).

In an effort to put each respondent at ease, I began the conversation by stating my first and last names and those of the person who had referred me to the respondent. I then said that I was doing research on women living in public housing in Pittsburgh. Then I stated that their part in the research would be responding to a telephone survey.
that would last between thirty and sixty minutes, explaining that their answers would remain anonymous. It cannot be assumed that potential respondents will happily participate, as they may fear exploitation or refer to time constraints. And so at this point in my introduction, I mentioned that in return for answering my questions, they could choose to receive a long distance calling card or a gift certificate to Giant Eagle. Continuing, I asked if it was a convenient time or if I could call back later. Once they agreed to participate, sometimes asking for further clarification of the purpose of my call, I launched into my list of questions. (See appendix for sample survey questions).

The questions I asked were designed to garner an understanding of the economic and social geographies of each woman’s life. By noting her address, I could determine in which part of Pittsburgh she lives. The location of her workplace and her means of transportation offered a map of each respondent’s mobility. Finding out if these women grew up in their current neighborhood speaks to their lifetime mobility, to their ability and desire to move elsewhere.

Since the feminization of poverty is both an issue of political-economic structures and behavioral practices, I wanted to see how these elements are played out in various women’s lives. I asked their ages to see what economic and social differences there may be between younger and older women. Marital status and live-in boyfriends or girlfriends were important in determining the household income and the division of domestic responsibilities. The number and ages of children provides an

---

3 One woman refused to participate, even after I had explained that her real name would not be used and that she would receive a gift in return for her participation.
estimate of a woman’s financial needs. Ethnic/racial background was crucial to understanding the effects of ghettoization and in exploring occupational segregation by race.

To uncover the realistic economic opportunities for these women, I asked if living wage jobs (determined by their family structure) were available to them. Their political participation was also questioned to reveal economic chances. The extent of their political activity speaks to the possibility of enacting living wage legislation in Pennsylvania. It also suggests the likelihood of their participation in labor unions, which could lead to improved financial conditions. Asking these women about their housing and the surrounding communities divulges other constraints to their economic security.

The next chapter will review the feminization of poverty, to which feminist, structuration, and underclass theories may be applied. The specific questions I asked my respondents elucidate the feminization of poverty by applying it to a particular time and place.
CHAPTER 3
THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

Rolling hills, apple trees, and starlit night skies; abandoned concrete slabs, neglected athletic field, and neighbors arguing. These images depict one of Pittsburgh’s public housing landscapes. Recently, this land at the western edge of the city limits has become less residential. City officials decided to raze most of the buildings of Broadhead Manor, a public housing development, and sell the land to nearby OK Grocery, a supermarket distributor. Geraldine, a resident of Broadhead Manor, has witnessed her neighbors move to other low-income, predominantly African American neighborhoods such as the Hill District, East Liberty, and the North Side (Fitzpatrick 1997) (see Figure 1). She has fought to keep her home, but is not certain how long she will be able to stay.

Staying in a 30-day shelter for women in crisis is not ideal. But until Christine Coleman finds “permanent” housing for her five school-aged children and herself, Womanspace East, Inc. in Pittsburgh’s Hill District must suffice. Until 1995, the Colemans lived in public housing in the Hill District. The family had outgrown its home and there were no vacant units that were larger. From then until the summer of 1998, they lived in a friend’s apartment. It was extremely crowded and they were violating the conditions of the lease, so the Colemans ended up at Womanspace. It is late August 1998 and Christine is scanning the classifieds and calling each number advertising a four-bedroom house or apartment. None of the lessors she reaches will
FIGURE 1: PITTSBURGH NEIGHBORHOODS
accept the Section 8 voucher that she received earlier that month. She has been on HACP's waiting list for public housing since August 5th. All of the Housing Authority's five-bedroom units are occupied. There are two six-bedroom units that are vacant, but they are reserved for families larger than the Colemans. There are numerous smaller units that are available, but the Housing Authority considers them too small for Christine and her children. School starts in two weeks, but Christine is unable to enroll her children because she does not know which school district they will be living in (Jones 1998).

Life on welfare in Pittsburgh has changed since legislators implemented the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity (Welfare Reform) Act of 1996 and the 1996 Pennsylvania Act 35. Claire Morrison, the executive director of the Department of Public Welfare's Allegheny County office, believes that the welfare-to-work program can be successful because she has found women on welfare who have marketable skills. Morrison cites a case of a Pittsburgh woman who believed she had no marketable skills. When the woman mentioned that she has been an unpaid baby sitter for years, Morrison determined that the woman did indeed have a job skill, implying that this woman could gain paid employment in the child care industry. She fails to admit that formal child care positions pay little more than the minimum wage and sometimes require experience at a paid job. According to Morrison, this woman wants to work for wages, as long as that does not mean compromising the well-being of her children. As Morrison refers to the need for

---

1 These pieces of legislation are explained later in this chapter.
affordable child care, she assumes that this woman’s concept of her children’s well-being may encompass their spending forty hours a week in formal daycare. She does not allow for an individual’s opinion of child rearing -- the mother might not want anyone but a relative to care for her children, or she may believe that she should not be working away from her children for more than twenty hours a week. Either scenario could complicate employment and financial self-sufficiency.

Morrison does, however, acknowledge a problem shared by many women at all levels of employment when she asks rhetorically, “How many times in any kind of meeting that I attend has some woman jumped up and said, ‘Sorry, I have to pick up my child at child care before it closes’?” (Thomas 1997). It is interesting that Morrison’s query refers to a woman, rather than a person or man, who needs to leave a work meeting to pick up a child at child care. Further, she speaks of a professional workplace, where one is able to leave a meeting to pick up a child. Many low-end service jobs, which are the jobs targeted for welfare-to-work participants, are inflexible regarding work hours. Leaving work early could mean leaving a job permanently.

Losing their homes, having no place to go but an emergency shelter, and being thrust into even more dire financial straits -- many women in Pittsburgh’s public-housing system wrestle with these issues daily. These circumstances hinder women’s economic security. Being forced to move to a different neighborhood can distance a woman from work opportunities, child care providers and public
transportation. Since many low-income women's networks are based in their communities, moving to a different neighborhood can be devastating.

Welfare-to-work may lead to the loss of healthcare. As these women enter the low-wage, temporary, and/or part-time work force, they are unlikely to receive healthcare benefits from their employers. Their Medicaid coverage will be terminated by the government two to three months after employment begins. Women in this situation can only afford charity hospitals, which charge uninsured patients on a sliding scale. But these hospitals are extremely backlogged. An emergency room visit may last nine hours, possibly causing one to miss work, which could mean lost wages. Charity hospital doctors have appointments scheduled through several subsequent months. In the time a woman waits to see a doctor, she may be unable to work until treated for her condition. Such a scenario could send her back to the welfare rolls.

These three examples from Pittsburgh illustrate some of the various situations that contribute to the feminization of poverty, a trend that is not unique to Pittsburgh. In fact, the feminization of poverty has gained attention across the United States since the 1960s, most likely a result of the Women's Movement begun in the same decade. This phenomenon is defined by the substantial numbers of women living in poverty, especially referring to female heads of households. The overall number of female-headed households has been increasing, making more families vulnerable to impoverishment (Table 1).
African American female householders are more likely to live in poverty than their Anglo American counterparts, giving the feminization of poverty an unambiguous racial character. Figure 2 illustrates the discrepancy between the overall poverty rate and that of female-headed families. It also demonstrates the racialization of poverty in the gap between the rates for white and black female householders. It is notable that the poverty rate for black female-headed households has been decreasing in recent years. This may be attributed to affirmative action legislation and an increase in post-secondary education among African American women. Nevertheless, these women continue to experience the highest rates of poverty.

For a geographer, it is interesting to note that poverty's gender bias is not equally distributed across the American landscape. Inner cities maintain a greater proportion of women than do suburban areas. This is due to the fact that cities have more female-headed households as well as more elderly, who are mostly female.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1999a

This chapter reviews some of the important research on the feminization of poverty. The debate over the causes of women’s widespread poverty is explored, and here I support the structural view versus the culture of poverty theory. Next I review the important structural factors contributing to poverty, including economic restructuring, public policy, demographic change, and housing costs, as well as the important studies of occupational segregation by Hanson and Pratt, Gilbert, and Kwan. Then, I present the racial element of poverty feminization, highlighting the decreasing marriage rates of African Americans and the racialized labor market. I argue that the initial elements of the feminization of poverty combined with lower marriage rates for blacks and a racially biased labor market create an enormous barrier against black women’s economic stability. I conclude that welfare-to-work programs will meet with small success, as they steer women towards low-end service jobs. This policy will convert “welfare moms” into the working poor, the benefit of which is dubious.

Factors Contributing to the Feminization of Poverty

...obedience is no longer included among the duties of a wife, and each woman citizen has the right to vote; but these civil liberties remain theoretical as long as they are unaccompanied by economic freedom. (Beauvoir 1953, 679)

Nearly fifty years ago, Simone de Beauvoir observed that the so-called developed world had progressed to the point that women had obtained civil rights, but
that these advances had not yet led to women’s financial independence. Now, almost a half century later, although more American women are in the paid work force, a disproportionate number of them remain in poverty. Below I will examine the reasons for women’s persisting poverty in the United States.

The causes of poverty’s feminization have been debated for some time. Liberals look to occupational segregation by gender, the welfare system, and the proliferation of female-headed families. The last cause has been refuted by Bane (1986), who found that mother-only families, in and of themselves, do not cause impoverishment. She revealed that many poor families emerge when an already poor two-parent household splits up.

Conservatives on the other hand, blame the victim, citing lack of motivation, absence of self-sufficiency, and welfare dependency resulting from cultural proclivities (Peake 1997). Zinn (1989) points out that such behavioral traits do not determine income levels because highly motivated individuals are just as likely to remain poor as those who lack initiative.

Societal structures may very well create the conditions that induce poverty feminization. Among the most important are: economic restructuring, public policy, demographic changes, and housing (Wilson 1987; Peake 1997).

**Economic Restructuring**

The American economy has been restructured in that it has shifted from manufacturing to services. Many high-paying union jobs in the industrial sector have
been replaced with low-wage, mostly nonunion jobs in the service sector (Gale 1984; Noyelle and Stanback 1984; Teaford 1990). For example, between 1967 and 1977, Philadelphia lost 40.3 percent, Boston 36.1 percent, Pittsburgh 35.4 percent, and Chicago 33.1 percent of manufacturing jobs.

These jobs were not altogether deleted and replaced by service occupations. Rather, manufacturing jobs, along with population, suburbanized. From 1950 to 1960, New York City’s population decreased by 1.4 percent while its suburban population increased by 75 percent. During the same period, the population of Minneapolis and Pittsburgh declined 7.4 percent and 10.7 percent respectively, while their suburbs gained residents by 115.7 percent and 17.2 percent respectively (Teaford 1990).

Furthermore, low-wage jobs have increased faster than moderate-wage jobs decreased. This situation allowed less opportunities for low-income women to reach financial stability (Peake 1997).

**Public Policy**

Over the last two decades, public policy has exacerbated the feminization of poverty. Under the Reagan administration, real wages of minimum-wage workers dropped by almost 40% because the minimum wage was no longer raised periodically. The 1980s did see a narrowing of the wage gap between men and women, but not necessarily due to an increase in women’s incomes. Approximately 40 percent of the increase in women’s earnings relative to men’s can be attributed to the decline in men’s incomes as men moved from the industrial sector to the service sector. The
Omnibus Budget Rehabilitation Act of 1981 slashed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Federal cut backs during the 1980s also included job training and unemployment programs, Food Stamps, community health services, education grants for low-income students, and financing for low- and moderate-income housing (Amott 1993).

For years, the modern welfare system has been of particular public concern. To appease their gainfully employed constituents, who may object to their tax dollars going to welfare recipients, politicians have strategized to revamp welfare programs. The stereotype entails unmarried minority women who do not want to work and have children so that they can receive AFDC funds. Despite the public’s perception, there is no conclusive evidence that the receipt of AFDC funds encouraged single parenting via divorce, separation, or out-of-wedlock childbirth. Higher-benefit states do not have higher proportions of single-parent households than low-benefit states (Amott 1990).

