WOMEN'S POWER:
A CROSS-GENERATIONAL EXPLORATION
OF ONE GERMAN-RUSSIAN FARM FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

Dockter, Shona Ann, M.A., Department of Sociology and Anthropology, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, North Dakota State University, May 1992. Women's Power: A Cross-Generational Exploration of One German-Russian Farm Family. Major Professor: Dr. H. Elaine Lindgren.

Exploration of the familial power women possess is growing as sociologists and anthropologists recognize the legitimacy of power internal to the family. The focus of this research was to uncover the forms of power German-Russian women held as they operated in the private sphere of the family. Attention also focused on the transference of women's power, and the family power dynamics unique to farm families.

Members of three generations of one German-Russian farm family were interviewed. The results indicated German-Russian women operated from bases of power derived from their roles as farm wives who contributed to family sustenance, and as caretakers and kinkeepers, maintaining family cohesion. While male power is largely public and formal, women's reliance on the bonds of familial relationships across generations lend them greater power in that realm.
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In loving dedication to
three special German-Russian women:

Barbara Schaffer Dockter
1897 – 1986
...for her strength and independence,

Emma Brenneise Wittmier
1906 – 1989
...for her faith and gentleness,

and

Virginia Wittmier Dockter
...for her continuous counsel and support.

The determination, persistence, and faith that... German-Russian women possessed was remarkable. These were the most powerful qualities they passed on to succeeding generations. It was the women who helped pass on the customs, values and history of our people by the foods they cooked, the home atmosphere they created and nourished, the skills and lessons they taught and the stories they told of their own past. (Rader, 1984: 37)
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INTRODUCTION

Exploration of the familial power women possess is growing as sociologists and anthropologists recognize the legitimacy of power internal to the family. As subjects of ethnic study, German-Russian women are a dichotomy of subordination and enduring strength and power. At times, German-Russian women have been portrayed as servants, maids, and slaves, living lives of drudgery (Diede, 1983; Wishek, 1941; Weber, 1927, cited from Phillips, 1988). The German-Russian woman's life was considered one of inferior status.

German-Russian women have a powerful history, shaped by the traditions they brought with them as immigrants from Europe: a strong sense of family and practical adaptability to social and economic realities (Kennedy, 1979). Despite visibly public subordination and inferior status, peasant women were forces to be reckoned with (Levine, 1979). The experience of immigration had a particular selection effect. May Antin, a Russian immigrant, remarked, "What we get in steerage is not the refuse, but the sinew and bone of all the nations" (Kennedy, 1979).
Driven by necessity, these women drew from within themselves the stamina, courage, and imagination to survive the harsh realities of pioneer life. German-Russian women were among the strong, tenacious, adaptable immigrants who found ways to come, stay, and take advantage of the freedoms America offered (Kennedy, 1979).

An important factor affecting group identification of German-Russians in America was their resistance to change in matters that threatened them most during their years in Russia and, before that, in Germany: difficult economic situations, loss of freedom of religion, and loss of their own ethnic German culture. In their efforts to retain their culture and solidarity, German-Russians remained loyal to their traditions in a country undergoing social change and a clamor for equal rights.

Blood and Wolfe (1960) studied husbands and wives and reported that the groups expected to be most patriarchal included immigrant families, families currently or formerly living on farms, elderly couples, and uneducated couples. If one asks an older German-Russian woman, "Who is the head of the house?" or "Who has the power in marriage?", the answer invariably will be "Men." If one asks whether she believes in feminism or the Equal Rights Amendment, her first response will be to ask that the issues be explained to her. Her second response most likely will be an unequivocal, "No, I
don't believe in that stuff. The man is the head of the family—he has the last word!"

German-Russians as a whole were opposed to the women's suffrage movement in 1914 (Kloberdanz, 1988: 150). As women across the country were fighting for the right to vote, German-Russian women refrained from becoming involved in politics and community activities. In public, the immigrant women often assumed subordinate roles, at times even walking several paces behind their husbands (Kloberdanz, 1988: 150).

And yet German-Russian women undisputedly possessed a great deal of power, often "ruling the roost."

In a German-Russian family, the woman always was the boss...although she had never heard of Women's Lib, she was truly liberated and free in her castle...at home she was in charge of things and very brave, but in public she was timid and tender. (Marzolf, 1990: 52-79)

The occasion of women's "taking charge" of their families was such an understood phenomenon that an expression was used to describe German-Russian husbands: "Er hat nicht immer die Hosen an," which translates to, "He does not always wear the pants" (Marzolf, 1990: 59).

Why, then, in light of the realities in countless German-Russian homes, do German-Russian women espouse conservative, even ultra-traditional values outside the home? Salamon and Keim (1979: 17) suggest that although the women cede power by allowing men to be the ceremonial or structural
heads of families, rural women do not feel exploited or downtrodden. Rural women, as German-Russian women, realize that they possess power and that men recognize their potential to exercise it.

Niomi Phillips describes her grandmother as follows:

...modest but bossy, especially in the kitchen; opinionated but able to keep her opinions to herself when she feels she should. In public, she displays the unassuming manner of a lifetime, accepting men with amused tolerance, smug in the knowledge that it is women who preserve religion, nurture children, protect families, and orchestrate life. (1988: 84)

German-Russian women apparently subordinated themselves to male domination publicly and symbolically, while the social reality they created through their interpersonal relationships was often of a more egalitarian nature.

Studies of power historically have concentrated on legitimate, authorized, i.e., "male" power, leaving the subject of subtle, informal power untouched. The "myth" of male dominance (Rogers, 1975) has prevailed, lending the appearance of male control, while actual power may be more egalitarian. Researchers have concentrated on power men wield outside the home to hypothesize that men are the leaders of women. However, as Friedl (1967) points out, if the family is the most significant social unit in peasant societies, then the attribution of power should be examined in that most private sphere. It is within that private
sphere of family that the German-Russian woman operates from a base of power.

The focus of this research was to uncover the forms of power German-Russian farm women held. Little attention has been given to research in the private sphere of power, the German-Russian woman's operation in that private sphere, or the family power dynamics unique to farm families. A second focus of this research was to explore the intergenerational familial tie and the manner in which women's power is passed on. The solutions contemporary women use are grounded in the influences of their mothers and grandmothers.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, power and its intergenerational link was studied at the micro level. Three generations of one German-Russian farm family formed the population from which was built an elementary understanding of women's power and its transference. The findings of this pilot study will be the foundation for further research examining the private sphere of power.
LITERATURE SURVEY

Conceptualizing Power

Operationalizing marital and family power has proven difficult. Problems of conceptualization and measurement (McDonald, 1980) have resulted in a number of divergent explanations.

