

## Appalachian Women: A Study of Resiliency Assets and Cultural Values

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**ABSTRACT.** There is scant literature addressing Appalachian women, their resiliency, and their cultural values. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore what constitutes resiliency for Appalachian women. The following research questions were explored: (a) Are Appalachian values reflected in Appalachian women's perceived resiliency during their school-age years, ages 5–18; and (b) if so, which Appalachian values emerged in these women's external and internal developmental assets? Ten Appalachian women were interviewed and asked to reflect on developmental assets during their school-age years. The study results indicated a relationship between developmental resiliency assets during youth as they corresponded with nine Appalachian values. The results indicate that Appalachian women's cultural values foster their strengths and resilience. This study supports the significance of practitioners acknowledging the importance of cultural values in counseling strategy. Implications and suggestions for future research are suggested

**KEYWORDS.** Appalachian values, resilience, women, developmental assets, culture, phenomenological study

Appalachian females, as a distinct cultural group, face many challenges during their lives. In the Appalachian region residents face lower income levels, higher unemployment, a higher prevalence of poverty, a higher infant mortality rate, and less access to health care than in the United States as a whole (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2007). Most of the literature about those living in the Appalachians, their history, and their values is comprised of nonfictional narratives written between the 1960s and early 1980s by authors such as Eller (1982), Jones (1979), and Weller (1965). There is scant lit-

erature that focuses specifically on women of Appalachian heritage and their values. In Appalachia, where patriarchal family values are common, women are traditionally expected to assume gender roles that center on household and home responsibilities and are not always encouraged to seek formal wage-earning labor. However, Appalachian women overcome many of these challenges by creating a range of resources and social supports, including growing agricultural goods, producing crafts, and joining knitting and quilting groups (McKinnis-Dittrich, 1995; Oberhauser, 2005). Such

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activities can empower Appalachian women to be less marginalized and more resilient in addressing their own needs.

These experiences of Appalachian women fit the definition of resilience in the literature. *Resilience* is defined as the capacity to spring back, rebound successfully in the face of adversity, and develop the capacity to struggle well over time (Walsh, 2003). Research on resilience has suggested that there are key developmental assets that contribute to resiliency. The major premise is that the more positive experiences that children undergo, the greater the likelihood that they will succeed developmentally (Sesma, Mannes, & Scales, 2006). Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) point out that resiliency research associated with adolescence differs from risk research by focusing on the assets and resources that enable individuals to overcome the impact of risk. Further, a study by Rausch, Lovett, and Walker (2003) focused on positive resiliency indicators, rather than risk factors, which captured salient information regarding the existence of resiliency within a high-risk urban elementary school environment. Werner (2001) noted that resiliency is a process that occurs within a cultural context. It is a subjective concept that varies in meaning from one culture to another. The authors are interested in how adult Appalachian women perceive their own resiliency growing up within the cultural contexts of family and community.

The purpose of this study is to explore what constitutes resiliency for Appalachian women. The research questions explored are twofold: (a) Are Appalachian values reflected in Appalachian women's perceived resiliency during their school-age years, ages 5–18, and (b) if so, which Appalachian values emerged in these women's external and internal resiliency assets? This study is a unique contribution to the Appalachian literature because it emphasizes resiliency in Appalachian women from a developmental perspective and seeks to identify values that foster resiliency within a cultural context. Understanding the process of resiliency within a cultural context can be informative as to how developmental assets relate to Appalachian women's values.

Social work and other practitioners working with Appalachian women should understand how resiliency emerges from the Appalachian

value system. This understanding would enhance practitioners' ability to empower these women. Furthermore, a review of the practice literature on resiliency research indicates the need to expand information on gender, ethnicity, race, and age as significant factors in coping (Glicksen, 2004; Walsh, 2003). Glicksen (2006) also explored African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, and how their cultural beliefs and traditions affect resiliency. Dass-Brailsford (2005) examined cultural factors that contributed to resiliency and academic achievement among socioeconomically disadvantaged black youth in South Africa. The authors contend that this vein of research on other culturally diverse populations needs expansion to enhance the understanding of how resiliency emerges in such groups as Appalachian women. These insights can be used to help practitioners capitalize on the women's strengths and lived experiences in order to provide culturally competent services.