To force those who supposedly did not want to work into jobs, the Family Security Act of 1988 mandated enrollment in welfare-to-work programs for certain AFDC beneficiaries. The program in Massachusetts was considered one of the most successful, but only 55 percent of program participants who were employed received any health benefits from their employers (Amott 1990). Given the excessive cost of health care, the majority of welfare-to-work participants were financially strapped by
their precarious positions: they could either carry no health insurance and pay full price for services or pay the exorbitant fees for private health insurance.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 discontinued guaranteed cash payments to the poor. This federal Act replaces the sixty-one year-old AFDC with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Whereas AFDC did not have time limits, TANF lays out a five-year lifetime limit for cash transfer payments for most adults. The five-year limit started from 3 March 1997 for current welfare recipients (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania 1999b). Within the first year of TANF, states were required to have twenty-five percent of their cash recipients employed at least twenty hours a week. For states that had recently reduced their welfare rolls, the rate was reduced. Due to its caseload reduction before the enactment of the federal law, Pennsylvania’s rate was adjusted to seventeen percent. In any case, the state had an incentive to reduce its number of welfare recipients. In May 1996, Pennsylvania’s Governor Tom Ridge signed Act 35 into law. This state legislation charges welfare recipients “to sign agreements that spell out how they plan to get off welfare; to try to overcome barriers to employment; and to work at least 20 hours a week if still on assistance after two years” (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania 1999a, 1).

This legislation assumes that employment will move welfare mothers to economic self-sufficiency. It falls short in neglecting to consider the sex segregation of the American workplace. This unequal job opportunity entails low wages and the glass ceiling (the unofficial policy that provides little chance of advancement for
female and, for that matter, minority employees). Policy-makers ignore the discrepancy between men’s and women’s earnings and the fact that many women’s wages cannot sustain a family (Gilbert 1998). It has been found that geographic concentrations of poor single mothers coincide with areas where low-end service jobs have increased. Indeed, creating jobs does not necessarily boost the economy, particularly if those positions are low-paying (Jones and Kodras 1990).

**Demographic Changes**

The social change in demographics most associated with the feminization of poverty is the increase in female-headed households. These households have multiplied as women have increasingly separated, divorced, married later in life, and abstained from marriage altogether. Specifically, between 1980 and 1990, the average age for first marriage increased from twenty-one to twenty-four. Between 1970 and 1985, divorces almost doubled and out-of-wedlock births quadrupled, resulting in a rise in single motherhood (Amott 1993). The rise in premarital births is shown in Table 2.

The figures in Table 2 are indicative of a social change in America. The “shotgun wedding” is no longer a social norm; today’s society is more accepting of unwed mothers (Mare and Winship 1991). Given that the rate of premarital births remained steady from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s, the almost five percent increase in the 1965-1969 period may be attributed in part to the Women’s Movement. Feminism allowed women to move beyond stereotypes so that being a mother did not
have to mean being a wife. The subsequent decades saw the decline of the industrial era, and so a lack of marriageable (financially stable) men could be an additional impetus for rising out-of-wedlock births.

**TABLE 2: U.S. PREMARITAL BIRTHS, 1930-1934 TO 1990-1994**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of First Birth</th>
<th>Percentage of All Births That Were Premarital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990-1994</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1989</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1979</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1974</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-1969</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1964</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-1959</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1954</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-1949</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1944</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-1939</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-1934</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Housing**

Housing also contributes to the economic disadvantage of women. Birch (1985) has found that female householders are more likely to be cost-burdened, which is defined by HUD as those who pay more than 30 percent of their income in rent, more than 35 percent of their income in mortgage and maintenance, or more than 30 percent in maintenance on mortgage-free homes. Of all U.S. households, 15.5 percent are cost-burdened, while 29.3 percent of all female-headed households are
cost-burdened. The situation is even worse for female householders who have children under the age of eighteen -- 33.1 percent of these householders are cost-burdened (Birch 1985).

**The Geography of Labor: Women and Occupational Segregation**

Also important for the perpetuation of women living in poverty is occupational segregation. The major indicator of this trend is that the labor market has always been divided into male-dominated jobs and female-dominated jobs. The majority of the latter pay significantly lower wages than the former. In 1979, fifty percent of all employed American women worked in traditionally female jobs. These jobs are defined as those positions in which at least seventy percent of the work force is female. Examples include elementary-school teaching, nursing, and clerical work (Hanson and Pratt 1990). Among the numerous explanations for persisting occupational segregation, Hanson and Pratt found that three theories of stand out, each of which must be synthesized to explain fully how labor is segregated.

First, the labor supply theory holds that gender-based segregation of the work force is caused by differences in employees' education, domestic responsibilities, and work experience. It is occupational segregation in the home that causes women to have less education, more work in the home, and possess less experience on the job than men. Next, the labor demand theory blames employer discrimination for occupational segregation. Biased employers only make secondary (low-paying, part-time) jobs available to women. Research indeed demonstrates that some
employers discriminate against women in their hiring, training, and promotion practices, making this one of the reasons why many women seek out female-dominated occupations. Third, the employer-employee matching theory suggests that the ways in which people find jobs affects the segregation of labor (Hanson and Pratt 1990). Men in male-dominated jobs tend to tell other men about related job opportunities, while women in female-dominated jobs are likely to tell only women about similar employment availabilities (Hanson and Pratt 1995). Finally, there are cases where the underpinnings of all three of these models may exist to severely limit women’s job opportunities.

Beyond the theories of occupational segregation lies the distinctly geographic aspect of commuting time and its importance for the additional responsibilities of women. Journey-to-work times are strongly linked to the type of job a woman holds. Those in female-dominated jobs tend to work closer to home than those in other types of jobs. Many women actively elect to work closer to home to accommodate their domestic workloads (Hanson and Pratt 1990).

Hanson and Pratt found that women with the most domestic responsibilities tended to obtain employment in the traditionally female fields. Their data were gathered from respondents who were employed and living in couple-headed households. Hanson and Pratt asked who performed certain household tasks and with what frequency they performed these tasks. They’re possible responses were: “self always”, “self mainly”, “partner always”, “partner mainly”, “both equally”, and
“someone else”. Between 21 percent and upwards to 80 percent of women answered “self always” or “self mainly” to the following tasks: cleaning the house, cooking the meals, cleaning up after meals, shopping for food, doing the laundry, shopping for clothes, paying bills, staying home when child is sick, chauffeuring the kids, pet care, and running errands. Only 6 to 34 percent of men responded “self always” or “self mainly” to these responsibilities. Men were much more likely (52 to 67 percent saying “self always” or “self mainly”) to mow the lawn, do other yard work, and repair the house and car. To these chores, 0 to 20 percent of women responded “self always” and “self mainly”.

Hanson and Pratt grouped all of the responses into categories of “men”, “women in female-dominated occupations”, “women in integrated occupations”, and “women in male-dominated occupations”. They found that the women who worked in the female-dominated job market were most likely to perform the traditional female tasks (cleaning the house, cooking the meals, cleaning up after meals, doing the laundry, pet care, and running errands). Those women in male-dominated occupations were more likely than the other women to do the traditional male chores of yard work (22 percent), house repairs (11 percent), and car repairs (6 percent). The total percentage points, where the highest number reflects the most duties performed, were: 384 for “men”, 751 for “women in female-dominated occupations”, 661 for “women in integrated occupations”, and 662 for “women in male-dominated occupations”.

37
Therefore, men performed the least amount of household tasks while women in female-dominated jobs performed the greatest amount of domestic tasks.

According to Hanson and Pratt's study, women, especially those employed in traditionally female jobs, have many more responsibilities at home than do men. It is notable that many of the male-dominated tasks, such as mowing the lawn and car repairs, are oftentimes not performed by a household head. A teenage son or neighbor may mow the lawn for a nominal fee. Most major car repairs are entrusted only to professional mechanics. On the other hand, the female-dominated obligations are not so commonly met by outside workers. Cooking, cleaning, and driving the children to different activities need to be done more frequently than yard work and repairs. Employing cooks, maids, and chauffeurs year-round is much more costly than hiring outside help for seasonal activities. Ironically, even though women still earn only about $.73 for every $1 a man makes, women in each occupational category were more likely to pay the bills than their male partners.

Gilbert (1998) has also studied the occupational segregation of women. She asserts that economic restructuring since the 1960s has produced three results related to women's employment: a polarization of wages, an increase in low-end service jobs, and an increase in part-time employment. A result of these trends is that many employed women are no better off economically than if they were receiving funds from the now-defunct program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).
Whether she has a partner or not, a woman is required to play several roles -- employee, mother, housekeeper, driver, cook, etc. (Gilbert 1998). The fact that she is not simply an employee means that her work day does not end when she leaves her place of employment. As indicated by Hanson and Pratt’s study, mothers with partners are much more likely to drop off and pick up children at daycare. Clearly, the commute to work is markedly longer when travel to child care is included. Since traveling to child care lengthens a woman’s total commuting time, she is limited in the distance she may travel to work. Further, long commutes are not justified by the low wages earned by women. Limited access to transportation, including a greater dependence on public transportation, also dictates job location and its distance from home. Finally, women tend to make employment decisions from a fixed residential location and in terms of child care location (Gilbert 1998). All of these factors combine to create a geography of viable jobs for women, which is smaller than the male-employment landscape.

Child care is not only constraining in adding to the journey-to-work time, but also economic costs. For women whose skills mandate that they may only obtain low-paying jobs, private child care is all but pointless. In 1991, the average annual cost of full-time child care was $3,432. A woman earning minimum wage at a full-time job brings home less than $10,000 a year. Even if the 1991 average daycare rate has not gone up, a woman would be spending about one-third of her earnings on
child care. Since child care is the fourth largest household expense after rent/mortgage, food, and taxes, a woman would not meet her family's needs on a $5.15 per hour salary. If the entirety of a single mother's wages (after the usual monthly expenditures) are spent on daycare, it does not behoove her to work (Bloom and Steen 1996). Informal child care may be more accessible to low-income women, but it may still be unaffordable. Subsidies would help, but neither local nor federal governments fund child care if it is not licensed. Moreover, when informal child care arrangements are accessible and affordable, they may still be restricting. The hours of operation may be limited and the child care provider may be not be available due to illness or vacation (Gilbert 1998).

The women who do gain the education and skills to secure lucrative occupations still face obstacles in acquiring financial equity. Regardless of their qualifications, employers tend to regard women as less reliable employees, viewing them through the lens of socially ascribed gender duties (household maintenance and child rearing). Worth, in capitalist societies, is defined largely by money and profit. Therefore, women's work in the home is not valued (Lord 1993). This mind-set leads to the workplace's demand for long hours (more than forty hours per week) in return for promotions and increase in pay. But no one, male or female, who works seventy hours each week can maintain top performance. "Work loads that are incompatible
with family life are themselves a kind of toxin -- to men as well as women, and ultimately to businesses as well as families.” (Ehrenreich and English 1989, 88).

Kwan’s (1999) study of whites in Columbus, Ohio, and its surrounding county revealed that the same types of urban opportunities (employment opportunities, shops, restaurants, entertainment, etc.) are available to men and women, but that access to these opportunities was more limited for women. She showed that the lower accessibility of women was due to the greater space-time constraints that women experience. As opposed to Hanson and Pratt’s 1990 study, Kwan found that accessibility was not dependent on the journey to work time. Rather, it was the fixed locations of non-employment activities that limited women’s accessibility to urban opportunities. Further, this study evidenced that women in dual-career households retained their gender-role-related duties. She concluded that, if men would take on some of the traditional household responsibilities of women, access to urban opportunities would become more equitable.

The Racial Element of Poverty Feminization

As I have demonstrated, the number of female-headed families has been rising over the past few decades. It is important to note that this increase in single motherhood is not evenly distributed among ethnicities and races. Women head one in ten white households whereas women head roughly fifty percent of African American households (Spain 1995). And of these, sixty percent were living in poverty (Barron 1984). For whites, only twenty-five percent of those mother-only families lived below
the poverty line in 1980 (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1983). Employment alone
does not necessarily raise single mothers out of poverty. For example, in 1987, almost
one third of black single mothers who were employed lived in poverty. The same
year, only about seventeen percent of white single mothers who worked lived below
the poverty level (Amott 1990). Feminized poverty encompasses women of all
ethnicities and races, but statistics repeatedly show that African American women
have been affected at especially severe levels.