Blood and Wolfe (1960) defined marital power as "the potential ability of one partner to influence the other's behavior. Power is manifested in the ability to make decisions affecting the life of the family" (1960: 11). The two researchers developed a power model after asking married couples to answer decision making questions about the husband's job, car purchase, life insurance purchase, vacationing, acquiring housing, wife's job, doctoring, and food expenditures. The questions were asked because of their importance, universality to all couples, and their typically "masculine" and "feminine" distinctions.

Emerson conceptualized power as "an ability or potential (which may or may not be acted upon) to influence others, i.e., to withhold rewards from and/or to apply punishment to others" (1964, cited from Osmond, 1978: 50). Zartman (1976)
further defined power as a negotiation situation, pitting one party against another. Power negotiation took place when the first party caused the second party to shift from his or her original position to that of the first party.

The reputational approach measures family power by self-report or the report of some other person intimately acquainted with the family power structure (Heer, 1963). Strodtbeck (cited from Heer, 1963), innovator of the experimental-observation approach, used revealed differences. Family members were positioned according to certain hypothetical questions of value and asked to resolve the resulting value difference. Family power was measured by determining whose opinion prevailed in the discussion.

Defining power on the basis of spousal prevalence in decision making has been criticized for its overly simplistic fashion (McDonald, 1980). Preoccupation with this single dimension negates the dynamic, multidimensional force of marital power (Blumberg and Coleman, 1989). Decision making is an ongoing process, occurring continuously over the life cycle of relationships (Scanzoni and Godwin, 1990).

Blumberg and Coleman (1989) argued that economic power is a key variable affecting the power balance within a marital relationship. Women's employment outside the home can significantly affect the structure of power in families (Shukla and Kapoor, 1990). According to "resource theory"
(McDonald, 1980; Safilios-Rothschild, 1970), the decision making power of each spouse depended directly upon the extent of valued resources each spouse contributed to the marriage. A valued resource is defined as "anything one partner may make available to the other, helping the latter satisfy his needs or attain his goals" (Blood and Wolfe, 1960: 12).

For women, the indication is that the more money they earn relative to their partners, the more control and consensus they will manage to achieve in their marriages (Scanzoni and Godwin, 1990). As wives seek employment outside the home, their increased economic power will lead to an increased sense of self and increased control over their own lives; and they subsequently will achieve greater bargaining power in their marital relationships. These changes experienced by wives possessing economic power will manifest themselves in changes in the gender balance of power within the household (Blumberg and Coleman, 1989).

One limitation of resource theory in its contribution to the study of power has been its almost exclusive focus on economic power. Shukla and Kapoor (1990) have endorsed the need to examine other resource variables that might operate in different cultures to influence the balance of family power.

Intangible resource variables as a source of marital power have been overlooked in most studies. Parsons (1955)
divided power between husbands and wives along a continuum of instrumental versus expressive roles. He focused on structural and functional familial relations to develop the idea of instrumental and expressive activities. Among the family's primary functions were socialization of children and stabilization of adult personalities through marriage relations. Each family member had specialized roles in performing its functions, with the male's assuming responsibility for instrumental roles (providing economically for the family and maintaining the appearance of the family outside the home), while the female assumed responsibility for the expressive roles (providing affection, emotional support, and integration of family members). The couple's involvement in decision making was influenced by the manner in which they perceived their involvement as affecting their personal goals and interests growing out of their roles in the family (Wilkening and Bharadwaj, 1967).

Women dominate the balance of familial power through their expressive roles. When power is defined in terms of the public sphere of economics, men most often wield the greater power, based on their extrafamilial roles as providers. Examining power outside the family tells little about the kinds of power women wield and how they use it (Kranichfeld, 1987).
In tests of resource theory...the resources women hold universally (skills in relating to and fostering the development of others) have been virtually ignored...when power is defined as the ability to change the behavior of others intentionally, as the ability to bear, educate, and determine the personality, the values, beliefs, hates, and loves of each new human member of a society...then power is at the core of much of what women do...the power intrinsic in determining the outcome of each new generation is unparalleled. (Kranichfeld, 1987: 50; Raphael, 1975, cited from Kranichfeld, 1987: 45)

The power to shape and mold generations arises largely out of women's roles of caretakers and kinkeepers. In efforts to maintain family ties, kinkeepers and nurturers become more "deeply, extensively, and enduringly embedded in the family" (Kranichfeld, 1987: 42). The central role women play in orchestrating family gatherings and ritual occasions anchors them as linchpins of family cohesion (Kranichfeld, 1987: 42).

The kinkeeping position is primarily a female activity, which persists over time and frequently is passed on from mother to daughter over successive generations (Rosenthal, 1985). This processural nature of power has received little attention. Hagestad (1984), Kranichfeld (1987), and Rosenthal (1985) have examined the power dynamics in cross-generational "power constellations," of which women are the core. In approaching the study of power from an intergenerational perspective, one must move from examining
the static, horizontal bond of the marital tie to focusing on the vertical ties of family. Only with this new focus on the family life cycle can the emergent, dynamic nature of family power and, thus, German-Russian women's power be assessed.

Historical Background of the Germans from Russia

The history of the Germans from Russia has been one of planting roots, uprooting that which was planted, and once again sowing seeds upon new soils (Giesinger, 1974; Height, 1975; Kloberdanz, 1988; Sallet, 1974). In the mid 1700s, eastern and east central Europe were in economic distress. The impact of the Thirty Years War and the Seven Years War were felt most severely by the German peasants (Giesinger, 1974). The wars had led to oppressive taxes, high unemployment, and the conscription of peasants' sons. Religious persecution also had caused growing unrest in the country, as the predominantly Catholic areas of what is now southern Germany were brought under Protestant rule. As conditions worsened, many natives sought to escape.

On July 22, 1763, Catherine the Great issued a manifesto that many Germans viewed as their ticket to freedom (Giesinger, 1974: 1). Catherine, a German-born princess who became tsarina of Russia, wished to Europeanize her Russian Empire and make it a factor in Western politics. Large
tracts of land in the Volga region were to be turned into an agricultural paradise as part of Catherine's plan.

While Catherine's manifesto granted foreigners the right to settle anywhere they desired in the Volga region and follow any chosen occupation, all settlers had to take an oath to be loyal Russian subjects. Special privileges granted to the settlers included religious freedom, local self-government in the colonies, self-administration in schools and churches, and exemption from taxation and from military service.

The manifesto was distributed over much of Europe. Catherine hired immigration recruiters and paid them "per head" for the number of people they could bring to her country. To the Germans, who had suffered through years of war and devastation, the manifesto was a godsend. Approximately 27,000 people left the German-speaking states in what is now central and southwest Germany to settle in Russia's lower Volga region (Kloberdanz, 1982: x).