### **APPALACHIAN REGION AND CULTURAL VALUES**

According to the Appalachian Regional Commission (2007), Appalachians are defined as persons who are born in or have a parent or grandparent born in the 420-county region that makes up Appalachia. Appalachians comprise approximately 8% of the American population and live in those states that lie along the Appalachian mountain chain. The region includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. The Appalachian people are largely descended from European immigrants who came from England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and other Western European countries to find a better life in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries (Bailey, 1981).

Jones (1994), a well-known sociologist and Appalachian scholar, identified 10 beliefs and traditions that comprise Appalachian cultural values. Appalachian people espouse the values and beliefs of their pioneer ancestors. These values are: (a) independence, self-reliance, and pride; (b) neighborliness; (c) familism; (d)

personalism; (e) religion; (f) humility and modesty; (g) love of place; (h) patriotism; (i) sense of beauty; and (j) sense of humor. Most Appalachians appear to be *personalistic*, where great value is placed on respecting interpersonal relationships. Within this group, Appalachians may go to great lengths not to offend others. They generally prefer an informal style of communication, are individualistic and self-reliant, and forge strong kinship bonds that they maintain throughout their lives. Historically, Appalachian people have depended on neighborliness and hospitality, and support one another during times of need. Moreover, Appalachians tend to be spiritual and have strong religious beliefs grounded largely in Protestant fundamentalist belief systems. They typically have a strong sense of place and an almost symbiotic attachment to the Appalachian region. Appalachians are characterized by an inherent sense of beauty as evidenced by their closeness to nature, their love for music, and their ability to create exquisite handmade crafts such as quilts, dolls, furniture, and baskets. A sense of humor is also identified as a common Appalachian cultural trait and has often helped them to adjust during hard times (Jones, 1994).

### **RESILIENCY AND DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS**

Many cross-cultural researchers have moved toward conceptualization of resilience within the context of a family and community framework. Further, Wright and Masten (2005) contend that the formation of these resilient processes is culturally influenced or can interact with cultural values. Bachay and Cingle (1999) previously noted that resilience among culturally diverse minority women is virtually absent within the resilience literature. Resiliency is defined as a product that provides children with opportunities to develop the skills essential for dealing with adversity that might confront them in adulthood (Goldstein & Brooks, 2006). The study of resiliency at its outset focused more on negative assumptions and deficit-focused models than on capabilities and strengths. Most contemporary researchers concur that resilience refers to positive outcomes, adaptation, or achieve-

ment of developmental milestones or competencies in the face of significant risk, adversity, or stress (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999; Walsh, 2003). In addition, many cross-cultural researchers have moved away from an individually based conceptualization of resilience to a contextually rooted framework. Despite the fact that some of the factors fostering resiliency stem from individual functioning, the formation of these processes can be culturally influenced or can interact with cultural values (Wright & Masten, 2005).

There is a body of literature on childhood resiliency (Greene, 2007; Kumpfer, 1999; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Sesma et al., 2006) and a growing interest in the impact of family and community on resilience (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Hawley & DeHaan, 1996; Patterson, 2002; Walsh, 2002). Kumpfer (1999) indicates that risks or challenges are cumulative as are developmental assets that protect and support children. The life events and situations that place a child at risk are called *risk factors*. Conversely, *protective factors* are those life events and situations that contribute to a child's assets and abilities and help him or her have positive outcomes or successful life adaptation (Kumpfer, 1999). One person may experience an event as a protective factor while another may experience it as a risk factor in another situation (Rutter, as cited in Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006).