To explain why the feminization of poverty is racially skewed, academics have
pointed to two factors in particular -- declining marriage rates and occupational
segregation by race.

The three principal reasons why marriage rates among African American
women have decreased are: the decline of marriageable black men, civil-rights
legislation, and the increased education of black women (Mare and Winship 1991).

Research reflects the decrease in marriage rates and shows that the rates vary in
terms of race. In 1960, sixty percent of 25-29 year old black women were married,
while eighty-three percent of white women within the same age group were married.
By the 1980s, the rate for 25-29 year-old black women had dropped to thirty-two
percent, and the rate for 25-29 year-old white women went down to sixty-two percent
(Mare and Winship 1991). This disparity in marriage rates could be ascribed to the
lack of marriageable men available to African American women.
As the large majority of Americans marries within its own ethno-racial group, African American women are most likely to wed African American men. One reason why these women have fewer men to consider for marriage is the high incarceration rate of black males. In the United States one out of five African American men will be incarcerated for some part of their lives (Lang 1992). Racism within the criminal-justice system results in higher arrest, conviction, and sentencing rates for black men as opposed to white men (Amott 1990).

Moreover, fewer African American men are considered “marriage material” because the adverse effects of the economic reorganization since the 1960s have hit them the hardest. The industrial sector, which had a tradition of employing a substantial proportion of this demographic group, has been languishing. If marriage offers little financial support for a woman and her child(ren), she is not as likely to wed. The African American women who do marry tend to retain their economic status, shifting from a low single income to a low dual income.

These low single and dual incomes may be attributed to the racialized American labor market. As evidenced by a 1988-1989 study of 185 employers in the Chicago area, rampant bias exists in hiring practices. Some of the employers interviewed considered inner-city workers, especially black men, to be lacking in stability, cooperation skills, honesty, and education. It is race, but also class, as viewed in terms of residential location, that determine employers’ perceptions of prospective employees. Here, race intertwines with space. For the employers
surveyed, "black" equals inner city and "white" is synonymous with suburbs. The respondents went so far as to interchange Cabrini Green and Robert Taylor Homes (largely African American housing projects) and South Side and West Side (mainly African American neighborhoods) with "black". Remarkably, they did not reference Pilsen (a largely Mexican immigrant neighborhood), Humboldt Park (a primarily Puerto Rican area), or Uptown (where mostly low-income whites and new immigrants reside), even though they were interviewed regarding all ethnicities represented in the Chicago area (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991).

This hesitation to hire African Americans has directed much of the black labor force to low-wage occupations. As a result, many employed African Americans, both male and female, are poor. Bane (1986) has found that two out of three black families headed by women lived in poverty prior to the events (divorce, separation, death of partner, or out-of-wedlock birth) that made them single mothers. Therefore, single motherhood is not the only cause of African American women's poverty.

Since African American women cannot depend on male partners to support them financially, they have become more educated in order to attain gainful employment. Affirmative action, rising out of civil-rights legislation, has been advantageous to African American women, but not on a large scale. In spite of civil-rights measures, these women, like African American men, experience bias in the workplace. For example, Gilbert (1998) determined that black women tend more to change jobs with the same employer while white women generally change
employment by way of want ads. The participants in Gilbert’s survey used various job-search strategies depending on their ethnicity. One Anglo American respondent looked in the newspapers, contacted employment agencies, family, and friends. A black interviewee said that she changed positions within her company because she had worked there for several years, so they knew she was a good employee. In other words, black job seekers feel they must prove themselves through experience before they can advance. Thus African American women’s job-search strategies limit their employment opportunities.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the growing literature on the feminization of poverty. Studies from scholars of many disciplines all point to the fact that women’s poverty is a problem of political-economic structure, not behavioral patterns. Human agency is important, however, especially when long-standing biases are confronted. Occupational segregation in particular is a formidable challenge to overcome. As long as child rearing is considered women’s work, and physical labor and executive duties are considered men’s work, women will continue to earn lower wages than men. Add to occupational segregation, the racism in the labor market and lower rates of marriage for African American women, and the ideal of truly equal opportunity employment is even farther from today’s labor market.
Welfare-to-work programs have attempted to lift many women out of poverty, but most fail by sending women to work for non-living wage jobs. The long term results of current policy could actually lead to worse poverty for many American women.

Since the 1960s, public discourse on women has progressed, yet discrimination abounds. It has been proven that a woman with the same educational level as a man is likely to receive less pay for the same work. But misogynist labor practices are still excused by a lack of experience (women who have taken maternity leave do not have as many years experience in the work force as their male counterparts) and by a lack of dependability (one never knows when a woman might get pregnant, and her career is seen as competing with her responsibilities at home). Our male-dominated culture is thus left unchallenged and unchanged. Just because we discuss women’s rights does not mean that the battle of the women’s movement has been won.
CHAPTER 4
PITTSBURGH'S RECENT HISTORY: ECONOMIC TRENDS

Nestled among the Appalachian Mountains of the eastern United States, Pittsburgh finds itself atop one of the world’s great coalfields. The mountains of western Pennsylvania also claim a vast limestone supply. Iron ore mined from deposits in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota were easily transported to Pittsburgh via the Great Lakes network. Thus in the early years of this century, Pittsburgh became known as the steel capital of the world, bringing coking coal, iron ore, and limestone together to manufacture steel at a minimal cost (Fellmann, Getis, and Getis 1992). Today, one understands that “Pittsburgh grew up in an era when geology and geography mattered more to the prosperity of cities, before faxes and e-mail and FedEx allowed cities to grow largely outside the context of work.” (Graham 1998, 15-16).

This chapter will progress through the history of Pittsburgh since the 1930s. Starting with the industrialized city, when Pittsburgh flexed its industrial-economic muscle, the narrative turns to two phases of deindustrialization, when steel and its related industries (iron, aluminum, steel processing, glass, etc.) declined. The present period finds Pittsburgh in a state of recovery, strengthened by its new technologies such as electronics, telecommunications, computers, and biotechnology. The shifting demographics of the Pittsburgh area are outlined next, with details of out-migration and ethno-racial composition. Subsequently, Pittsburgh’s economy today is analyzed. Living wage estimates are provided for various household types according to the cost
Living wage estimates are provided for various household types according to the cost of living in Pittsburgh. A review of occupational opportunities follows, emphasizing that low-wage jobs predominate the pool of jobs available to an unskilled work force. This leads into the occupational segregation by gender and race found in the local labor market. Discrepancies are found in unemployment levels and in wages. The conclusions disclose the damage economic restructuring has done, the lack of living wage jobs in Pittsburgh, and the prejudice apparent in the city's labor market.

**Phases of Pittsburgh's Changing Economic Geography**

**The Industrialized City (1937-1950)**

By 1937, more than one hundred years of industrialization with more than one hundred years of smoke and soot hanging over the central city had left downtown Pittsburgh in a state of disrepair. Those who could afford to leave downtown's eternal nights (the haze from the factories was so thick so as to give the impression of evening during the daylight hours) for the city's surrounding neighborhoods, did so (See Figure 3). Extensive out-migration left the central city blighted, with air pollution posing a serious health threat, and floods occurring seasonally. When it became economically feasible at the end of World War II, Mayor David Lawrence led the way in effecting the $500 million Renaissance I urban renewal plan. Notable results of this project to revive downtown Pittsburgh include: enactment of smoke control legislation; creation of Point State Park; construction of the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport;
FIGURE 3: DOWNTOWN PITTSBURGH STREET AT 9:20 A.M., LATE 1940S
building of USX Tower (downtown high-rise housing U.S. Steel Company offices); and erection of the Civic Arena and Three Rivers Stadium (Greater Pittsburgh Office of Promotion 1988-1989).

Despite the physical condition of the city, its economy was still strong as steel. Pittsburgh area mills put out ninety-five million tons of steel during World War II. Steel mills lined the Monongahela Valley for forty-six miles upriver from Pittsburgh (Graham 1998).

**The Deindustrializing City I (1950-1973)**

On the economic front, steel was still king. In the late 1960s, U.S. Steel Company employed a high of 50,000 employees at its four Pittsburgh area mills (Fellmann, Getis, and Getis). It was during this late industrial era that the city of Pittsburgh’s population topped out at 676,806 (Lang 1992). But Pittsburgh’s economic heyday was about to decline.

Beginning with the Nixon administration, the federal government began directing monies to the “Sun Belt”. This shift in funding diminished blue-collar jobs in the traditional manufacturing belt, within which Pittsburgh is located. By this time, labor unions had secured a strong foothold in the North. Manufacturers decided to move to the South and Southwest to enjoy “right-to-work” laws which diminish unions, lower taxes, less regulation of environmental and workplace standards, and cheaper energy (Holcomb 1994). Birmingham, Alabama was to become a new center
for steel production. Also at this time, competition from overseas markets began to threaten Pittsburgh's stronghold on the steel industry (Florida and Jonas 1991).

By the end of this period, the federal government's postwar policies of highway construction and mortgage subsidy had transformed American cities, including Pittsburgh (Holcomb 1994). African Americans were systematically denied mortgages, so that only whites moved out to the suburbs. Because a car is needed to travel to suburban areas, poor whites and minorities were unable to migrate to the suburbs. This changed the inner city to a largely poor white and minority population, as affluent Anglo Americans dispersed throughout the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which encompasses Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington, and Westmoreland Counties (See Figure 4).

The Deindustrializing City II (1973-1983)

The 1970s ushered in an era where minorities gained rights as workers in the steel industry. The 1974 Consent Decree was established by nine steel companies and the United Steelworkers of America to provide equal opportunities to minorities. By doing so, the steel industry admitted that it had denied blacks and women higher-paying jobs, opportunity for advancement, and training. The only time before 1974 that women were employed on mill floors was during World War II, when there was a shortage of manpower. Although blacks were employed by the steel industry in preceding decades, they usually held the dirtiest and lowest paying positions (Graham
But this empowerment came too late. By the time the Consent Decree was implemented, Pittsburgh’s population and manufacturing sector were on the decline.

During the 1970s and 1980s, up to ninety percent of the area’s steel labor force was eliminated. In this same period, U.S. Steel alone laid off 30,000 workers. Such layoffs had a domino effect; for each steel job that was eliminated, two to three jobs in related industries and local stores were lost. Relocation to the Sun Belt was in part responsible for these layoffs. But the rise of new technology was also to blame. Automation reduced labor needs and the horizontal production line required larger factories. New factories were built in the periphery to be close to their executives’ and engineers’ homes. They were able to leave Pittsburgh because highways had made its river ports obsolete, and advances in communications had made central locations unnecessary (Holcomb 1994).

The local economic conditions of the late 1970s put pressure on then Mayor Richard Caliguiri to halt the city’s downward spiral. His response was the Renaissance II renewal plan. This project’s price tag of more than $2.4 billion covered expenses for: the David L. Lawrence Convention Center; Station Square (upscale complex of shops, restaurants, and bars along the Monongahela river front); Fifth Avenue Place (upscale shopping center located downtown); One Mellon Bank Center (downtown high-rise housing Mellon Bank offices); and a light rail and subway system called the “T” (Greater Pittsburgh Office of Promotion 1988-1989).
The 1980s was also a time of mass exodus out of the Pittsburgh area. Out of the unemployed workers who stayed in Pittsburgh, only twenty-five percent secured comparable jobs. Fifty percent of the displaced laborers found lesser jobs, and twenty-five percent were unemployed at the end of the decade (Graham 1998).

Finally, during the 1980s, federal monies to cities for housing, welfare, public transportation, and redevelopment were slashed. In effect, investment followed residents out of Pittsburgh.