Although the first migration of Germans to Russia was considered successful, another large migration took place during the early 1800s under the reign of Tsar Alexander I, grandson of Catherine the Great (Kloberdanz, 1988: 122). Tsar Alexander I reissued his grandmother's manifesto in 1804 with some changes, hoping to draw experienced German farmers, craftsmen, and winegrowers to settle in the southern Black
Sea region of Russia, known as the Ukraine. The Tsar hoped the German farmers might serve as models for the Russian peasants in the Black Sea region, which was still uninhabited and uncultivated.

This second manifesto initiated the flood of German immigration to the Black Sea region. At the time, the German states were devastated by the Napoleonic wars. Peasant sons once again were conscripted, many principalities were under harsh French rule, and religious conflict was felt. The new manifesto promised religious freedom and military exemption just as the old one had, but an additional enticement was the opportunity to homestead large tracts of land. German peasants were excited about the possibility of owning land and perhaps acquiring more land for their sons.

While many Germans immigrated to new lives in Russia, they did not fully assimilate into Russian or Ukrainian society. Little social interaction and intermarriage occurred among the Germans and Russians. Most of the young Germans married within their own village, thus keeping to their own ethnic heritage and faith. Few of the villages had a mixture of Catholics and Protestants because relations between the two religious groups were strained. The rifts stemmed to the Reformation and the bloody religious wars that had followed.

The self-sufficient Germans had built their own schools
and churches in which they continued to learn and worship in their native tongue, rather than using the Russian language. Germans who could speak Russian were those who conversed with "outsiders" when trading goods. While the colonists maintained separate schools and churches, they also retained many features of dress, customs, and folk culture and spoke the distinctive dialects of their home regions in Germany.

Because the Germans kept themselves aloof from the native peasants, many angry Russians began to circulate anti-German propaganda in nationalistic publications. The critical period of anti-German sentiment was in the 1870s. The Germans were viewed as intruders in Russia and were accused of being disloyal to the Tsar. The Russian peasants envied and resented the special privileges of the German colonists, their extensive land acquisitions, and their prosperity.

Because of the growing sentiment in Russia against foreign colonization, Tsar Alexander II abrogated the promises of Catherine the Great in 1871 and began to "Russianize" the German colonies (Kloberdanz, 1988: 128). German settlements were given Russian names (Sallet, 1974); and in January of 1874, Tsar Alexander II subjected all residents of the Russian empire to military conscription (Kloberdanz, 1988: 129).

The Germans resisted the Tsar's edict because Catherine
the Great had promised them eternal exemption from military service. This promise was one of the main reasons the colonists had settled in Russia. Another reason the Germans resisted military conscription was that the Germans felt they had no country to fight for—they believed themselves to be ethnic Germans, not Russians. The colonists also felt that military conscription soon would be followed by loss of freedom of religion and the loss of freedom to conduct their own local governments and schools.

Tsar Alexander III ascended the throne in 1881 (Kloberdanz, 1988: 130) and espoused the view of "Russia for the Russians!" Except for teaching religion and German, Russian became the official language of instruction in the village schools of the colonists. With Tsar Alexander III in power, German colonists once again had reason to immigrate.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Germans left Russia by the thousands for the promise of a new land—America. The immigrants flooded the Great Plains where the Homestead Act of 1862 allowed them to acquire land and to continue providing for their families.

**German-Russian Women on the Great Plains**

At the time of this mass immigration to the Plains, America was entrenched in Victorian ideology, prescribing the "proper" roles for men and women. The Cult of Domesticity
(Cott, 1977; Draditor, 1968, cited from Anderson, 1988) and the Cult of True Womanhood (Welter, 1966, cited from Armitage and Jameson, 1987) labeled a "true" nineteenth century woman as one possessing the virtues of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Responsibility for the moral and everyday affairs of the home was the highest calling a woman could answer.

The life of a German-Russian woman, however, was not to be so genteel. The belief system of the Cult of True Womanhood clashed with the daily realities of homesteading. Nina Farley Wishek, an early homesteader in south central North Dakota, said of the German-Russians, "One of the strangest ways of the foreigner was the custom of women working in the field...I rather resented it as an insult to my sex" (Wishek, 1941: 235). Faced with the dilemma of doing what the larger society deemed appropriate versus doing what farm family characteristics dictated (Blood and Wolfe, 1960), the German-Russians chose to do what was necessary. The homesteading life sometimes required both men and women to transcend rigid gender expectations and loosen the traditional concepts of "feminine" versus "masculine" behavior (Kohl, 1988).

Frederick Jackson Turner saw the frontier experience as a liberating influence for men and women (Turner, 1894, cited from Armitage and Jameson, 1987). The pioneer forging West
was liberated from the economic and psychological constraints of Victorian America. The frontier society was a democratizing force, which helped to transform sex roles and perceptions into acceptable behavior for men and women (Armitage and Jameson, 1987). The "ideal" structures, broken down from sheer necessity, were replaced with new institutions and values.

Liberation from Victorian ideals paradoxically brought security to the homesteaders. Values of self-reliance, practicality, and individualism were important to all people in rural America, men as well as women (Dorfman and Mertens, 1990). Hannah Lambertson, a homesteader in frontier Ohio, commented,

We didn't have to put our hands in our pockets for everything we put in our mouths...We didn't run and buy everything. We raised it. That was an independent life I call it. (Gallagher, 1976: 67)

Although farm wives appeared to adhere more closely to traditional feminine tasks (Weigel and Weigel, 1990), they were more likely than nonfarm wives to enter the masculine sphere simply because a farmer's work is never done (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). A farmer is not separated from the workplace and cannot punch a time clock at the end of the day. A unique aspect of living on a farm is the fusion of work and family roles. Family members work together to ensure the success of the farming operation--their
livelihood. Boundaries between work and family, male and female, often meld toward the benefit of the farm (Weigel and Weigel, 1990). Doing "whatever needs to be done" keeps modern farm women from being bound by society's idea of "women's work" and "men's work" (Light et al., 1983).

German-Russian women, perhaps more than any other ethnic group, worked in the fields, side by side with their husbands, aiding in production for family sustenance. Salamon (1985) and Flora and Stitz (1988) found ethnicity was a key determinant of the economic contribution of women. Their research indicated that farmers born in the United States relied on capital-intensive strategies, while Germans and Volga-German farmers used labor-intensive strategies.

Lydia Schaffer (1990), who farmed with her husband on the North Dakota prairies, balked when he was about to hire extra help for the fall harvest:

I said, 'No, I cannot sit at home. I'll get it done—the cooking and everything.' So we do it ourselves.

When told what a tremendous amount of work that must have been for her, Lydia replied, "I should say! But I do it!" (1990).

