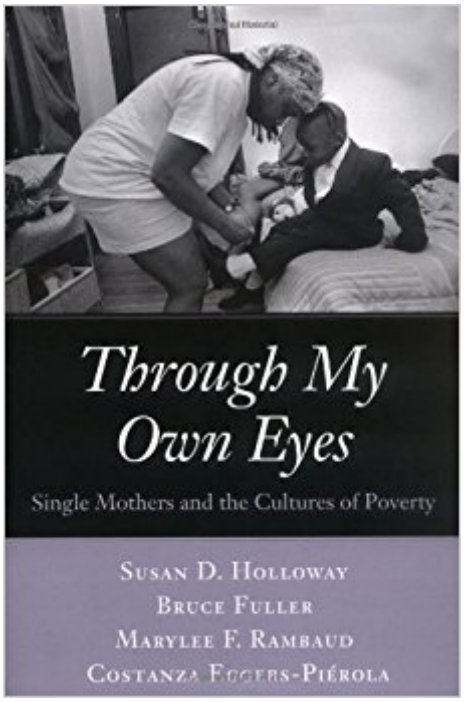
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Through My Own Eyes: Single Mothers And The Cultures Of Poverty



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Synopsis

Shirl is a single mother who urges her son’s baby-sitter to swat him when he misbehaves. Helena went back to work to get off welfare, then quit to be with her small daughter. Kathy was making good money but got into cocaine and had to give up her two-year-old son during her rehabilitation. Pundits, politicians, and social critics have plenty to say about such women and their behavior. But in this book, for the first time, we hear what these women have to say for themselves. An eye-opening--and heart-rending--account from the front lines of poverty, Through My Own Eyes offers a firsthand look at how single mothers with the slimmest of resources manage from day to day. We witness their struggles to balance work and motherhood and watch as they negotiate a bewildering maze of child-care and social agencies. For three years the authors followed the lives of fourteen women from poor Boston neighborhoods, all of whom had young children and had been receiving welfare intermittently. We learn how these women keep their families on firm footing and try--frequently in vain--to gain ground. We hear how they find child-care and what they expect from it, as well as what the childcare providers have to say about serving low-income families. Holloway and Fuller view these lives in the context of family policy issues touching on the disintegration of inner cities, welfare reform, early childhood and "pro-choice" poverty programs.

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Customer Reviews

Over a three-year period, Berkeley professors Holloway and Bruce Fuller and independent scholars Marielee F. Rambaud and Constanza Eggers-Pierola interviewed 14 poor, single-parent women of

Anglo, Latina, African American background in the Boston area to learn about their attitudes and beliefs toward parenting, employment, and welfare. This in-depth study reveals similarities and variations in these womens' approaches to (mostly) common goals of attaining self-reliance, education, and respect for themselves and their children. The authors strongly suggest that policymakers, educators, professionals, and community members (to all of whom this book is addressed) understand the underlying ambitions and key influences of these families' differing cultural milieus, resource availability, and attitudes when planning what should be a mix of programs to help them escape the poverty that precludes their independence and hurts our society as a whole. Recommended.?Suzanne W. Wood, SUNY Coll. of Technology, Alfred, Lib.Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Over a three-year period, [the authors] interviewed 14 poor, single-parent women of Anglo, Latina, African American background in the Boston area to learn about their attitudes and beliefs toward parenting, employment, and welfare. This in-depth study reveals similarities and variations in these womens' approaches to (mostly) common goals of attaining self-reliance, education, and respect for themselves and their children. The authors strongly suggest that policymakers, educators, professionals, and community members (to all of whom this book is addressed) understand the underlying ambitions and key influences of these families' differing cultural milieus, resource availability, and attitudes when planning what should be a mix of programs to help them escape the poverty that precludes their independence and hurts our society as a whole. Recommended. (Suzanne W. Wood Library Journal)Through My Own Eyes is a thoughtful book that adds to our knowledge about poverty in America. By utilizing women's voices throughout, the volume offers a rich texture of ideas that is both compelling and creative. The book is a useful addition to the field of education, social welfare, and social policy and adds special meaning to one of the most challenging issues of our time. (Jill Duerr Berrik Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare)

I am reading this book for my own personal growth. I am a school teacher and a new mother and wanted to understand a bit more from an academic point of view the struggles, challenges and love that single mothers experience in this country. Many of my students come from single family homes. It is very rich and powerful book. I am still reading it. So far I am very interested in the research presented. I like its participatory research approach. It touches on our countries lack of support for poor mothers, who work so hard to care for their children, mothers who are constantly navigating the social system, low paying jobs and childcare.