The High-tech City (1983-Present)

Despite Caliguiri’s endeavors, residents continued to leave the Iron City. The estimated 1986 population was a mere 387,490, little more than half the city’s population high of 676,806 in 1950 (Greater Pittsburgh Office of Promotion 1988-1989, Lang 1992). By this time, less than 5,000 workers remained employed at U.S. Steel’s four mills along the Monongahela (Fellmann, Getis, and Getis 1992). Massive layoffs were not limited to U.S. Steel. Between 1979 and 1988, Allegheny County lost 46.6 percent of its manufacturing jobs (Peterson and Vroman 1992). But it seems that the marketing plan, Renaissance II had worked. The city had recreated itself, trading in its industrial image for a postmodern look. In 1985, Rand McNally ranked Pittsburgh the “#1 Most Livable City”, a slogan to which the city still clings. Of course this ranking was based on the revitalized downtown. As in other postindustrial cities such as Syracuse, New York, the new-fashioned image of Pittsburgh has benefited the city’s professionals at the cost of its low-income residents.
(Short et al. 1993). Neither renewal programs included designs for low-income housing. While tax breaks were given to Mellon Bank, welfare payments were reduced, further downgrading minority neighborhoods in the periphery of Pittsburgh’s downtown. And then people began to return to the CBD and its abutting neighborhoods. By the end of the 1980s, more women had joined the workforce and the average family size had decreased. Centrally located housing became more important than the quality of public schools (private schools are always an option to the more affluent). A nationwide recession and high mortgage rates kicked in, and suburban professionals came back to gentrify Pittsburgh’s historic neighborhoods (Holcomb 1994).

The 1990s have given the local economy a makeover. The steel mills and related industries have been replaced by high-tech industries. The Pittsburgh Technology Center now lines the north bank of the Monongahela river with modern buildings. It houses the University of Pittsburgh Center for Biotechnology and Bioengineering, the Carnegie Mellon Research Institute (develops industrial solutions such as cleaning landfills with microwaves), and others (Graham 1998). Other large businesses now employing Pittsburgh’s professionals include AT&T (telecommunications), Sony Electronics Inc., Oracle (information technology), and Compaq Computer Corporation. The Pittsburgh region’s computer industry has kept up with the nation’s other metropolitan areas. Between 1993 and 1995, Allegheny
County's private sector jobs in computer software rose by 16.5 percent. In 1995, the county claimed the nineteenth highest number of computer software jobs out of the fifty largest U.S. counties (Bangs and Weldon 1998).

**Demographics**

In 1990, Pittsburgh was the forty-fifth largest city of the United States with a population of 358,883. Allegheny County was the nineteenth largest U.S. county in 1990, with a population of 1,336,449 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991). During the period 1990-1996, the city population fell by 5.3 percent, which was the sixth greatest population loss of the fifty largest American cities. Between 1990 and 1997, the population of Allegheny County decreased by 4.2 percent. This figure represents the third greatest population decline of the fifty largest U.S. counties. The loss of residents from the city and county during the 1990s extends the trend that began as early as 1960 (Bangs and Weldon 1998). These population losses are attributed to lower fertility rates, low rates of international and domestic in-migration, and most notably, out-migration (Pennsylvania State Data Center 1998). Although out-migration continues, it is slowing down. Between 1980 and 1986, Allegheny County lost about 15,000 residents per year, between 1986 and 1990 about 11,000 per year, and between 1990 and 1995 about 7,000 per year. Should this trend continue, population loss will end by 2005. The outlook for the city of Pittsburgh is not as positive. Its 1990-1994 population decline of 2.8 percent was the ninth largest of
America’s fifty largest cities. This figure does not appear to be very high, but the median city gained population by 1.5 percent. The highest rate of decline (6.9 percent) during this period was in another former industrial core, St. Louis (Bangs and Hong 1996).

Unlike most other American urban areas, Pittsburgh and surrounding Allegheny County are characterized by a rather simple white-black racial demographic profile. In comparison to other American cities, Pittsburgh has a relatively high percentage of African Americans (25.9 percent in 1990, which was the twentieth highest proportion of the fifty largest cities). The lack of Hispanics, Asians, and international immigrants makes the region one of the least ethnically diversified urban areas in the country. In 1990, Pittsburgh’s population was 71.5 percent white and 25.9 percent black, meaning that only 2.6 percent of the city’s population was neither white nor black. Of note, Allegheny County is even less diverse and even more predominantly white. The county’s 1990 population was 87.1 percent white and 11.2 percent black, leaving only 1.7 percent of the population that was non-white and non-black (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1995). It is important to note that, as the overall population of the city continues to decrease, the African American population is increasing (Bangs and Weldon 1998).

This population growth in African Americans has been accompanied by an increase in poverty. In Allegheny County, the absolute number of those living in poverty rose from 143,000 in 1989 to 169,000 in 1993. However, the total population
of the county declined during this time period (Bangs and Weldon 1998). In summation, the populace in the Pittsburgh region is becoming characterized by more African Americans and more impoverished people.

**Pittsburgh’s Economy Today**

**A Living Wage**

Imagine going to work five days a week, eight hours a day, arriving on time, working hard while you are “on the clock”. You do not make personal phone calls and you do not extend your breaks past the allotted time. Your supervisor rates your performance as excellent. Yet you are unable to make ends meet. This is the predicament that many of the nation’s poor find themselves in. Such individuals are referred to as the working poor and do not earn what is called a living wage.

Newscasts cheerfully report that the economy is booming: unemployment is down, there is a high rate of job growth, and the stock market is reaching all-time highs. The individuals writing these reports fail to mention the kinds of jobs that are being created. White-collar jobs replacing blue-collar jobs in the Rust Belt demand a more educated labor supply. Manufacturing jobs could be secured without a high school diploma. Most white collar positions are filled with workers having post-secondary school education. Those without the appropriate training (beyond high school) are left with the option of low-end service jobs that are increasingly available (Kasarda 1988). For example, a new Home Depot is coming soon to Pittsburgh’s
depressed East Liberty neighborhood (Manners 1998). People seem excited about this prospect and trust that the opening of this home improvement store will help turn the community around. If the building contract is granted locally, residents of East Liberty may find temporary employment in the store’s construction. As for those who secure employment working in the finished store, it is likely that only the manager will earn a livable wage.

The Alliance for Progressive Action (APA), a Pittsburgh-based public advocacy group, launched its Western Pennsylvania Living Wage Campaign in 1998. The group defines a living wage as the amount of wages needed for a "subsistence budget". This budget covers the following expenses: basic food, transportation, rental housing, clothing, child care, health care, and telephone. Not included in the budget are items such as: televisions, large appliances, dining out, and savings for college, retirement, or vacations. Accounting for the cost of living in the Pittsburgh region, the APA has established a $34,069 annual income as the living wage for a family of four (two adults and two children below the age of six). This figure breaks down to one adult working and earning $16.40 per hour or both adults working, each earning $8.20 per hour. Noteworthy is the fact that the average American family of four spends $48,497 per year (Olson 1998). Ralph Bangs et. al. have conducted research to determine the basic costs of living in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. They have determined the minimum living wage for various family types, which appear in Table 3.
TABLE 3: MINIMUM LIVING WAGE BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>Minimum Living Wage Level (in 1997$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married couples, 2 workers*, no children</td>
<td>$6.10 per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single adults; Married couples with 2 workers, 1-2 children; Other family types, 2 workers</td>
<td>$7.86 per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married couples, 2 workers, 3-4 children; Single parents, working, 1 child</td>
<td>$10.35 per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parents, working, 2 children</td>
<td>$15.13 per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parents, working, 3 children</td>
<td>$18.38 per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parents, working, 4 children</td>
<td>$20.33 per hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Where "2 workers" appears, the min. living wage level (in 1997$) is the minimum wage each worker must earn.


Opponents of the living wage campaign may argue that businesses cannot afford to pay all employees a livable wage. But, given the exorbitant salaries sub-living wage employers pay their executives, and considering that the city and county governments have given millions of dollars worth of cheap loans and tax breaks to such companies, it is apparent that Pittsburgh area employers can pay all of their workers a livable wage. Mellon Bank Corporation is a case in point. This Pittsburgh firm’s Chairman received $17.2 million in cash compensation in 1997. It would take Mellon Bank’s lowest paid employee 1,010 years to earn the Chairman’s 1997 salary (Olson 1998).
The living wage campaign is timely in that Pittsburgh’s growing job market is dominated by low-end service jobs. The top ten fields for job creation in Pennsylvania in 1997 are shown in Table 4 below.

**TABLE 4: FASTEST-GROWING JOBS IN PENNSYLVANIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Annual Wage</th>
<th>% of Living Wage*</th>
<th>Annual Growth</th>
<th>Growth Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waiter</td>
<td>$11,086.00</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>$11,794.00</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>1,559</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care worker</td>
<td>$12,542.00</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>1,055</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail salesperson</td>
<td>$12,958.00</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>1,427</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s aide</td>
<td>$14,373.00</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>1,145</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home health aide</td>
<td>$15,496.00</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>1,086</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse’s aide/orderly</td>
<td>$17,763.00</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>1,345</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered nurse</td>
<td>$37,960.00</td>
<td>111%</td>
<td>2,227</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems analyst</td>
<td>$42,515.00</td>
<td>125%</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General manager/top</td>
<td>$48,818.00</td>
<td>143%</td>
<td>1,123</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One hundred percent of the living wage is $34,069 for a family of four (two adults and two children below the age of six).

Depending on one’s family composition, only three of Pennsylvania’s fastest-growing jobs provide a living wage. All three require at least a four-year college degree. Women in public housing oftentimes do not have access to a college education. Additionally, they are likely to be single parents, which means a single income must support the family. Given that the living wage only covers minimum necessities, a living wage worker is unable to save for her own or her children’s education. The cycle of poverty is thereby perpetuated by this situation, which is common to urban families.
Job Opportunities in Pittsburgh

Another important aspect of Pennsylvania's economy is revealed in Table 4. It is indicative of a large wage gap. The highest paying of the top ten growing jobs pays over 100 percent more (143 percent) of the living wage than the lowest paying of the high-growth job (33 percent). But at least these positions pay more than the minimum wage, which in 1997 was raised by forty cents to $5.15 per hour. The current minimum wage amounts to annual earnings of only $10,712. When these numbers are adjusted for inflation, it is evident that real wages have decreased by $1.75 per hour over the last twenty years (Olson 1998). Essentially, this amounts to the poor getting poorer.

This uneven labor market development pertains specifically to the Pittsburgh region. From 1993 to 1995, Allegheny County lost 1.6 of its manufacturing jobs, 0.5 percent of its f.i.r.e. (finance, insurance, and real estate) jobs, and 0.9 percent of its government jobs. Meanwhile, the typical large U.S. county gained jobs in these employment sectors (Bangs and Weldon 1998).

The December 18-31, 1998 issue of Pittsburgh's The Employment Guide shows that plenty of low-end service jobs are available in the greater Pittsburgh area. Seven advertisements are listed under “Hotels/Restaurants”, only two of which mention management positions. Management positions could be had at two fast food establishments -- Long John Silver’s and Wendy’s. While the first restaurant states
that it is hiring managers and assistant managers, Wendy’s is more vague. Their advertisement indicates that the restaurant is hiring “crew members” but offers management “opportunities”. Of all seven listings, none cite wages. The four retail advertisements are more encouraging. Each of them mention management positions, but only one, 84 Lumber, specifies wages. With a high school degree (some college is preferred), a manager of this lumber supply company would earn $23,000-$26,000 annually (The Employment Guide 1998). The high end of this salary range figures to $12.50 per hour. A single parent could subsist on this income only if that parent had one child.

The Gendered and Raced Labor Market

Despite Allegheny County’s large population loss, only 0.5 percent of its labor force was lost between 1989 and 1997. So the absolute size of the labor force declined very little during this period. This is attributed to women who joined the labor force during this period. From 1970 to 1990, the percentage of females employed in the county increased steadily, but this percentage remained below the national level (Bangs and Weldon 1998). The discrepancy between the male and female rates of labor force participation is illustrated in Figures 5 and 6.

Among the fifty largest MSAs of 1990, the Pittsburgh metro area had the fourth smallest proportion of employed women who were executives, administrators, and managers. Further, the 1990 Pittsburgh MSA had the fifth greatest gap between
FIGURE 5: MALE LABOR FORCE IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

FIGURE 6: FEMALE LABOR FORCE IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

the proportions of men and women employed in these high-end positions (Bangs and Weldon 1998).

Racial disparities in employment exist as well. In 1989, Pittsburgh blacks' per capita income was only half of Pittsburgh whites' per capita income. This figure was the median of the fifty largest cities, and therefore points to widespread income inequalities.