In 1898, the Jamestown, ND, Daily Alert published an article describing the cultural ways of the "Russians," who had been buying land in central North Dakota:
As a result of doing much heavy outdoor work, the Russian women are very strong and well-developed physically. They are ill-proportioned and ungraceful, however, while their feet and hands are as large as those of the men. In family affairs she practically rules supreme, and is often appealed to when a bargain or trade is under consideration. (Sherman, 1985: 19)

The very nature of farming gave its operation precedence over all else. Christina Link, an early homesteader on the plains of North Dakota explained:

...there was no such thing as complaining of tiredness; we had no time for self-pity. When the husband needed help, it was the wife that left everything lay and went and did it, whether it was gathering stones off of a field, or doing the hay-stack setting; you knew if you wanted something to eat, that prairie had to give you a survival kit. Man and wife were as much the machinery as the horses were. It was back-breaking work. (Diede, 1985: 60)

Arnold Marzolf recalled the incredibly long days many German-Russian pioneer women endured:

[They] worked out in the fields and did barnyard chores side by side with their men, sometimes all day long during the summer months. Even after the evening meal, while their beloved menfolks rested and maybe enjoyed a smoke and/or a beer, the 'little women' still had to milk the cows, slop the hogs, clean the house, do the dishes and the laundry, settle the kids, and plan the meals for the next day. (Marzolf, 1990: 41)

German-Russian women felt strong ties to the soil. In Russia, they may have experienced more equality in their
rights to property ownership than previously thought (Klaus, cited from Lindgren, 1989). Women, as well as men, tasted the land hunger generating the mass migration of Germans from the steppes of Russia to the Plains of the Midwest. A number of German-Russian women homesteaded land in North Dakota (Lindgren, 1989) and, at times, even married for land (Kloberdanz, 1988).

Resource theory, when taken in the cultural context of German-Russians, their attachment to the land, their adherence to a strong work ethic for men and women, and the absence of a rigid separation of spheres prohibiting women from performing labor-intensive, traditionally "male" tasks accounts for much of the power German-Russian women possessed. As postulated by resource theory, any contribution women might make to production is viewed as an informal personal service, which is an acceptable exchange for the support men give women (Bennett, 1982). Women viewed their occasional public status of subordination as a trade off. Salamon and Keim (1979) found that farm wives accepted their husbands' domination of their families as long as the husbands were wise farmers and good managers in providing for their families.

Women's contributions to North Dakota agriculture have been and continue to be substantial. While their contributions have been significant, the recognition given
them has been poor (Fassinger and Rathge, 1988). Sanday (1973) suggested that female labor has a lower valuation than male labor because women's tasks require few technical aids but do require hard work. Conversely, male tasks are more varied and demand more technical assistance, and therefore, are afforded greater legitimacy.

Not only did German-Russian farm wives contribute key labor to the central farm operation, they also made significant contributions to managing related agricultural ventures (Godwin et al., 1991). Income earned from the production and marketing of poultry, cattle, and garden crops generated secondary subsistence. Lydia Schaffer (1990), who had been willing to work from dawn until dusk in the fields, also had ideas on how to increase her family's income. Her husband John always had insisted no money could be earned from raising chickens. Lydia felt she knew better and struck a bargain with her husband:

    Alright, you give me the money...what you get from selling the eggs and everything--don't spend it. Give the money to me for one year. I show you.

And indeed, one year later, Lydia did. "I gave him back $500 after paying all the expenses" (1990).

Often the independent control over surplus income brought greater leverage than having control over the resources needed for everyday subsistence (Blumberg and
Coleman, 1989). Countless German-Russian farm women would bring eggs, cream, butter, and dressed poultry to town to trade or sell. A portion of the money usually was tucked away in some safe place as a personal nest egg (Rader, 1984).

In addition to a material contribution to subsistence for their families, farm women added the intangible sustenance of "moral capital" (Fink, Deborah 1988) through extension of their expressive roles. A woman, as wife and mother, was sought for nurturance and emotional strength. While stabilizing the family's emotional climate, the farm wife often acted as a buffer to neutralize the shocks of the "cruel world" and keep the family on the farm. A crucial element in the success or failure of farm projects was the woman's ability to sustain household morale (Bennett, 1982).

Sustaining family cohesion is a primary force driving the lives of German-Russian women as well as farm women. Standing tall while weathering the storms of life is an ability German-Russian women possessed almost universally, as evidenced time and again in the written word.

Literary Portrayals of German-Russian Women

Study of the position of women in distinct ethnic settings has been a matter of relatively recent interest (Lindgren, 1989). Focus on German-Russian women as subjects of academic research is expanding, but only in the last
several years. To attempt a further examination of the status of German-Russian women, one must turn to literature. An extensive body of English-language material exists, rich with images of German-Russian women. While literary portrayals of these women are divergent in time, place, and perception, the underlying themes of strength and endurance are apparent in all.

Kansas credits child pilgrim Anna Barkman for its wheat industry (Prieb, 1982). In 1874, Anna and her Mennonite family lived in the beautiful village of Annenfeld in the Russian Crimea. After the family decided to emigrate from Russia to the new shores of America, it was Anna’s job to pick the very reddest, most plump and firm turkey wheat kernels to plant in Kansas.

Eight-year-old Anna sat in a bin of wheat, picking up the grains, one at a time, and putting the best ones in a gallon bucket. Her father had asked her to pick two gallons of wheat:

You must choose only the largest grains, which have a reddish golden color, and are of good shape. Next month we will start for Kansas to make our home there. We should take only the finest of wheat for seed. (Prieb, 1982: 58)

For a week, Anna worked every day in the bin, picking out the best wheat until two gallon buckets were filled.

Why was Anna, a female, given the most important,
seemingly "masculine" task of picking the seed wheat that would sustain her farm family for generations to come? The answer most certainly is because women provide the foundation and the nurturance upon which to build these new lives.

Nina Wishek (1941) admired the strength of the German-Russian women because she had heard firsthand their heart-wrenching immigration stories. There was Magdalena, who had come with her family from Russia to America. At Ellis Island, Magdalena was turned back because of an eye disease. Magdalena and her mother returned to Europe while her father and the rest of the family continued to Ashley, North Dakota. During their return passage, Magdalena's mother died. Fifteen-year-old Magdalena watched as the body of her mother was slipped over the side of the ship for its burial at sea.

Bereft of family and with no plan or hope for the future, Magdalena went to Belgium, where she worked and saved money for a return trip to America. At the age of 18, Magdalena once again set sail for America, and once again was turned back due to a recurrence of the eye disease. Five years later, 23-year-old Magdalena eventually reached Ashley by way of Canada. "She showed little of the tragedy that had come to her," remarked Wishek, "and worked as a maid in my home until her marriage" (Wishek, 1941: 258).