There are two general categories of protective factors associated with resilience in school-aged children: internal and external. Internal protective factors are internal resources or characteristics that support the school-aged child including good decision making, problem solving, and the ability to form positive relationships with others. External protective factors emanate from external sources including families, schools, and communities. Specific characteristics would encompass setting and enforcing clear boundaries, limits, norms, and rules; encouraging supportive and caring relations with others; and espousing values of altruism and cooperation (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). The Search Institute has completed extensive research on resilience and risk and protective factors in youth (Sesma et al., 2006). From this research, they conceptualized a model called the developmental assets

framework. This model offers a typology of relationships, opportunities, skills, and other strengths that promote the healthy development of young people. Developmental assets are defined as a set of interrelated experiences, relationships, skills, and values that are known to enhance a wide range of youth outcomes. Forty developmental assets were identified that reflect extensive parameters of strengths-based child and youth development (Benson, 2003; Scales & Leffert, 1999). These developmental assets are divided into two major categories: external and internal assets. The external assets are identified as support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. The internal assets are identified as commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

### METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological approach was selected to explore the reflections of Appalachian women on their school-age years. Approval of this research study was attained from the university's institutional review board. The purpose of the study is to explore what constitutes resiliency for Appalachian women. The interview guide focused specifically on answering two questions: (a) Are Appalachian values reflected in Appalachian women's perceived resiliency during their school-age years, ages 5–18; and (b) if so, which Appalachian values emerged in these women's external and internal assets? Phenomenology requires that the researchers attempt to clarify and understand an individuals' perceptions and experiences, particularly the meanings they ascribe to situations, issues, and concepts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This approach explores the experience of each individual and recognizes that each person's experience has a distinctive relationship with the phenomenon. In the recordings, it is the variation in the participants' responses that emerges through the individual experiences. These emerging themes or categories describe the range of various ways in which a group experiences the phenomenon.

Utilizing the ideas of Creswell (2007) in this study, there are three research processes that con-

stitute the phenomenological method. The first is the investigation of the phenomena (in this research, middle aged and older Appalachian women's recall of their developmental assets). Second is the identification of general themes of the phenomena and in this research it is exploring Appalachian values. Third is the identification of the relationships that develop from these themes. Specifically in this research, it involves the relationship of developmental assets to the values of Appalachian women.

Convenience sampling was used to identify the 10 Appalachian women who volunteered to participate in the study. All of the women were identified by the researchers through professional contacts in the social work community. The women were asked either by the researchers or by professional colleagues if they would be willing to participate in this study on Appalachian women. After receiving the women's consent, the researchers scheduled interview times and locations over a span of 4 months, based on the availability of all parties. Participants were ensured of the confidentiality of the research data, data analysis, and reporting.

The criteria used to select these women were as follows: middle aged or older women; first and second generation Appalachian women; Appalachian women from all three geographic subregions of the Appalachian area—northern, central, and southern; African American representation; and Appalachian women from urban and rural settings. The mean age of participants was 64 (with an age range of 48–83). Six of the women were born in West Virginia, two in Tennessee, one in Ohio, and one in Pennsylvania. Nine were Caucasian, and one was African American, which generally reflects the ratio between Caucasians and African Americans within the Appalachian culture. Pollard (2004) indicated that in the 2000 U.S. Census, 8% of the Appalachian population was African American. Eight of the women in this study were first-generation Appalachians and two were second generation. Two resided in the Appalachian region and eight lived in urban areas in the Midwest. The mean educational level of the women was 14.1 years with a range from 10th grade to doctoral education.

Semistructured interviews provided an opportunity to obtain rich, descriptive data about

Appalachian women's developmental resiliency assets. The researchers asked about their life challenges within the context of understanding healthy development. A structured 20-question interview guide was based on an adaptation of the developmental assets framework (Sesma et al., 2006), which relates to external and internal resiliency between ages 5 and 18. Examples of the types of questions asked are: "Describe the support that your family gave you as a child growing up. Did your family have clear rules, and consequences if these rules were broken? Do you believe that you are a strong person? Explain. How have you adjusted to the changes in your life, both good and bad times?" The research process required these women's active engagement in sharing their stories of success and hardship. The interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours each.