In 1996, the overall unemployment rate in the Pittsburgh MSA was close to the average for large American MSAs. Yet the rate for the Pittsburgh MSA’s African Americans was two to four times the rate for its white residents (Bangs and Weldon 1998). The 1990 unemployment rates for the City of Pittsburgh are laid out by gender and race in Figure 7. It indicates that the black unemployment rates (19.9 percent for males and 14.3 percent for females) were considerably higher than the white rates (6.9 percent for males and 4.4 percent for females) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1991). Although the female unemployment rates are lower for women than for men, labor force participation must be considered. In 1990, eighty-five percent of Allegheny County’s male population aged 16-64 participated in the work force. The same year, only sixty-eight percent of all Allegheny County women aged 16-64 were in the labor force (Bangs and Weldon 1998). One reason why black males suffer the highest unemployment rate is that African American men were traditionally employed in Pittsburgh’s industrial sector which had been crippled by the 1990s (Knox 1994).
White Males  White Females  Black Males  Black Females

Percentage Unemployed (Age 25-54)

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

FIGURE 7: 1990 UNEMPLOYMENT BY GENDER AND RACE IN PITTSBURGH
The above indicators of a gendered and raced labor market may be attributed to less education on the part of white and black women and black men. Without the training (usually at least four years of college), high-end jobs are not accessible. Those with less education may secure a professional job that is temporary, never being able to maintain financial stability. Then there are the fastest-growing jobs, low-end jobs that are available to those without a college degree. They may be permanent and long-term, but it is unlikely they will pay a living wage. But even when education is held constant, inequalities persist, as shown in Table 5.

Evidently, white men earn more than the other groups, at every education level. Black women’s wages remain ahead white women’s until post-secondary education. This set of data shows that gender is an even stronger income factor than ethnicity. At each level of educational attainment, black men earn at least $5,000 per year more than white women.

TABLE 5: FULL TIME-FULL YEAR MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS BY EDUCATION, GENDER, AND RACE, ALLEGHENY COUNTY, 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black Women</th>
<th>White Women</th>
<th>Black Men</th>
<th>White Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than HS degree</td>
<td>18,864</td>
<td>17,030</td>
<td>26,200</td>
<td>28,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS degree or GED</td>
<td>21,615</td>
<td>20,960</td>
<td>26,200</td>
<td>32,336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>23,580</td>
<td>23,942</td>
<td>29,090</td>
<td>36,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>23,580</td>
<td>26,200</td>
<td>31,440</td>
<td>36,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>32,750</td>
<td>35,370</td>
<td>44,540</td>
<td>52,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

Pittsburgh’s economic history has gone through dramatic highs and lows -- from industrial powerhouse, to rusted and weary city. Now a comeback in the 1980s and 1990s has turned around Pittsburgh’s image, but has not improved reality for many of its citizens. The struggle to find living wage work, leaves many Pittsburghers outside of its growing high-tech industries. The wage gap between the professional and non-professional service sectors primarily finds women and minorities on the short end. Pittsburgh’s demographics are changing so that the city is becoming characterized by more African Americans, who are more likely to live in poverty and outside the high-tech economy.

In Pittsburgh, the local labor market is patently worse than most U.S. cities. In analyzing the local labor market by race and gender, it becomes clear that white men hold the most high-end jobs and enjoy the lowest unemployment rate. Women are in a much greater minority in high-end positions in Pittsburgh than in other urban areas. The black to white ratio of income is strikingly low in Pittsburgh, but in line with national levels. These inequalities in the job market may be the results of occupational segregation and bias in the work place. They may also stem from the fact that education and training are oftentimes inaccessible to Pittsburgh blacks who are isolated in impacted ghettos. However, as Bangs, Kerchis, and Weldon (1997) have shown, education does not necessarily provide equal opportunities for women and
minorities. Their data indicate that Pittsburgh area women, either Anglo or African American, always earn less than African American males. Again, these findings suggest occupational segregation in a biased work place, in which discrimination is more strongly correlated with gender than with race and ethnicity. This points to occupational segregation as a major contributor to the feminization of poverty.
CHAPTER 5
PUBLIC HOUSING IN PITTSBURGH

As a result of the 1937 Wagner-Steagall Act (U.S. Housing Act), public housing was first built in Pittsburgh (Spain 1995). Public housing in the initial years was sorely needed and quickly filled with blacks who had recently migrated. Before public housing the city was unable to accommodate these newcomers. In 1920, according to the Secretary of the Employers Association of Pittsburgh, approximately 250 African Americans were turned away each week because member companies had no housing for them. Until the first public housing, the squalor of the city’s housing and the distance southern migrants sometime had to live from their jobs caused them to move to other northern cities (Gottlieb 1987).

Public housing built during the 1940s was intended to house returning war veterans and their families (Fitzpatrick 1997). Most tenants were white until Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans, faster and cheaper automobiles, and highways opened the door to white suburbanization. Blacks, being denied FHA loans (between 1945 and the late 1950s, less than two percent of FHA-insured housing benefited African Americans), remained in the city, many moving into Pittsburgh’s public housing (Hartshorn 1992).

This geographical phenomenon has created discrete boundaries between low-income and higher-income neighborhoods, between Anglo and African American communities. The crowding of low-income blacks in neighborhoods surrounding
Pittsburgh’s downtown has created impacted ghettos, where few economic opportunities exist. Although the intention of public housing was to provide relief to low-income citizens, housing families in federally-funded homes in these neighborhoods has not been effective in breaking the cycle of poverty. Housing is critical to economic level in its location, which determines an urban dweller’s access to services such as jobs, education, and transportation.

This chapter shall sketch public housing as it has been placed on Pittsburgh’s political-economic landscape. The scale and segregation are mentioned, distinguishing Pittsburgh among other American cities. The next section will provide the background of the two areas where my respondents live. Following is a synopsis of my survey results. It is categorized by demographics, political participation, division of domestic responsibilities, and neighborhood reforms. Then the numbered data is contextualized by individual respondents’ stories. Tying up the chapter, I review patterns of experience among these women, especially in terms of the constraining nature of their housing.

**Scale and Segregation**

The large scale of Pittsburgh’s public housing system is salient. As of August 1999, the city contains 9,265 public housing units, which is the largest per capita stock of any city or county in the United States. Although Pittsburgh currently ranks as the fortieth largest American city, it claims the thirteenth highest reserve of public housing (Department of Housing and Urban Development 1999).
Not only is the city’s network of subsidized housing vast, but it is widely segregated from middle- and high-income neighborhoods. This segregation by class parallels Pittsburgh’s segregation by race. In 1990, the city’s segregation index was .759, which indicates that approximately seventy-six percent of whites or blacks needed to move for Pittsburgh to be completely integrated (where all census tracts have the same proportion of blacks as the city as a whole). When this figure is compared nationally, Pittsburgh is the tenth most residentially segregated city of the forty-nine most populous U.S. cities (Bangs and Hong 1996).

In the Pittsburgh region, impoverished African Americans are keenly aware of their physical isolation. In 1988, six Braddock (a suburb about one mile east of Pittsburgh) women filed a housing discrimination lawsuit against HUD, claiming that the federal agency has assembled impacted ghettos. They point to HUD’s practice of locating poor blacks in housing that is concentrated in seven low-income municipalities in Allegheny County. This suit was settled in 1994, making $12.7 million available for development in the specified towns. Unfortunately, as of July 1998, the municipalities had received less than one percent of the agreed amount (Pitz 1998).

I must stress that residential segregation is not a simplistic issue. HUD has proposed to suburbanize some of its housing. In line with the federal Hope VI program, both HACP and the Allegheny County Housing Authority are attempting to
establish mixed-income neighborhoods. The example of Plum, an Allegheny County
suburb east of the city, bears out the difficulties that arise when such a proposal is
made. Last year the Allegheny County Housing Authority set forth a plan to buy
homes in Plum as new subsidized housing units. At a meeting with Housing Authority
officials, a Plum councilman threatened that “under his instigation, citizens would take
up arms to prevent the housing authority’s tenants from occupying the homes to be
purchased by [the Housing Authority].” He continued his tirade, “all ‘liberals’ . .
should be placed on an island which should then be blown up . . . “. At the County
Housing Authority’s request, the U.S. Justice Department is investigating the irate
councilman (Means 1998).

Meanwhile, public housing residents remain segregated, living in the same
downgraded conditions. The example of Plum suggests that integrating
neighborhoods would lead to white flight, and thus to continued segregation.

Integrating public housing into moderate-income communities is indeed problematic.

**Bulldozing Broadhead Manor**

In an attempt to relocate public housing residents into moderate-income
neighborhoods, HACP has disjointed a fifty year-old Pittsburgh community.

Broadhead Manor’s 400+ split-level townhouses were more than ninety percent
occupied in 1990 (Lord 1997). With a $27 million Hope VI grant received in 1997,
the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) began leveling the
community, where some families had lived since the end of World War II (Fitzpatrick
1997). Today, only a fraction (sixty-four) of the homes remain standing in this Fairywood community. Cement foundations tell of the homes that once stood atop them (see Figure 8). Figure 9 shows a recently renovated three-bedroom unit. Thirty years ago, Broadhead Manor was mostly white. As more blacks moved in, whites moved into Section 8 housing or purchased homes. Today, all of the residents are black.

As evidenced by one resident's small flower garden and another's swing set, those living in Broadhead Manor do not view these townhouses as "public housing units", but as homes. They do not want to escape "the projects" as members of the media and Housing Authority assume.

In the summer of 1996, HACP put up glossy posters throughout Broadhead, advertising its Section 8 Mainstream Program. The poster displays Broadhead on trash day after HACP had let the grass grow to about six inches, juxtaposed with a photo of the brand new Crawford Square townhouses with a finely manicured lawn and a late model car parked in front (see Figure 10). In bright yellow lettering, it announces, "Broadhead Residents: you can now live anywhere you choose." The HACP plan to move many of the residents into Section 8 housing is not a solution since they are guaranteeing vouchers for only three years. If someone in the program does not significantly augment her income by the end of three years (for example, the Crawford Square units are selling for $80,000- $169,100 apiece), she will have to

1 The data in this section and throughout this chapter were compiled through fieldnotes I made during interviews. See chapter two for methodology.
For more information, call the HACP at 922-3292

- No more deplorable living conditions for you or your family.
- Move into a safer community of your choice.
- Choose a community anywhere in Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania or United States.
- Live in a clean, new apartment or house of your choice.
- Take control of your life. Let us hear from you by August 30.

The goal of the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh is to provide you with affordable, safe, sanitary, and decent housing. In keeping with our goal, we desire to provide you with an opportunity to improve your present living conditions. Because HACP will be pursuing an objective of demolishing Broadhead Manor, we cordially invite you to participate in HACP's Section 8 Mainstream Program, which will provide you with a three-year Section 8 Certificate. This program gives you the opportunity to move to a new community of your choice. Yes, you can choose to live in Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Western Pennsylvania, or anywhere in America, or you can transfer from Broadhead Manor to other HACP public housing communities. We will also assist you with your self-sufficiency efforts outside public housing through our Resident Relations and Human Services Department. Our HACP Relocation office will be available to assist you with your relocation plans.

Be a part of the Section 8 Main Street Program and secure your opportunity to live anywhere you desire. WE GUARANTEE IT!

Call us today at 922-3292 and take charge of your life!

FIGURE 10: HACP POSTER ADVERTISING ITS SECTION 8 MAIN STREET PROGRAM
move (Urban Redevelopment Authority 1999). Most likely, she will only be eligible to move back into public housing.

In an editorial in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, it is suggested that the residents who wish to keep their homes just do not understand this plan:

Sadly, there is evidence that the plan is in deep trouble with the residents. Two stormy public meetings this week, including one designed to explain the plan to the tenants, deteriorated into shouting matches. . . . Some residents weren’t in a mood to listen to logic. . . . It’s unlikely that 100 percent of tenants will welcome a change no matter how well it is explained. Still, if they are given the full picture, many of the residents now engaged in shouting matches might come around and support the plan. (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 1996).

When residents objected to the demolition, HACP responded that Broadhead Manor is isolated from urban amenities. However, the Crafton-Ingram shopping center is a three-quarter of a mile walk or six-minute bus ride from the community. Downtown may be reached in a mere twenty-five minute bus trip.