Hope Williams Sykes wrote about her experiences with the
German-Russians in Colorado. Sykes moved to Colorado during her teenage years and, as a young teacher, came into contact with the Volga German sugar beet farmers. For seven years, she absorbed the feeling and undercurrent of the beet industry and its people and published her first work of fiction, the novel Second Hoeing, in 1935 (Kloberdanz, 1982: xii).

The book was extremely controversial, as German-Russians objected to the portrayal of their people as being dishonest and dirty, speaking a strange broken English, half-German language. Volga Germans felt the book was condescending and prejudicial; however, two of the strongest characters are Hannah Schreissmueller and her mother Ana. While the women in the book were at times "visibly submissive, [they] actually wielded much subtle power and considerable influence" (Kloberdanz, 1982: xvii).

After enduring several beatings from her father Adam, Hannah finally gathers the courage to stand up to his madness. She becomes the new foundation for her family, following her mother's untimely death from years of hard field labor. Hannah's dream of attending high school to escape the farm is repeatedly put on hold, as time and time again she tends to the needs of her family—her higher priority.

In the end, Hannah does not receive her diploma and is
not "rescued" by the handsome American landowner's son, who wishes to marry her. She instead marries Fred, a fellow Volga German who is widowed and needs a wife for his young children. Hannah is content among her own and realizes that freedom is not "getting away from what one hates, but rather conquering what one does not like" (Sykes, 1935: 269).

Sykes' second novel, *The Joppa Door* (1937), was based upon the real-life experiences of Katharina, a German peasant who marries a "stranger from Russland." The Black Sea German from Neudorf meets Katharina in Palestine, where she had immigrated with her family (Kloberdanz, 1978: 16). Katharina bids her family farewell to follow her husband to America, where they join the Mormons in Utah. As her husband becomes caught up in each new adventure, Katharina, steeped in reality, is the one who looks after her family's welfare, making sure there will be food on the table in the lean times.

One of the most romanticized works of fiction about German-Russians is *The Land They Possessed*, written by Mary Worthy Breneman (1956), who is not German-Russian. Mary Worthy Breneman is actually a pseudonym for co-authors Mary Worthy Thurston and her daughter, Muriel Breneman, who spent 14 years researching, writing, and revising the novel before its publication.

The story reflects Mary Thurston's early years in
Eureka, South Dakota, and her interest in why the Germans from Russia stayed in the area while others moved on. Her account of her grandfather—John Ward in the novel—and his family is contrasted with the German-Russian Gross family. The Wards were transients, while the Grosses were the real settlers. Muriel Breneman suggested that the Germans from Russia, with their tenacity and capacity for hard, grueling work, possessed not only the land, but also values worth preserving.

_The Land They Possessed_ traces the early settlement of Eureka, South Dakota, by the Germans from Russia. The "Englishe" Ward family sees German-Russians as foreigners, outsiders who do not really belong. The main character, a young girl named Michal Ward, becomes friends with the "Rooshans" and is constantly admonished by her parents that the "Rooshans" are not of her class. Mrs. Ward reminds Michal:

> The Almighty God who planned everything realized that we are born to different stations in this life. We can be kind to these German-Russians, but that doesn't mean that we must associate with them any more than we would with cattle. (Breneman, 1956: 33)

The romance of the story lies in its ending. Michal and her "secret" lover, Black Sea German Karl Gross, elope. Both sets of parents are opposed to the marriage, but the couple feel their love will conquer all. Realistic for 19th century
Eureka, South Dakota? Probably not, however, one must remember, the novel was written by the "Englishe."

While "outsider" accounts of German-Russian life at times fail to capture the full essence of their experiences, German-Russians themselves have written widely differing sketches. Pauline Neher Diede, in her autobiographies, Homesteading on the Knife River Prairies (1983) and The Prairie Was Home (1986), often depicted women in demeaning, submissive positions. The story of Pauline's years on a homestead near Hebron, North Dakota, at times described women as long-suffering slaves, subject to the brutal treatment of their husbands. While this may have been typical in some cases, for many it was not.

Diede's volumes are punctuated in several places with "Brauchers," the early healers of the prairie. The hands of Mutter Lennick and Mutter Boehler aided the sick and ushered in the births of countless pioneer children. Their power and respect among the neighboring German-Russian farmers was enormous.

Diede's father, Ludwig, held strong memories of his mother, Julianna Zimmer. In times of utter despair, Ludwig would turn to the spirit of his mother for peace and comfort. To him, "Mother" was synonymous with "Russia." She represented the homeland--and all that was German-Russian.

Mela Meisner Lindsay's fictional account, Shukar Balan:
The White Lamb, (1976) is about Evaliz, a Volga German girl who has dreams of leaving her village for the exciting career of teaching or singing in America. As her peers tease her for daring to have such lofty goals, an elderly village woman comforts Evaliz:

Her arms are hard around me and for the first time I feel a measure of strength. So solid and strong this woman of Russland stands, she has strength enough for me also. I feel it come over me. It seems at last my feet are planted with sureness beside these strong women, walking the steep ways of life, so gallant and brave. I will make something of myself. Nothing shall crush my spirit. (Lindsay, 1976: 5)

Evaliz eventually reaches America, but the intervening years have brought maturity and marriage for her. Her goals now center on providing for her family. When she asks her neighbor, Frau Schuster, how she managed to obtain her new sewing machine, the-Frau shot back:

What do you think--I just took hold of the empty wagon with my bare hands and pulled it to the granary. Then I shoveled wheat into it until it was full. When my Reinhold came home from the field at noon, I said to him flat, 'No more stubble plowing today, man. I am sick of sewing my fingers to the bone. Go, take that load of wheat to town. Get me that newfangled sewing machine I saw in Meyer's store.' And, he did it...and watch you...some day I will get me a telephone put in the same way, even if I have to plunk three miles of telephone poles myself. Just you wait! (Lindsay, 1976: 224-225)

A graphic portrayal of the tremendous struggles endured, and the inner strength possessed by German-Russian women is
given by Berta Bachmann (1981) in *Memories of Kazakhstan*. This true story tells about the lives of the German-Russians who chose to remain in their Russian villages while many others trekked on to new countries.

In the 1940s, Berta and her family were deported to a collective agricultural farm in Kazakhstan. Berta's father and two brothers were sent to work in a forced labor army. They were never heard from again. Life in Kazakhstan was hard for the women and children. Although they lived in an age of technology, the women were allowed no machinery and worked the fields with oxen. Berta commented:

I learned at that time that a woman under circumstances of great anguish can accomplish much, perhaps more than a man. (Bachmann, 1981: 6)

Berta was sent to prison for acting as the village spokesperson and daring to take a stand against the Russian officials. After her release, Berta continued to eke out a living for herself and later married a minister. In 1972, she and her family immigrated to Germany, where they continued their daily struggles, all the while guided by their deep faith in God.