The data were analyzed through a series of steps: (a) dividing data into statements, (b) transforming these statements into clusters of meanings and developing categories of experiences, and (c) organizing the statements, which allowed for the emergence of themes common to all participants' descriptions (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Analysis began with an identification of life challenges and risk exposure during the developmental years of the 10 women.

Consistent with qualitative research methods (Spinelli, 1989), the authors each separately completed cross-case thematic content analysis by identifying and coding themes across cases and then compared the two separate analyses and reached agreement on the themes' content and interpretation. To ensure the trustworthiness and accuracy of the findings, the researchers provided participants with written and oral summaries of their responses and confirmed their agreement (Oktay, 2002). Moreover, the researchers used peer debriefing to minimize bias and review ideas and themes as they emerged.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section will present the data from the 10 women interviewees and the themes of Appalachian values that emerged from within the external and internal developmental resiliency assets. All of the women identified challenges in

their life experiences that they had to overcome. Challenges identified included: Living within a patriarchal family system, dealing with the negative effects of poverty, dealing with the hardships of rural life such as the geographic isolation of mountain communities, lack of transportation, walking miles to school, not having stores and other conveniences nearby, harsh working conditions, closing of the coal mines, lack of employment, coping with the stressors and readjustment of migration, experiencing prejudice and discrimination in urban areas because of the "hillbilly image," and other negative stereotypes.

Further analysis of the data examined how these women overcame the negative impact of these life challenges. The external and internal developmental assets were presented as a framework for promoting resiliency in Appalachian women's experiences as youth. Based on phenomenological analysis of the women's responses to external and internal categories of developmental assets, 9 of the 10 Appalachian values emerged within these assets that promote resiliency.

Following are the external and internal developmental resiliency assets categories, as discussed previously in the literature review, and the corresponding themes of Appalachian values that emerged from the women's life experiences. As discussed in the literature review, the external developmental assets categories are: (a) support, boundaries, and expectations; (b) constructive use of time; and (c) empowerment. The internal developmental assets categories are: (a) social competencies, (b) positive values, and (c) a positive identity and commitment to learning. The Appalachian values that emerged from the women's stories were associated with these external and internal developmental assets categories. The paired developmental assets and Appalachian women's values are described here.

### ***External Assets and Corresponding Appalachian Values***

#### ***Support, Boundaries, and Expectations: Close Kinship Ties***

There were three themes that emerged in the interviews related to external assets that corresponded to Appalachian values: support,

boundaries, and expectations paired with the value of close kinship ties and a supportive family system. Support includes family support, positive family communication, a caring neighborhood, and other supportive relationships in the community. Boundaries and expectations include family and neighborhood boundaries, parameters for discipline, and encouragement for youth to be responsible and do well (Appalachian Youth and Families Commission, 1996; Sesma et al., 2006). The themes that emerged were those of close family ties and honoring the family values that they acquired at home. These themes are consistent with the literature, which indicates that Appalachian families are integral to the lives of the people. In fact, family relationships are considered the most powerful influences on Appalachian people.

The extended family system is supportive, involved, and constant within the lives of Appalachians (Lantz & Harper, 1992; Lemon, Newfield, & Dobbins, 1993; Obermiller & Maloney, 1994). Moreover, the authors have found that Appalachian women in their own lives value close kinship ties and especially rely on nuclear and extended family networks during times of crisis and transition. Familism or close kinship ties was reflected through the following statements: (a) "My family was close and enjoyed spending time together"; (b) "There were clear rules to follow because there were 15 kids and we had to get along"; (c) "I could always talk to my Mom. She gave me advice on how to live and behave"; (d) "If we broke the rules, we would be punished and made to understand the reason for the punishment"; (e) "My parents encouraged us to learn as much as we could and get a good education"; (f) "We were taught to stand up for the things we believed in"; (g) "We were always told that we could achieve anything we set our mind to."