The reason for tearing down so much of this housing was to make room for a massive grocery warehouse. When visiting this site in January 1999, there was no visible construction. There was a crane enclosed by a chain link fence (see Figure 11). Returning in March, one informant told me that the warehouse had been built and was in operation. Before leaving the community, I decided to stop to see the new warehouse. I was met by a large chain link fence topped with barbed wire. Just behind the fence was a small booth, manned by a security guard. As the warehouse is partially over a hill, only the top of it was visible from the road. I took photographs of it (see Figures 12 and 13), and then walked over to two signs by the sidewalk. One
FIGURE 11: HILLSIDE AWAITING NEW CONSTRUCTION, JANUARY 1999

FIGURE 12: OK GROCERY STANDING ON HILLSIDE, MARCH 1999
FIGURE 13: HIGH SECURITY ENTRANCE TO OK GROCERY

FIGURE 14: WAREHOUSE SIGN DISCOURAGING TRAFFIC
announced “CONSTRUCTION AREA” with the reasonable restriction, “NO THRU TRAFFIC”, but there was no construction under way (see Figure 14). The other sign names the grocery distribution company and boasts, “Strengthening Pittsburgh’s Neighborhoods” (see Figure 15).

Although warehouse management stated that they would hire from the surrounding area, my informant (a very active member of the community for many years who has an extensive network of personal contacts in the area) was aware of only one man within the Fairywood neighborhood who had been hired.

Having noticed the security guard watching me and having taken the photographs I needed, I turned and walked to my car. I heard the elderly guard say, “Ma’am!” I continued walking without responding, so he repeated his plea more earnestly, “Ma’am!” He did not pursue me as that would have meant leaving his post. I drove off, bewildered that this guard seemed alarmed by my presence and interest in the warehouse. I wondered what he would have said if I had stopped to speak with him. Would he have told me that I could not take pictures of the premises? There were no signs stating that it was private property or that trespassing was not tolerated. And why were barbed wire and a security guard in place at a warehouse? Was it out of fear of public housing residents?

**The Degradation of “Little Harlem”**

The Hill District was once to Pittsburgh what Harlem was to New York. This neighborhood directly east of downtown was a center for African American literature.
FIGURE 15: A POSITIVE MESSAGE FROM OK GROCERY
art, and music from the 1930s through the 1950s. It claimed one of the best Negro League baseball teams in the country and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a nationally distributed newspaper reporting on black news around the United States. Once the home of Lena Horne, it was "open all night" with its music clubs featuring such jazz legends as Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, and Cab Calloway. The Hill was *the* place for jazz between New York and Chicago (Bolin and Moore 1991).

Originally an entry point for immigrants, the neighborhood was ethnically mixed before the 1930s, home to Italians, Syrians, and blacks. The high points of black migration to Pittsburgh were the periods of 1910-1920 and 1920-1930, in which the city's black population increased by 87 percent and 62 percent respectively (Gottlieb 1987). During World War II and throughout the 1950s, African Americans continued moving to Pittsburgh from the South. A great number of these immigrants settled in the Hill District, demographically altering the neighborhood to primarily African American (Bolin and Moore 1991).

Blacks were not welcome downtown, so they established their own businesses in the Hill District. One’s shopping needs could be entirely met on the Hill. Along Wylie Avenue there were food, clothing, and furniture stores, dry cleaners, and doctors’ and lawyers’ offices. Flourishing businesses led to affluence among a number of Hill District residents. The FROGS (Friendly Rivalry Often Generates Success) social club was established for the community’s elite. But the beginning of the end of the Hill District’s heyday came in the late 1950s (Bolin and Moore 1991).
The Housing Authority opened its urban redevelopment field office at the end of the 1950s. Its initial agenda was to demolish the Lower Hill District. Theaters, businesses, and homes were torn down, thereby destroying the economic base of the Hill (Bolin and Moore). The more affluent left their crumbling community, moving to one of the few Pittsburgh neighborhoods that would rent and sell to blacks, such as Homewood (Williams 1981). The poorer residents who did not have the means to move, stayed on the Hill.

And those who stayed on the Hill saw the “spaceship” land. The Civic Arena with its massive parking lot were completed in 1961. It was intended to house the Civic Light Opera, but instead it became home to the Penguins professional ice hockey team. The Hill District’s City Councilman, Sala Udin, describes the Civic Arena’s effects, “The people from the Penguins games park all over the place, up and down Center Avenue, and they come out after the games, drunk, and piss on the resident’s lawns.” (Volk 1998, 20). In April 1968, a riot ensued on the Hill after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, securing the decline of this historic neighborhood (Bolin and Moore). Today, the Hill District is a predominantly low-income, African American area, dominated by public housing. Its business district along Center Avenue is thwarted by the crack cocaine and heroin business converging at the corner of Center Avenue and Kirkpatrick Street (Volk 1998). The glory of “Little Harlem” has faded.
Survey Results

Demographics

This section will summarize the quantitative results of my seventeen interviews. All of the respondents were female, except for one man who spoke with me about his community and about his mother who passed away in 1991. The results are also tabulated from youngest to oldest in Table 6. The ages range from twenty-two to seventy-eight, with an average age of forty-eight.

All who were interviewed live in the Fairywood or Hill District sections of Pittsburgh. There are two living in Broadhead Manor, which is in Fairywood. The remainder live in three of the Hill District’s subsections -- one in Terrace Village’s Addison Terrace housing community, four in Terrace Village’s Allequippa Terrace housing community, and ten in the Bedford Dwellings housing community, which is in the neighborhood of the same name (See Figure 1). There were nine respondents who have spent their entire lives in their respective neighborhoods. Eight of these nine were in the lower age bracket (twenty-two to forty-five). Of the women who moved, four were 70+ years of age and had moved from the South (Alabama, Arkansas, and Virginia). My data reflect the fact that since the Sun Belt’s economy has boomed and the Manufacturing Belt has “rusted”, fewer African Americans (all of the women are

---

2 Except for the question regarding changes the respondent would like to make to the neighborhood, Kevin’s answers to my questions reflect his mother’s experience.

3 One woman did not want to reveal her age, saying that she tells people she is twenty-four. I estimated that she is in her early seventies by the ages of her children (late thirties to fifties). When averaging the women’s ages, I included her age as seventy-one. Therefore, the average of forty-eight is approximate.
### TABLE 6: DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Housing Community</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Grew up in Neighborhood</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Monthly Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Terr. Village</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>$403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Bed. Dwellings</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8th grade</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>$403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Terrace Village</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>$403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Bedford Dwellings</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9th grade</td>
<td>Not in workforce</td>
<td>$900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Terrace Village</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Business school certificate</td>
<td>Full-time and part-time</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Bed. Dwellings</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11th grade</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>$1,200+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Terrace Village</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2 years of technical school</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>$900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Bedford Dwellings</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2 years of college</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Terrace Village</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>$527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Fairywood</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>$850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Bed. Dwellings</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>$300+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Bed. Dwellings</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>11th grade</td>
<td>Not in w/f</td>
<td>$311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Bed. Dwellings</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Fairywood</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some h.s.</td>
<td>Not in w/f</td>
<td>$500+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
African American) are migrating to Pittsburgh from the South. These survey results agree with Feit and Peterson's (1985) findings that low-income women tend to live geographically restricted lives. Often, they live most of their lives in one neighborhood, and do not travel far or frequently (Feit and Peterson 1985).

The younger women are also more likely to be single. The eight women who are single vary in age from twenty-two to forty-five. All of the others are over forty-five except for a thirty-nine year-old married woman. The older women tend to have more children than the younger women. The average number of children per respondent is 4.3. The women in their twenties have two or three children, except for the twenty-nine year old who has four children. All of the women who have more than four children are 70+ years of age.

Educational attainment varies across generations. The lowest and highest educational levels, fifth grade and bachelor's degree, are held by septuagenarians. The influence of religion is implied by the two women who are active in churches. These two women have post secondary education, ranking them among the most educated of this cohort. Religion has been tied to blacks' educational advancement since emancipation. Black churches developed formal education for African Americans by providing classrooms and establishing schools during the first two generations following abolition (Grant 1993).
Employment varies as well, across age groups and educational levels, so that lack of education is not necessarily a barrier to employment. However since none of the women who work for wages earns a living wage, low educational levels may be linked to their meager earnings. As Casserly concludes, even though black women have increased their educational investment at a faster rate than white women, a higher percentage of black women are unemployed (Casserly 1998). Williams, who did fieldwork in Belmar, a low-income black neighborhood, expresses the hopelessness of this situation:

Those who . . . attend ghettoized schools fear departing at graduation time for they sense what awaits them – the diploma but not the training or the contacts. There is no “place” for them to go. They are already in their “place”. The females go on welfare with their babies. The males go into the streets and/or menial jobs. (Williams 1981, 10).

In fact, the woman with a fifth grade education retired from full-time employment in 1987. She had worked for the Housing Authority as a monitor (positioned at the front desk, buzzing in tenants and visitors) in high-rises. Although she attended college for two years, one of the most educated women is unemployed. Income is not precisely associated with education. A woman I interviewed has an eleventh grade education and makes $1,200 each month. Another woman, who has a GED (General Equivalency Diploma), lives on one-fourth of the latter’s income ($300+ per month). But as evidenced by Table 5, median earnings are higher for those with a high school degree or GED than for those with less education⁴.

⁴ The exception is black men, who earn $26,200 annually whether they have high school degrees/GEDs or not.
Political Participation

Congruent with Verba et al.'s (1993) findings, the degree to which my respondents are politically active depends on their socioeconomic levels. This fact was determined by reviewing the women who had the five lowest incomes and the five highest incomes (see Table 7). The low end ranges from $300+ to $403, and the high end ranges from $900 to $1,200. The most politically active of the lower-income cohort were two of the three with the highest educational levels -- GEDs\(^5\). On the high end, the two women who earn $1,200 per month appear to be as active as the most active of the lower-income group. Neither woman attends tenant association meetings. Without asking them why they do not attend, each woman told me that they do not attend because the meetings are held in the evenings when they are at work. The two women on the low end who said they do not attend tenant association meetings are unemployed. They did not provide a reason for their absence at these meetings. If the tenant association meetings were held in the daytime, the higher-income women would attend whereas the lower-income residents may not.

There are two of the seventeen women, who are not registered to vote. One is in the low economic bracket and the other is in the high economic bracket. Although there is a significant income gap, these women share similar education levels. The lower-income resident dropped out in 11\(^{th}\) grade and the higher-income resident left school after 9\(^{th}\) grade.

\(^5\) The third woman of the three highest educational levels in the lower-income group has a high school diploma. Whereas others may not consider them equal, I equate the GED with a high school diploma.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Registered to Vote</th>
<th>Votes Regularly</th>
<th>Politically Active In Other Ways</th>
<th>Attends Tenant Assn. Meetings</th>
<th>Community Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Yes, planning to strike at work</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, writes letters to representatives</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Baptist Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, works election polls and writes to congressional representatives</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Healthy Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Food Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Hall Captain's Cmte. (keeps the building's halls clean/litter-free)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, protests, started 1st tenant assn. in Allegheny County, and former board member of HACP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Hill House*, Baptist Church, Urban League's Tenant Empowerment Program, Schenley High School's parent assn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e70s</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, works election polls, writes letters to and calls representatives</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>YMCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Food Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Senior citizen group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Hill House administers social services such as a recreational center and a senior citizens' association.
Political participation can affect a woman's financial situation. She may not only vote but campaign for politicians who support living wage legislation. One woman is planning to strike to earn higher wages. Being familiar with her civil rights, Charlotte refused to move out of Allequippa Terrace after signing on to what HACP told residents was an optional move. Rochelle, who is less politically active than Charlotte, did not question HACP's actions and moved from Allequippa Terrace. In her new Bedford Dwellings neighborhood, Rochelle senses a higher crime rate. Her perception of the area limits her mobility, which in turn may hinder her economic opportunities.

**Division of Domestic Responsibilities**

The nine women who are not single range in age from thirty-nine to seventy-eight. Two of their husbands never performed any of the domestic tasks listed in my survey. Of the husbands who contribute to household duties, the extent of their contribution is dependent on age. The thirty-nine year old receives the most help from her husband, who cooks, cleans up after meals, and does laundry half of the time, and always cleans the house, shops for food and clothing, and stays home to care for a sick child. The seventy-six year old had the least cooperation from her husband, who cleaned the house, cooked the meals, and cleaned up after meals half the time, never
did laundry, went food shopping most of the time, and shopped for clothes half the time.