Although literature can only begin to tap into the tremendous strengths German-Russian women possessed, its examination allows one a glimpse of the perceptions many hold. Despite their seemingly public subordination and the
mental, emotional, and physical hardships endured, what is illustrated in novel after novel is the resiliency and constructive approach to life that German-Russian women practice.

Brauche:

A Manifestation of the German-Russian Woman's Power

A route to power unique to German-Russian women developed from their central roles as caregivers of families, and often of entire communities. Although many craftsmen and businesses operated in the small villages in Russia (Kloberdanz, 1988), few doctors served the many communities. Besides the everyday maladies afflicting the colonists, the communities suffered severe losses when epidemics hit: in the years 1831, 1834, and 1844, small pox; in 1837 and 1843, measles; and in 1846, neural fever (Height, 1975: 194).

Families in the villages were large, so a midwife always was needed. A doctor occasionally would visit to train village women in midwifery. Upon learning the craft, the women were depended upon in time of need. The midwives expanded their roles to become medical practitioners, acquiring extensive knowledge of home remedies used to treat illnesses. Because of the lack of doctors in the community, villagers turned to the midwives when seeking a cure for their various ailments. The midwives helped their people,
using the traditional folk medicine of the German-Russians: 

_Brauche._

_Brauche_ is the folk healing legacy of the German-Russians. The term is derived from the German verb "brauchen," which means "to use" or "to need." Used in the context of healing, the word _Brauche_ may be translated as "sympathy healing," or "secrets of sympathy" (Hand, 1976: 249). An anthropological definition of _Brauche_ interprets it as a type of folk medicine that makes use of "prayer-like verses in treating the assorted maladies of people and animals" (Kloberdan, 1985: 3). The practitioners of _Brauche_ used prayer-like chants and invocations to the Holy Trinity to act as intermediaries through which the healing power of God was transmitted to help an ailing patient. The verses the healer used were repeated silently or softly under one's breath.

Most healers learned _Brauche_ from someone in their family who practiced the art, as did Carolina (1984). Carolina, whose grandmother was a "Braucher," was a teenager when her mother taught her how to "brauchen." Elizabeth, who was born and raised in Neudorf, South Russia, was only 10 years old when her mother, a midwife, passed the knowledge on to her (1984).

Those skilled in _Brauche_ were held in high esteem among the German-Russian villagers and generally came from
respected, Christian families. "Brauchers" drew inspiration and power from God Himself, calling His blessing upon the sick, and regarding themselves only as vessels through which His divine will was carried out. The faith of the sick was joined with that of the healer, and this unified expression constituted, in a sense, an act of worship by which the blessings of heaven were showered down (Hand, 1980: xxv).

The sympathetic gestures and "laying on of hands" technique which accompanied many Brauche ministrations provided a warm, secure feeling for the German-Russians, who were not especially demonstrative when showing affection. Brauche was one of the few areas in which touching was culturally and socially permitted. The hands of the women that brought life into the world, sustained and nurtured it, were also the hands which ushered life through death's door. The women most often had the task of preparing the body of the deceased for burial (Rader, 1984).

Although Brauche was used primarily to treat people, there were also verses to treat livestock, a significant source of income for the German-Russian farmers. Remedies ranged from verses to destroy bots in horses to verses for hollow horn in cows. Able to treat most any problem the villagers had, "Brauchers" were an integral and valuable part of German-Russian folk life.

Among the many traditions and customs the German-
Russians brought from Russia to North Dakota was the tradition of Brauche. Doctors were just as scarce on the open prairies of North Dakota as they had been on the open steppes of Russia. Midwives and folk healers were needed. In isolation, the German-Russians were forced once again to depend upon each other. Elizabeth, who had started her profession as a midwife and "Braucher" in Russia, continued her work among the German-Russian settlers in south central North Dakota (1984).

Brauche did not survive in the New World unchanged. Ringworm, fever, warts, and rashes still constituted most of their cases, but "Brauchers" had new problems with which they had to contend. Two world wars took sons away from home. "Brauchers" coped with this sobering reality by making charms and amulets to guard the boys' safety. One "Braucher" sent two of her sons into the U.S. Army, each with a verse contained in a locket worn around his neck. The woman's faith in Brauche, and in God, was reinforced when she saw each of her sons return safely from the war (Elizabeth, 1984).

The German-Russians' reliance on and faith in Brauche has persisted to this day. While in the homesteading days, Brauche filled a need for localized medical care, today it fills a need for practitioners who are familiar with the culturally defined maladies of the German-Russians. For the
folk healer to be effective,

...the treatment modality must be in line with the belief system within which it is practiced, and must fulfill the expectations of the patient. (Taylor, 1981: 105)

Many German-Russians seek the aid of "Brauchers" today after they have been diagnosed as "hopeless" by other medical doctors.

A paramount reason for the continued reliance of the German-Russians on Brauche today is simply because they believe in its efficacy. It may be hypothesized that a placebo effect, rather than the power of God, is responsible for its success. Nevertheless, Brauche works for the German-Russian believer. There have been few reports of German-Russians who visit "Brauchers" believing that they will be healed and subsequently are not. As a Mexican folk healer said, "If you had faith, an ordinary rock could cure you" (Taylor, 1981: 96).
METHODOLOGY

The interpretative method is the foundation upon which this qualitative study rests. Virginia Fink (1988), in her study of women and farming, used the interpretative method to examine how farm wives construct their reality. Fink focused on the verbal methods women used to construct everyday meaning. The interpretative method was used to examine the words and attitudes with which three generations of German-Russian women ordered their lives.

Because she is of German-Russian descent, the author had advantages in studying that culture. A researcher possessing "insider" knowledge of a culture holds an advantage over the "outsider," who may produce superficial research results because of his or her lack of such knowledge (Geertz, 1973). An "inside" researcher also will not suffer the culture shock an "outsider" may. Dennison Nash (1963, cited from Anguilar, 1981) supports the role of the "insider":

...the condition of anomie inherent in the stranger's role is unlikely to permit [the unbiased objectivity claimed for it]. Rather in such anxiety-provoking situations one would expect an average citizen to develop and maintain strong, inflexible, 'black and white' views and to display
'perceptual sensitivity' or 'perceptual defense' in keeping with them. (1963, cited from Anguilar, 1981: 17)

Advocates of "insider" research cite advantages of member knowledge, a low probability of altering social settings, shared frames of reference, natural interaction, linguistic competence, and an ability to ferret "real life" out of "ideal" behavior (Aguilar, 1981). Additional advantages of "insider" research include perspective and hypothesis reduction (Hennigh, 1981).