#### *Constructive Use of Time: Sense of Beauty, Humor, Place, and Religious Support*

Several developmental resiliency assets were identified with the constructive use of time when it was paired with the importance of developing and maintaining a sense of beauty and hu-

mor, love of place, and honoring one's religious values and expectations. In this developmental resiliency asset, constructive use of time, three Appalachian values emerged. According to Sesma, Mannes, and Scales (2006), constructive use of time involves three areas of enriching opportunities for youth to foster their resiliency. These areas are: creative activities such as youth programs, quality time at home, and congregational involvement. Moreover, these activities promote fun and a sense of humor in these children, which is considered a trait of resiliency (Greene, 2007). In the study, these three areas of constructive use of time are reflected in the Appalachian values of a sense of beauty and a sense of humor. Second, the quality of time at home reflects the Appalachian value of love of place. Last, congregational involvement reflects Appalachian religious beliefs and traditions of the respondents.

When exploring creative activities within the constructive use of time category, the theme of a sense of beauty and humor emerged. The findings are consistent with the research that Appalachians enjoy spending time in leisure activities that emphasize fun and finding humor in everyday situations (Jones, 1994; Yelton & Nielson, 1991). The women all stated that creativity was encouraged, especially in learning to play music and making crafts. A sense of beauty and humor was a part of family and community life, reflected in the following statements: (a) "We made our own toys. We used a tin can and stick for baseball games"; (b) "Yes, Mom and Dad had a sense of humor and laughed with us"; (c) "A sense of humor was important to my whole family. We used to sit in a circle and tell jokes"; (d) "Mom used to tell funny stories"; (e) "Life with a sense of humor was a lot happier"; (f) "My mother was into making quilts and making flowers"; (g) "If we wanted a toy we had to make it."

In the area of quality time at home of the constructive use of time category, the theme of *love of place* emerged. Appalachian authors have stressed the significance of a sense of place or feeling connected to the land as a major value of Appalachian culture (Dyer, 1998; Jones, 1994). The majority of the women expressed a fondness for time spent at home in the Appalachian

region. They felt that connections to the region and the old home place were important to them even after they moved to urban areas. The following statements exemplify this value: (a) "We didn't mix much. We stayed at home"; (b) "We played checkers, games, and the fiddle"; (c) "We read the Bible, told ghost stories, canned things from the garden, and shared chores"; (d) "We had a big dinner on Saturday night, played games, and listened to the Victrola"; (e) "We sang songs and Dad would always tell us stories about his younger days."

In the area of congregational involvement of the constructive use of time category, the theme of *religion* emerged. Appalachians possess a strong religious value system that reflects fundamentalist religious beliefs and practices. Their religious values are often fatalistic and they believe that in most instances "God's will" prevails. Appalachians follow the Golden Rule, believe that God's grace is unmerited, and also believe that no person is better than his or her fellow human beings (Jones, 1994; McCauley, 1995; Weller, 1965; Yelton & Nielson, 1991). The majority of the women in this study discussed having attended church in their younger years, which was encouraged by their families. Worship also included reading the Bible and listening to radio preachers. The women also displayed a strong sense of spirituality, as noted in the following statements: (a) "I was told life is what you make of it. God will reward you for being a good person and doing what God wants you to do"; (b) "You have to put religion first. Have respect for everyone especially your elders"; (c) "We were expected to know our purpose in life"; (d) "We went to church two times a week for services and we went to revivals"; (e) "We gave preachers a place to eat or a place to spend the night during revival meetings."

### *Empowerment: the Value of Neighborliness*

According to Sesma, Mannes, and Scales (2006), the resiliency asset of empowerment entails young people being valued by their community, having a sense of security and safety, and being given opportunities to contribute to others. Thus, feeling valued and accepted, youth grow

up to be secure, healthy, and capable of helping others around them. Several Appalachian researchers have found that Appalachian people would prefer to rely on neighbors and those with whom they are closely acquainted for both emotional and economic sustenance.