This data is extremely important in that it recognizes a pattern in which male partners have been taking on more household responsibilities. Should this trend continue, women’s poverty could be lessened by the decrease in their domestic tasks.

**Neighborhood Reforms**

The changes that residents would like to see in their neighborhoods were related to four areas – maintenance/remodeling, security improvement/crime reduction, activities for children, and improvement of HACP operations.

Better management and maintenance by HACP is sorely needed. Housing managers do not send out workers to pick up litter and paint fences, as they had once done. The grounds crew no longer comes out to tend to what little green spaces there are, so they have become overgrown. Two residents spoke of a fence removal that left large holes where there once had been fence posts. They want the holes filled because they are unsafe. I am told that children have fallen and a “lady busted her head open” on this hazard. Rochelle’s children risk developing lead poisoning from the paint chips that have been falling onto her bathroom floor.

Remodeling is also in order. Four residents said that the rooms in their houses and apartments need to be bigger. Having seen a townhouse in Broadhead Manor, I concur that the downstairs and upstairs rooms are small. Storage space is quite limited, especially since there are no basements. One woman’s building must be
rewired. She shares laundry facilities with five other households, and cannot do laundry while someone is cooking, because of faulty wiring. Work outside the housing units is needed as well. Roads are pockmarked with potholes, an athletic field has been neglected, and a playground was torn down for no apparent reason (nothing was built in its place).

Safety and crime also concern many of the residents. A Bedford Dwellings resident of thirty-seven years has seen her neighborhood change. In 1998, a bullet went through her bedroom window. So the most important changes that she cited are removal of drug dealers and users from the community, and increase in police patrolling. Tenants in three different buildings in Bedford Dwellings are concerned that there are no security doors on the front entrance to their buildings, so that there is no barrier to individual apartment doors. An Allequippa Terrace resident suggested that a neighborhood watch be established.

Seven women, some with adult children, have expressed a need for activities for the neighborhood's youth. Much housing in the Hill District lacks yards, so children need a place to play. I have been told of a playground that was torn down and another that serves as the place of business for drug dealers. Youth programs are requested for different reasons. One woman said that activities for children are needed so they have somewhere to go when they are out of school in the summer. Another said that organized activities would keep kids out of trouble.
Women have also critiqued HACP for its operating procedures. Several women expressed their concern that HACP no longer screens applicants. Pearl says this lapse in screening has turned a building once occupied by the elderly into a crack house. Others complain of neighbors who are noisy, do not discipline their children, and do not keep the interior and exterior of their units in order. One resident cites a violation of HACP’s confidentiality regulations in which a HACP employee discussed the woman’s request to move with another tenant.

Having been forced to move out of Allequippa Terrace and into Bedford Dwellings, one woman said that tenants should be able to choose the area they live in. In moving tenants, HACP does not consider that the economic and emotional costs of moving are higher for poor women than for most other segments of society (Feit and Peterson 1985). Low-income women maintain personal networks on an extremely localized level, so that moving more than a few miles can disrupt their physical and emotional survival strategies. Not knowing if or when she will be forced to move out of her home, the public housing resident must tirelessly employ both economic and emotional survival strategies.

The numbers of my surveys are telling, with regards to women’s economic conditions. I found that the younger women are immobile, living their entire lives in one neighborhood. In comparison, some of the older women migrated to Pittsburgh, for a brighter future. The younger women do not perceive improved opportunities outside of Pittsburgh, and so they remain. The fact that the younger women are single
reflects the lower marriage rate and the higher rate of female-headed families. The varying educational levels showed that education alone cannot lift a woman out of poverty. The degrees of political activity were correlated with socioeconomic status, so that even if education alone does not raise income, political action that may result from education may affect a woman’s finances. Although men appear to be taking on more household tasks, employers seem slow to understand this social change, since there is still prejudice in the labor market. Finally, neighborhood reforms reveal inhibitors of women’s economic self-sufficiency. Need for maintenance and security may restrict women’s movement or cause her harm that could keep her getting to a job. The idea of allowing tenants to choose their neighborhood would help women maintain their personal networks, which alleviate, if only insignificantly, the burden of poverty. To truly see what these women grapple with in their daily lives, individual stories must be told.

Real Life Experiences

These women’s individual experiences enable the understanding of their perspectives, thereby connecting the feminization of poverty with real people. They locate certain occurrences in the city of Pittsburgh and reveal the complexity of daily survival strategies. These stories illustrate how political-economic structure combines with human agency to shape individual endeavors in managing a meager budget.
Irene

Irene can look back on her seventy years and see that she has led a full life. Growing up in private housing in Virginia, she did not know what the future had in store for her. But she understood the very real limitations that women, especially black women, endured in the 1940s. If she did not find a man to support her, she could support herself working as a domestic or in the tobacco fields. Irene evaded unfulfilling work; by the age of fourteen she had fallen in love with an older man and was pregnant with their first child. Soon after they married, the young family decided to move to Pittsburgh.

By the end of the 1950s, their family had grown to include eight children. Despite her husband’s full-time wages, Irene’s family needed to move into public housing. Rejecting the term “projects”, Irene grew to love her home, where she has lived for the last forty-six years.

Residing in the Bedford Dwellings public housing community in Pittsburgh’s Hill District, Irene became involved in local organizations. In between raising eight children and attending to household duties, she found time to get involved with various social and political activities. She volunteers at Hill House which houses several social services such as a recreation center, a senior citizens’ association, and child care. She remains active in Schenley High School’s parents’ association (two of her teen aged grandchildren currently live with her). Irene also works with her Baptist church’s summer youth program which helps find jobs for teens. She is a member of
the Urban League’s Tenant Empowerment Program and she established the first tenant
association in Allegheny County.

As her children grew to adulthood, Irene continued to be active in her
community, while taking on new tasks. After receiving her GED, Irene took various
courses at Duquesne University, University of Pittsburgh, Point Park College, and
Mount Mercy College (now Carlow College). With early education, social work, and
legal skills in hand, she joined the workforce. She held full-time jobs as an assistant
teacher at a Montessori school, as a social worker, and as a paralegal before retiring in
1991. As hard as she has worked in her community, she has unfortunately witnessed
its deterioration.

The roof of her building now leaks, the green spaces are overgrown because
HACP’s grounds crew has stopped working there, and curb littering is an all too
familiar sight. Irene blames the littering on transitional families which she describes
as temporary tenants. Also, if the grounds crew were coming around, they would
dispose of the litter. Once a safe neighborhood, security has become an issue.
Neighborhood men take turns (today one of Irene’s sons holds the responsibility)
walking around the community as a sort of neighborhood watch.

A widow for almost twenty years now, Irene is facing another loss. HACP
plans to demolish the homes on her street, replacing them with private market housing.
Until then, Irene will do what she can to maintain a sense of community - neighbor
children see her coming and straighten their postures or pick up litter, saying “Ooh, here comes Mrs. Smith”. It encourages Irene to see kids taking pride in their neighborhood, but HACP’s agenda will squelch the residents’ self-respect as they are displaced by new housing they cannot afford.

Pearl

Pearl is probably in her late seventies, although she tells people that she is twenty-four. She and her husband witnessed “white flight” from Pittsburgh’s North Side. Pearl lived on the North Side until her family moved to the Hill District when she was fifteen. She says that her family was one of only about twenty black families living on the North Side. She now sees a community where the minority has switched from black to white.

Although she grew up in the pre-Civil Rights era, Pearl says that everyone got along in her ethnically mixed neighborhood. This mingling of cultures became important to Pearl when her family moved to the predominantly black Hill District. When the first of her eleven children, their ages now ranging from late thirties to fifties, was entering high school, she seriously considered the local high school. Her children were to go to nearby Fifth Avenue High School, which was all black. Pearl decided to send them across the Monongahela River to South Side High School, which was ethnically diverse.

To support their large family, both Pearl and her husband were employed. In his younger days, Pearl’s husband was a musician. She reminisces that he played the
"sexy machine" (drums) at clubs on the Hill. Then he became a truck driver, making local deliveries. Pearl was a social worker by day and a barmaid by night. When I inquired about the division of household labor, she replied defiantly, "Don't even go there. You're talking to the mother and the father".

Even late in life, Pearl is extremely active. Although she is disabled, she volunteers at the YMCA's youth program, works election polls, remains in touch with Social Work professors at University of Pittsburgh, and attends Housing Authority board meetings. Subsisting on $511 a month from disability and social security, she lives in an apartment in the Bedford Dwellings public housing community on the Hill. Although she is active in the community, she no longer attends tenant association meetings. She explains, "I was a great worker in tenants' names... I will not have my name slung around in mud". The hostility that she alludes to arose about two to three years ago. Pearl speaks of the "low down dirty deal" which took place during the election of a new tenant association president. A woman was elected because she won the most votes. But HACP Director Stanley Lowe replaced her with someone who would manage the tenant association according to his agenda.

The president that was elected by the tenants had plans to implement several social programs. She proposed activities for children such as arts and crafts, ping-pong, a library, and snacks, sessions to educate tenants on the upkeep of the interior and exterior of their apartments, and a daycare for senior citizens. The
president appointed by the Housing Authority has not implemented any of these programs.

**Geraldine**

Geraldine is not employed even though she has thirteen years before reaching the usual retirement age of sixty-five. Kidney dialysis treatments three times a week keep her from holding a full-time job. The aftereffects of these treatments are unpredictable. The day after dialysis she may be too tired to get out of bed all day. Or she may have the energy to be productive for ten or twelve hours. So she is unable to show up consistently at a part-time job. Her condition is permanent unless she gets a transplant. It is uncertain how long she will be on the waiting list -- she has been on dialysis for the last three years.

Geraldine is feeling good the day I come to visit her at Broadhead Manor. Her home is neat, but crowded. She does not have an abundance of furniture; rather, the lack of space is due to the size of her townhouse. During the summer of 1998, she moved into one of the renovated units because her house was slated for demolition. Since the rooms in her new place are smaller, she had to give some of her belongings away.

Geraldine also shows me the Ujamaa Center, which is a community center near the townhouses. It houses a laundromat, a small general store, an administrative office, and a large room where tenant association meetings are held. The meeting room is also
used for an after-school program where children can use Macintosh computers, do homework, and make crafts. There are signs on the windows reading “can’t we just get along” and “you are somebody”.

These inspiring messages are meant for children who have seen their friends and neighbors forced to move, who have seen their community decimated. On the positive side, there is a perceived decline in illicit drugs and homicide, which once permeated the neighborhood. Another resident explains that those addicted to crack cocaine quickly agreed to the move because of the relocation money ($750-$950). Therefore, the local crime rate has plummeted. So looking at Broadhead Manor today, it may appear that demolition has eliminated crime. However Geraldine mentions a crime increase in Sheraden, another neighborhood in the city’s West End, where many moved from Broadhead Manor. So in fact, it is likely the illegal activity has not disappeared, but has moved with the tenants having criminal histories.

Charlotte

Charlotte is a twenty-eight year-old single mother of two. She works evenings full-time as a barmaid and does part-time clerical work during the day. Charlotte must take a jitney home because the PAT (Pittsburgh Authority Transit) busses stop running by 1:00 a.m. A jitney is an informal taxi service, where most jitney drivers are black men who drive sedans without meters. Before getting in a jitney, a passenger states

---

6 Kevin informed me that in 1989, the crime rate in Broadhead Manor was very high. He said that by the time there was discussion of demolition in 1996, the crime rate was declining. Due to the relocation monies, Kevin explained that the crime rate has decreased significantly. He did not, however, provide me with statistics on Broadhead Manor’s crime rate. Therefore, the crime rates mentioned are perceived.
where she is going and the driver quotes a fee. Charlotte spends about fourteen dollars a day on jitneys.

Her experience demonstrates not only how Pittsburgh’s public transportation system is limiting, but how the city’s public housing system constrains residents. When Charlotte’s friend was shot, she identified the shooter. Charlotte’s name and address, including apartment number, were printed in the newspaper. This prompted her to request an emergency transfer from HACP. They were unresponsive and lost Charlotte’s paperwork, so she had to go down to the office several times. She is aware of another tenant who requested and received a transfer around the same time. Charlotte said the other tenant was able to move because she “knows” someone at HACP. Without the funds to move into private housing, the only way Charlotte could have moved was if HACP had approved a transfer. She and her family remain in their apartment, and have not been harmed.