The "outsider" learns of the culture under study in bits and pieces to understand it as a whole fitting into the larger social system. Failing to see the forest for the trees, the investigator may place an exaggerated sense of importance on the details (Guemple, 1972, cited from Hennigh, 1981), while an "insider" is able to place details into their proper perspective. The "outsider" investigator lacks the basic understanding gained only through living the culture of the people studied:

To 'live' a culture demands more than a knowledge of its events' system and institutions; it requires growing up with these events and being emotionally involved with cultural values and biases. (Uchendu, 1965, cited from Anguilar, 1981: 20)

Involvement with cultural values and biases is another advantage to the "inside" researcher. Because most accurate
explanations of native behavior may seem improbable to the "outsider," he or she is faced with an endless number of equally improbable explanations (D'Andrade, 1976, cited from Hennigh, 1981). A key informant, on the other hand, can reduce the likely hypotheses to a researchable few (Hennigh, 1981).

Opponents of "insider" research point to involvement with cultural values as a disadvantage, believing it creates a web of bias that traps the researcher. Srinivas (1966, cited from Anguilar, 1981) argues the web is not all encompassing: after completing fieldwork, the "insider" researcher removes him or herself from the field to interpret and write the results of the study. Physical distance from the field, along with intense analysis to produce a work the researcher understands will be critiqued by colleagues, forces the researcher to relinquish the role of participant-observer and become an impersonal analyst.

In carefully scrutinizing the debate between "insider" versus "outsider" research, the advantages of "insider" research for this study seemed to outweigh the dis-advantages.

The particular German-Russian family chosen for this study had certain advantages for the author as a researcher. The author was acquainted with the family and already had gained their trust. The author also had interacted with the
family on previous occasions and could approach the
informants without negotiating for their confidence. As an
"insider," the author was a social equal of the subjects and
did not face the exclusion, suspicion, and distrust with
which many "outsiders" are confronted (Anguilar, 1981):

Because I was one of them and not a 'foreign
intruder', the fear and suspicion which always lurk
in the minds of subjects and informants during
social research...were almost absent. They had
confidence in me because they knew I could not
'sell them'. (Nukunya, 1969, cited from Anguilar,
1981: 18)

The author had knowledge of this family's past history
and thus had the advantage of greater access to further
information. The author was in a position to seek the hidden
nuances in the informants' answers because she was dealing
with known personalities rather than "mere subjects"
(Hennigh, 1981). Appreciating an informant's history is
essential to research, for without historical analysis, "we
tend to see the family as an abstract form, void of its real
context...knowing the history of a contemporary institution
is like knowing the biography of a good friend - it helps you
understand the present" (Anderson, 1988: 149).

The actual fieldwork for this study involved extensive
interviews with three generations of the Schmidt family (see Appendix A for lineage chart). Ancestors of the Schmidt family, as well as ancestors of those who had married into the Schmidt family, had immigrated to North and South Dakota from Russia in the late 1800s. The Schmidt family members, except for the youngest married couple, resided on farms in New Odessa, in south central North Dakota, at the time of the interviews.

Both the husband and wife of each generation were interviewed. Previous research has relied heavily upon using the wife as informant to assess familial power. Safilios-Rothschild (1969) demonstrated the possible data distortion inherent in interviewing only one spouse. She found husbands and wives agreed on decision making in only 23.8 percent of the cases and suggested the family unit must be viewed as consisting of many different points of view. Morrison and Wilkening (1963) also saw the importance of exploring both spouses' points of view. They found spouses differed on their roles in farm labor and decision making. A husband may see his wife's contribution as limited to the domestic sphere, while she assumes that what she does is

\[1\]

\[1\]All identifying information (family names, towns) has been changed to protect the anonymity of the informants.
farm work. For this study, examining subjective data from both the husband and wife controlled accuracy and checked perceptions in comparing both views of power in the families.

To examine German-Russian women's power and its transference, the matrilineal line of the Schmidt family was traced. A comparison was made of the power the grandmother, her daughter, and her granddaughter held, to determine if or how that legacy had emerged in each successive generation.

Only one German-Russian family was chosen for study to control the variables of age, ethnicity, religion, and the presence or absence of a wife/mother working outside the home and farm. The extraneous variables presented by comparative, cross-generational samples would all differentially affect the forms of power women held in their families. As this was an exploratory study, an attempt was made to keep the sample as homogeneous as possible to isolate the variables of German-Russian ethnicity, and farming as an occupation, for in-depth scrutiny.

Hulda and Henry Schmidt, their daughter, Judy Hoffer, and her husband, Lloyd, and Judy and Lloyd's daughter, Michelle, and her husband, John Miller, were interviewed. The interviews were open-ended with a rather loose structure. A guide was followed for questions (see Appendix B), and the interviews were tailored somewhat to the lifestyle of each couple.
After securing biographical information, the following subject areas were explored: identity, division of labor, amount and competence of labor participation, decision making, ownership, organizational membership, disagreements, feminism, role models, familial influence, and customs and traditions. The subject areas used for the interview guide ranged from typically masculine to feminine in scope, and yet affected the family as a whole. Sources used to develop the questionnaire included Blood and Wolfe (1960), Heer (1963), Komter (1989), and Safilios-Rothschild (1969).

The interview guide was structured around subjects integral to the life of a German-Russian farm family. Anecdotes of daily life must be examined in a search for power; therefore, the questions were not worded as they appear in Appendix B, but instead were woven into the interview conversations. Instances of power must be brought to the surface and discussed in a subtle manner, rather than through direct questioning. To unearth as much information as possible, the interview guide was deviated from to follow topics the informants introduced. Informants themselves know what is most important and meaningful in their lives. The informant lives in a "web of significance which he himself has spun" (Geertz, 1973: 5). Discovering and understanding family structure as subjectively perceived by its members is significant in exploring where familial power lies.
Interviews were conducted in each informant's home, usually at the kitchen table. The husbands and wives were in separate rooms and could not hear one another's interview responses. At the time of their interviews, the youngest couple, Michelle and John Miller, had been married only a short time. Their answers to several of the interview questions were based on their nearly seven years of dating, six months of married life, and conjecture.

All informants signed an oral consent form, indicating they were aware the interviews were being tape-recorded. Upon completion of fieldwork, the tapes were transcribed for meaningful interpretation.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Frontier/Farm Experience

Hulda Becker Schmidt was born to immigrant parents in 1919 in south central North Dakota. The experience of pioneering on the North Dakota prairies was liberating for the Schmidt women, first for Hulda's mother, Martha, and finally for Hulda's grandchild, Michelle Miller. Martha was one of many women who took advantage of the Homestead Act and North Dakota's open prairies (Lindgren, 1989). At the age of 21, Martha and her sister, Serena, each homesteaded a quarter section of land in southern North Dakota. The two sisters shared a tiny shack, where they lived for one year. After "proving up," the sisters sold their land to an uncle who farmed it.