The goal of Through My Own Eyes was to make mothers and their young children who live at the edge of poverty no longer faceless strangers. This was done by telling their story of living in poverty. This book argued that there is not one single culture of poverty, that there are many cultures of poverty. This study focused on fourteen "working poor" mothers in the Boston area who had at least one child below the age of five.This book discussed the push and pull factors of being a mother and needing to provide for their family. This book worked to dispel the myth that women prefer to be on welfare over working. This was done by looking at the ways and context within which these women pieced together income, from low paying jobs, welfare, and kin and childcare. This was also done by looking at the pressure that welfare agencies and public policy has put on mothers. Another myth that was dispelled was that families in poverty have low expectations for their children in school and do not care about their child's education. These women's stories illustrated a concern for their child's success and many of them saw education as a tool for success and social mobility.The last chapter of the book discussed the lessons learned through this study, which included the difference of economic and social context each woman came from and the resources available within those contexts. The authors also outlined the implications and suggestions for policy makers, community practitioners, and scholars and analysts. The theoretical framework was a cultural model, specifically cultural difference. I also think that there was a lot of sociological influence. The most interesting aspect of this book was how easy to read it was. I thought that the book was written in an accessible manner. Though it was obviously academic, I thought that it would be easy for the people who this book was written about to read. I thought that that was important because many books and articles that I have read that have used interviews or ethnography have used so much theory that is inaccessible to the people that it is written about. The evidence of this book was interviews with women who were working mother's in poverty. Additional research and studies that supported the authors' arguments were also cited and used as examples. The point from the book that I am going to connect to my broader scope of knowledge is from chapter seven. The title of chapter seven was Cultural Models of Education. This chapter included a discussion about each mother's conception of the purposes of schooling and the type of schooling they saw best fit for their child. The authors of this book found that these parents emphasized teacher-structured learning. They also emphasized literacy and numeracy skills. I thought this was interesting because it connected to recent reading I have done, Lisa Delpit's Other Peoples Children Ellen, Brantlinger's Dividing Classes, and Jacqueline Goodnow's Parents' Knowledge and Expectations. I thought that the perspective of the parents in Through My Own Eyes connected to Lisa Delpit's argument that

the constructivist approach is not working for African American students and that these students need a more behaviorist approach that emphasizes skills. Her argument is that low-income parents prefer conservative forms of schooling because they believe it provides more access to power than progressive approaches. This argument connected to the preferences exhibited by the mothers in Through My Own Eyes who did not like preschools that did not have a behaviorist, teacher-centered approach. Many of the mother's believed that education was their child's chance at social mobility and they did not want to waste their child's time in an atmosphere that was not training them to be successful in school. This perspective was similar to Delpit's because both believe that conservative curriculum enhances poor children's chances for social mobility.The mother's perspective also connected to Ellen Brantlinger's Dividing Classes. Brantlinger argued that, similar to working class and poor parents, the middle class prefers aspects of conservative pedagogy including an emphasis on skills, facts, and standardized knowledge. I think it is interesting that both of these books use interview strategies with their respective group and both showed parents who believe that behaviorist teaching will enable their children to be successful.In this chapter I also saw connections to Goodnow's Parents' Knowledge and Expectations. Goodnow discussed the circumstances that parents seek out information about their parenting. She argued that parents seek out information when they need it. Questions on page 147 of Through My Own Eyes connect to questions addressed by Goodnow, "If a mother is not confident about her role in preparing her child for school, what does she do? Under what conditions do mothers accept "expert opinion" and when do they reject it?...When expert knowledge is perceived as legitimate, cultural models evolve in response to it; this is the active process of producing culture". The mother's in the study responded to "expert" knowledge on child rearing, though some were more responsive tan others. Though this was not overtly stated I wonder if what the authors were saying was that the level of new information a mother sought out was dependent on her cultural model? I am curious about how the author's felt that their own class position may have affected their analysis of the experiences of the women in the book.

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