**Frances**

Frances is a lifetime resident of the Hill District. Living with her two children in Allequippa Terrace, this twenty-four year-old woman enjoyed a momentary financial boost. A temporary employment agency hired her at Mellon Bank. Her hours were full-time, but the job lasted a mere two months. Although Frances’ rent was raised and she paid $150 per month to a neighbor who watched her children, her monthly disposable income increased from $403 to $550. A 36.5 percent growth in disposable
income seems substantial, but Frances’ $6.25 per hour wages are about half of her living wage rate of twelve dollars per hour.

Now that she is home each day, Frances has more exposure to public housing life. She tells me of a time when a housing manager stole the master key to her building. As a result, all of the locks in the building had to be changed. No letters were sent to inform residents that the locksmith would be coming. Immediately after knocking once, the locksmith, a man Frances had never seen before, entered her apartment. All she was wearing was a T-shirt. Frances says that the police are just as “ignorant” as HACP employees. They force residents to move if they are sitting on the front steps. Frances exclaims, “they treat us like we’re in a [concentration] camp”.

Conclusion

Living in public housing not only influences a woman’s financial situation, but controls social aspects of her life as well. As Williams notes, “Socialization is critically determined by housing and resultant neighborhood conditions.” (Williams 1981, 134). Seeing a community cut down like Broadhead Manor or broken like the Hill District gives cause to believe that the neighborhood is somehow defective. As well, it is defeating when a woman feels that she alone cannot breathe life back into a community invaded by wrecking balls. Impacted ghettos like the Hill District lead to socials ills such as violent crime. Real and perceived crime rates can limit women’s mobility, which then hinders her economic opportunities. Inaccessibility to skills and
living wage jobs keep women in the impacted ghetto, with little hope of a revitalized neighborhood.

Broadhead Manor has no more hope of renewal since it was bulldozed in 1998. Those who left with three-year Section 8 vouchers have found only a temporary solution. OK Grocery came in with claims of strengthening the neighborhood, but one job to a local resident has not helped the community.

Hill District residents have seen how public policy turned their neighborhood into an impacted ghetto, by tearing out ninety-five acres of businesses and homes for the Civic Arena. More recently, residents have been forced to move, sometimes ending up in a shelter, because of public policy. The project to demolish public housing and replace it with mixed-income housing, will probably go the way of the Civic Arena -- doing nothing to improve the lives of local residents.

HACP's plan to create mixed-income neighborhoods will not remove other barriers to poverty, such as economic restructuring and occupational segregation. Rather than tearing down communities, a more effective strategy might be investment in the current federally-funded neighborhoods that improves living conditions and begins to break the cycle of poverty. Instead of spending money on demolition and construction of mixed-income housing, HACP could allocate some funds towards youth programs that could lead to improved communities.

The women I interviewed realize that activities for children could improve their finances and neighborhood. Subsidized programs for kids would unburden
women who must pay for child care. What is more, children occupied with activities have less chance of involvement in criminal activities.

The results of my interviews also support trends identified in chapter three. The rise in single motherhood is reflected in the number of young never-married mothers and of older mothers who were once married. Of the women who had been married, the division of household duties is encouraging. The younger the woman, the more household tasks her husband performed. If this is a common trend that continues, it could reduce occupational segregation.

These women also reflect the fact that higher education does not always correspond to higher income. Further, my respondents’ political activity did relate to their socioeconomic status. In other words, the higher the education and/or income, the more politically active the woman tends to be.

The wide array of responses to my survey questions indicate that, as Williams (1981) notes, there is no single black, poor culture or subculture. African American women or public housing residents cannot be labeled and understood as cohesive groups. Contextualizing these women’s experiences has shown that they can lead meaningful lives despite the numerous obstacles they face.

A major obstacle to high quality of life is HACP. The sliding scale rents, invasions of privacy, forcible relocation of tenants, neglectful maintenance, and disregard for tenant association elections combine to frustrate and discourage public housing residents. The major finding regarding the public housing system concerned
the current demolition project. As one woman stated that HACP should allow residents to choose their neighborhood, she touched on HACP’s hindrance of their tenants’ finances. They may soon find out how moving low-income families to new neighborhoods can be detrimental.

HACP continues with its own agenda that results in overriding tenant associations’ elections, displacing residents for the almighty dollar, slowly processing emergency transfers, and invading residents’ privacy. The women who have spoken with me shed light on the difficulties public housing residents face each day. Amazingly, their spirits are unbroken. One woman has a positive tone in her voice as she tells me about the mandatory welfare-to-work program she is attending. She finds the prospect of earning minimum wage without health benefits encouraging. Her enthusiasm may come solely from the idea of employment. I am unsure if she realizes there is a great chance she will remain in public housing, unable to meet her family’s minimum needs.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has demonstrated that the feminization of poverty exists in Pittsburgh. In certain respects, it is highly prevalent and in others, it is subtler. For example, women in Allegheny County earn lower wages than men even when educational levels are held constant. On the other hand, the younger respondents who had been married receive more help from their husbands than the women in Hanson and Pratt’s (1990; 1995) study.

Although public housing and transfer payments were intended to alleviate poverty, they may actually exacerbate women’s poverty in Pittsburgh. A woman may enter a cycle in which she gains employment through a welfare-to-work program. As the program is designed, her income rises. But then too, her housing cost rises since she pays 30 percent of her income. Interestingly, HUD considers a household cost-burdened if the housing cost is more than 30 percent of the household income. There is not much difference between paying 30 percent and 31 percent of earned income. Thus HUD knowingly burdens low-income residents with its thirty percent rule.

The history of Pittsburgh’s economy and residential segregation have worsened the economic climate for its female residents. Occupational segregation is magnified by a growing service sector that leaves little opportunity to women, especially African American women. As evidenced by Hanson and Pratt’s (1990; 1995), Gilbert’s (1998), and Kwan’s (1999) research, occupational segregation at
home and in the workplace is a persisting obstacle to women’s financial security. Segregating African Americans and public housing away from urban services has further diminished economic opportunities for Pittsburgh’s black women.

Finally, this study has shown the degree to which a woman’s financial status affects her tendency to be politically active. Generally, women with higher educations and/or incomes were more politically active. Certain political activities, such as protesting and striking can lead to an improved economic standing. Although increased education does not necessarily translate into higher salaries for women, political awareness from educational experiences may lead to more stable incomes.

Political awareness is key in opposing conservatives’ denial that patriarchy is alive and well. If women’s advocates believe that the status quo fully empowers women, then feminist reform cannot be effected. It is essential that feminists bring about change to empower all women, but especially those who are doubly or triply disadvantaged -- African Americans and other ethno-racial minorities, lesbians, the poor, and the disabled.

**Public Policy Implications**

The women’s movement is political and personal, so that feminist research does not live in an ivory tower. I will therefore present my findings to pertinent organizations in Pittsburgh¹.

¹ Copies of my entire thesis or synopses of my findings will be given to University of Pittsburgh’s University Center for Social and Urban Research; the Alliance for Progressive Action; the Urban League of Pittsburgh; and the NAACP, Pittsburgh chapter.
Specific policy changes were, in fact, initiated by HUD in 1994. A three-phase renovation project, funded with $35.5 million, was started at Broadhead Manor. Nineteen residents of this housing community attended an eight-week session in which they learned to paint and tile. They went to work on the 1940s structures, earning ten dollars an hour. An exception was negotiated with the welfare office, so that these workers maintained their Medicaid and food stamp benefits while working on this contract. Phases two and three included further renovations of the townhouses, along with an apprenticeship program and an incubation program for minority-owned and women-owned businesses. But before the other two phases began, HACP convinced HUD to move the funds to other urban projects (Lord 1997). If the project had continued as planned, it would have provided residents with marketable skills and resume items to secure living wage jobs. It is probable that this project to renew Broadhead Manor would have met great success, had HACP not put an end to it.

In agreement with Casserly, I do not see one simple solution to poverty. Higher quality and more affordable education coupled with living wage legislation would be a large step in the right direction.

Policymakers should also adjust the administration of public housing. Forcibly moving tenants places undue hardships on families, who already struggle to make ends meet. Creating mixed-income neighborhoods does not resolve the problems of impacted ghettos. If adequate training and/or living wage jobs are not accessible, many poor will remain on public assistance. As the government wrestles with strategies to reduce cash transfers to the poor, it must look past the current welfare-to-
work programs. A GED cannot lift someone out of poverty if she does not receive healthcare benefits and a living wage. Thus, the so-called booming economy of the late 1990s must be critically analyzed if we are to decelerate the feminization of poverty.

**Further Research**

As the three-year Section 8 vouchers begin to expire towards the end of this year, a desperate situation may arise. Once their housing cost skyrockets, those promised greener pastures may not have a choice but to move into deteriorating houses and apartments. A study of the changes that accompany the discontinuation of the voucher program will be warranted. To date, demolition of Pittsburgh’s public housing continues. And plans to replace leveled areas with posh townhouses beckon new social geographies to Pittsburgh’s neighborhoods.

The current welfare-to-work programs are indeed troublesome. Further investigation into this sociopolitical agenda will determine its efficacy in raising people out of poverty. Truly, working for a living wage escapes many Pittburghers.

Considering the sweeping transformation of its economic geography, Pittsburgh has provided a provocative site for this case study. Connections are sure to be made with other cities. Have these issues played out similarly in other Rust Belt cities? Since manufacturing has moved to the South and Southwest, does the Sun Belt avail its public housing residents to living wage jobs? Future studies of Pittsburgh will uncover how the local economy and HACP have shaped the lives of public housing residents. The twenty-first century brings with it hope for rejuvenated communities among the rolling hills of Pittsburgh.
REFERENCES


Manners, Steven, Manager of Survey Research Program, University Center for Social and Urban Research. Interview by author, 16 December 1998, Pittsburgh.


APPENDIX

1.) Name.
2.) Address.
3.) Age.
4.) Marital Status.
5.) If single, do you live with your boyfriend or girlfriend?
6.) Children (include age or ages).
7.) Do you consider yourself African American/black?
8.) Did you grow up in your neighborhood?
9.) Educational Level and Schools Attended.
10.) Are you employed?
11.) If so, please note part- or full-time, the location, and your position.
12.) Income (annual, monthly, or weekly) before taxes.
13.) What form of transportation do you use?
14.) If you own a car, do you pay to park where you live, where you work?
15.) Childcare (formal or informal, location, and cost).
16.) If married or living with your boyfriend or girlfriend, does your partner perform any of the following activities? If so, please note the frequency with which he or she performs the task (always, most of the time, half of the time, or almost never):

Cleaning the house
Cooking the meals
Cleaning up after meals
Doing laundry
Food shopping
Clothing shopping
Staying home to take care of a sick child

17.) Are there full-time, year-round jobs available to you that pay at least $8/hr. (for a single woman or a married woman with 1 child) - $6/hr. (for a married woman w/out children) - $12/hr. (for a single mother of 1)?

18.) What childcare rates have you seen in your neighborhood?

19.) Are you registered to vote?

20.) If so, do you vote regularly?

21.) Are you politically active in others ways, for example, protesting or campaigning?

22.) Do you attend tenant association meetings?

23.) Have you ever contacted HUD or the Housing Authority directly?

24.) If so, for what reason?

25.) Do you belong to any community organizations?

26.) If you could change your neighborhood, what changes would you make (for example, improve street lighting, build a playground near your home, etc.)?

Please list the changes in order of importance, where the first item listed is the most important.

28.) Do you know any other women living in public housing who would be willing to speak with me?

29.) Would you like a gift certificate to Giant Eagle or a long distance calling card?
VITA

Laurel Jeanne Person was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on July 7, 1970. In May 1993, she graduated from University of Pittsburgh with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in French. She worked in International Services for Matthews International Corporation before coming to Louisiana State University in August 1997. The degree of Master of Arts in Geography is anticipated in December 1999. Laurel plans to return to Pittsburgh to work for an urban institution.
Candidate: Laurel Jeanne Person

Major Field: Geography

Title of Thesis: Subsisting on Non-livable Wages: Women in Pittsburgh's Public Housing

Date of Examination: September 10, 1999