This value of neighborliness is also reflected in the migration experiences of Appalachians who settled in urban communities where they were welcomed and assisted by neighbors and kin (Schwarzweiler, Brown, & Mangalam, 1971; Tripp-Riemer & Friedl, 1977; Weller, 1965). In this study, the Appalachian value of neighborliness was manifested in the empowerment category. That is, the women indicated that they and their parents assisted others in need, feeling that this mutual aid was essential and expected. They said that this arrangement of helping the neighbors was a kind of insurance. Appalachian women consistently described a community of people with mutual respect and a deep sense of caring for one another. The following statements reflect this strong neighborliness and community bond: (a) "If we needed help, people were there to help us"; (b) "We were to help out if someone was down sick"; (c) "We all looked out for each other"; (d) "We always helped. If somebody was sick, you would go to the grocery store or take them food"; (e) "If someone was in crisis you were there regardless"; (f) "We helped older people clean their yard or helped out at church."

### *Internal Assets and Corresponding Appalachian Values*

#### *Social Competencies: Value of Personalism*

Social competencies are described as skills and competencies that help people to make positive choices, forge relationships, and succeed in life (Sesma et al., 2006). Tripp-Riemer and Friedl (1977) found in their research that Appalachians are person-centered and view personal relationships as central to their existence. Moreover, Weller (1965) said that for person-centered individuals, social relationships are central and it is essential to get along with other persons and be accepted by the group. In this study, the Appalachian value of personalism emerged in the social competencies category.

The women valued personal relationships and the importance of getting along with others as reflected in these statements: (a) "I still have some of my friendships from childhood. When I go home we get together. Friends for life"; (b) "We played with neighbors. We rode a neighbor's pony and played games outside"; (c) "My parents encouraged me to get along and interact with other people"; (d) "If people caused problems, we were encouraged to stay away from them"; (e) "We all got along. I don't remember any harsh words"; (f) "We had to hug and kiss our siblings when we fought. We were put in the corner until we apologized. Talk things out."

#### *Positive Values: Values of Humility and Modesty*

According to Sesma, Mannes, and Scales (2006), the resiliency asset of positive values guides young people's behavior and helps them to make appropriate choices. In Appalachian families, according to Lantz and Harper (1989), children learn the values of modesty and respect for others at an early age. Jones (1994) stated that the Appalachian values of humility and modesty help people within the culture realize that everyone has faults and that no one should be pretentious. In this study, the Appalachian value of humility and modesty emerged as a category. In the study, the women reflected that they were taught not to be arrogant or to put themselves above others. They were expected to treat others as they would want to be treated. These values are noted as follows: (a) "I was never allowed to taunt others about their disability"; (b) "I wore a brace and had to carry water up a hill to keep me from laying down and feeling sorry for myself"; (c) "My Mom said you should never make fun of anyone"; (d) "We were taught that no human being is better than another"; (e) "I stood up for a man with a disability at the fair when someone was making fun of him."

#### *Positive Identity and Commitment to Learning: Values of Independence, Self-Reliance, and Pride*

Sesma, Mannes, and Scales (2006) define the developmental resiliency assets of positive iden-

tity and commitment to learning as personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and a positive view of the future, including one's commitment to and goals for learning and improving oneself. According to Jones (1994), independence, self-reliance, and pride are among the most identifiable values of Appalachian people.

In this study, the Appalachian values of independence, self-reliance, and pride emerged in the positive identity and commitment to learning category. All of the women exhibited a sense of individualism and most grew up thinking that they were capable of taking care of themselves. They were empowered by their parents to rely on themselves and were encouraged to set high goals. They were told to believe that they should be proud of their possessions and skills, but not boastful. This set of values is reflected in the following statements: (a) "I have a good self-worth and know that I am a good person"; (b) "We were encouraged to be ourselves, have our own personalities"; (c) "I always believed that I could do anything I wanted and would then do it. I still do"; (d) "I was told to do for myself. You are not always going to have others to think for you"; (e) "I always had goals to reach"; (f) "It was up to me to do what I needed to do to get what I wanted"; (g) "Be different, be your own person. As time went on, I learned to be my own person, appreciate who I am"; (h) "We were expected to make something out of ourselves, to be independent"; (i) "I was told that schooling was important and that going to school was a way to get ahead"; (j) "Nobody can take your education away from you."

In summary, it appeared that all of the women identified challenges, hardships, and negative life experiences that they had to overcome. Despite these challenges, these women exhibited both external and internal assets during their school-age years, which helped them to perceive their lives more successfully and to develop more positive self-images. Externally, they received ongoing support from their families and the community and adhered to the boundaries and expectations of the family. Getting along with others in the immediate community was a major value and families depended on each other in times of need. Creative activities such as learning to play a musical instrument or learning

quilting were strongly encouraged. Constructive use of time was expected and seemed to reflect the powerful work ethic and sense of determination within the culture. Moreover, these women especially felt empowered by their mothers and sensed that both parents valued education and self-improvement. All of the women were spiritual and demonstrated an abiding sense of purpose in their lives stemming from childhood successes and lessons learned from failures.

These women demonstrated a strong sense of self, had positive identities, and were goal-oriented from the time of their school-age years. They were encouraged to develop and maintain good interpersonal abilities, yet within the Appalachian culture, they were expected to be humble and always treat others fairly. All of the women, in one way or another, mentioned their concern and respect for others and how this value had made them stronger and more resilient. The women stated that they always felt that they could reach their goals if they tried hard enough.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings support that Appalachian women are resilient and that their cultural values play a central role in fostering this resilience. Appalachian values, frequently cited in the literature by Jones (1994) and other researchers, emerged in the stories of these women's early life experiences. One value, defined in the literature as that of patriotism (Jones, 1994), did not appear as a distinct cultural theme within the external and internal developmental assets of these Appalachian women. The other nine Appalachian values discussed previously did indeed correspond with specific external and internal developmental assets. This study illustrates that although Appalachian women have had many life challenges in their school-age years, they are strong-willed, capable, and goal-oriented. Education is valued as a means of self-fulfillment and personal advancement within and outside the culture. These women exhibited a range of resilient traits, which if understood, could be helpful to practitioners. The findings of this study indicated that there was a relationship between

nine Appalachian values as they corresponded with developmental resiliency assets during their youth, ages 5–18. The study helped to understand how Appalachian women's cultural values fostered their strengths and resilience. The information gathered in this study is in agreement with Wright and Masten (2005) and other researchers discussed previously who state that despite resiliency stemming from individual functioning, it is often formed from cultural values and influences. This research demonstrates that Appalachian culture played an important role in fostering resiliency among these Appalachian women during their school-age years.

Practitioners who use a resilient framework give full attention to the unique features of Appalachian culture and its impact on practice. For example, practitioners need to be aware that the values of personalism and modesty may lead Appalachian women to go to great extremes to avoid offending others. They may agree to interventions and/or services, although they may not be interested. That is, maintaining a personal relationship with the practitioner takes precedence over receiving professional help. Furthermore, because of the extremely close kinship ties in Appalachian families, keeping a family commitment may take priority over an appointment. Practitioners should be aware that this cultural dynamic may not be resistance, but rather an adherence to Appalachian cultural values. These and other Appalachian values would inform practitioners in how to empower Appalachian women in identifying their strengths and sources of resilience.

There are several limitations to this phenomenological study. First, the authors are both Appalachian so it is possible that participants may have answered questions in the interviews based on what they thought the researchers wanted them to say about the culture. The generalizability of this study is another factor that should be noted as the authors cannot expect the findings to be applicable to other samples of Appalachian women. These women were asked to reflect on their developmental years and recall their early life experiences. In any retrospective study, recalling memories of early life experiences could be a dynamic that reflects in the completeness of the findings.

Future research that focuses on differences in age, race, and migration status would further the understanding of resilience among Appalachian women. This diverse data set could further enrich our understanding of Appalachian women's developmental resiliency and expand an understanding of the conditions under which this resiliency emerges. This research suggests that Appalachian cultural values predispose women to resiliency.

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