After her marriage to Otto Becker, Martha did not sever her ties with the land, but worked long hours in the fields during haying and harvesting times. Squeezed between the mornings and afternoons beside a hedder box, Martha found time to tend to the farmyard, where she raised over 500 chickens and turkeys. The chickens were kept for their eggs, which had to be gathered every day. Hulda remembered:
Sometimes Dad would help with the feeding because it was such a big job. Sometimes the boys helped too, but it was mostly my mother and my job. It was a big job from March until the beginning of June.

In the fall, the turkeys were butchered, dressed, and sold, the sole source of income for the Becker family's winter months ahead.

[My mother] was a very hard worker. She baked bread every day. It was not three or four loaves at a time. She baked as high as twelve to thirteen loaves at a time.

Martha and Otto Becker raised three girls and six boys on their prairie farm. Because she had so many brothers, Hulda was not called upon to work in the fields, except for helping with the raking and mowing. However, milking the cows was largely Hulda's responsibility. "I think that's why I learned to do a lot of things by myself, because I was taught that way."

In 1938, Hulda met and married Henry Schmidt, a young man from South Dakota, who was a hired hand for Hulda's neighboring relatives. The young couple began their farming operation on equal footing, with four horses that belonged to Henry and four cows that Hulda contributed. As their family grew to include two girls and a boy, so too did the Schmidt farming operation grow, and they eventually settled on a farm just outside of New Odessa, North Dakota.
The family farm meant long hours and hard work for everyone, most especially Hulda. She not only pulled her weight in the fields beside Henry, but was once again solely responsible for her own livestock: chickens, geese, ducks, and milk cows. The cream, milk, poultry, and eggs produced were sold regularly, the profits of which contributed to the family's income.

I done alot of spring's work [in the fields], like digging and dragging. I didn't do no seeding...I never learned to...Then during the summer...I done alot of raking. In harvest time, we used to hedder. [The children and I] were out there helping...then there was all the shocking to be done. I done mostly all of that and sometimes come home, do the chores and go back out in the evenings.

The hardest thing...was to take the kids along out in the fields...I would never do that again. I'd rather stay home and have somebody come and do [the fieldwork] for you. That's very hard on little children. [You had to] leave them in the car, then when you shock, you get a distance away and had to go back and check on them again. They were crying or else too hot or it was another reason.

...we finally did go into combining--well then I hauled grain back and forth, brought it home, unloaded it, went out again, got some more. Then haying time was the same thing. There was alot of baling to be done and raking...and then hauling them stupid bales home was not easy...then we done alot of milking. That was mostly my job and the kids. [Henry] helped, of course, in the morning, but not in the evenings. We raised sheep, pigs, turkeys, chickens, ducks, and geese.

After listing her daily chores and duties, Hulda was asked if she would be able to run the farm alone. She felt she could not.
I couldn't because I couldn't run the machinery. I'm not a field person. I wouldn't be strong enough to go out and be in the field...there's a lot of work to be done, and I don't think I can handle it...I'm very independent. I want to do what I can do by myself...I would have to look for a smaller place so I could take care of it. I imagine if I had to do it, I could learn to do it.

Hulda's tangible resource contribution to the Schmidt farm was crucial in its success; however, the critical resource Hulda contributed to the farming operation was herself. Hulda felt she had to sacrifice a great deal for Henry and the farm. Although Henry insisted it was he who had to "give in" when disagreements arose between the two, Hulda perceived the situation differently:

If you knew how much I had to give in!...I gave my whole life to you—what else do you want!...Like these younger women, they have their careers. They don't give in that easily. But I didn't have nothing to fall back [on], so I give my life to him really—to live on the farm and everything. I depend on him.

Hulda's contribution and her dedication to the farm was not something Henry lightly dismissed, for he saw farming as a partnership, requiring the total commitment of both husband and wife. Much of Hulda's power in their relationship lay in Henry's acknowledgment of her commitment to the farm, which was there from the beginning in the presence of her four cows and the loan from Hulda's father, which provided the capital for Henry to begin his farming operation.
Henry always stressed the importance of teamwork and the partnership aspects of farming. When his oldest son wanted to begin farming with him, Henry drew up a plan for the joint operation. As Henry and Delbert were discussing the financial aspects involved in the venture, Delbert's wife, Alice, listened with interest:

She says, 'Good grief, we'll be paying for [the farm] the rest of our lives.' I said, 'Alice, [Hulda and I are] still paying. You buy and [you] pay'...[I said to Delbert], 'it looks to me that Alice is not in favor of it.' Farming is teamwork. A man and wife have to work together otherwise you might as well quit. Everything works like that, but on the farm more so.

Henry and Hulda's second child, Judy, born in 1942, was raised knowing farm labor, helping with the livestock and haying, and driving wheat-laden trucks at harvest time.

When Judy married Lloyd Hoffer in 1962, she carried her commitment to the farm way of life into their marriage. Once again Judy found herself working in the fields at harvest time and taking care of livestock to supplement the family's income. When first married, Judy raised chickens, ducks, and geese for the eggs and meat. Spring and harvest times were busy seasons on the Hoffer farm, and Judy pulled her own weight. Often when the whole family was working in the fields, Lloyd would send Judy home early to tend to the livestock. Lloyd commented, 'She's had a big part of [our farming operation]." Judy reiterated:
...in the spring of the year when our calves are born, I get up in the middle of the night and check [the cows]. I take my turn. If Lloyd has trouble outside and I'm home after school, I help him. When there are cows to be sorted and so on, I help. And I help with mowing and raking hay and that's about it. When we milked cows, I milked.

In addition to working on the farm, Judy was able to contribute a supplemental resource to the family's livelihood that most farm wives in the 1960s and 70s did not. Judy's career in elementary education provided an additional source of income without which her husband, Lloyd, knew the family could not survive.

I guess I always felt that I had a responsibility to help make ends meet...it seemed like there was never any money, and I wasn't one to sit down and do nothing about it. I wanted to help raise money...I wanted to teach real bad. And I guess once I got into it, I couldn't let go of it. I knew that what I was doing [teaching] was helping alot.

Although Judy said she depends upon Lloyd for many things, she does consider theirs an equal partnership:

I'm trying to do my job in earning money as much as Lloyd is, although I know we couldn't...make a living on my income [alone]...and in turn we couldn't make it on the farm alone either without my income, so together [it] works out pretty good.

Lloyd is accustomed to the idea of wives' contribution to and even sole support of family and farm sustenance. Emma Hoffer, Lloyd's German-Russian mother, acted as the head of the household and farm while his father was rehabilitating
from a serious illness. In the early 1930s, Jacob Hoffer became very ill, to the point of requiring total bedrest:

He got so sick that my mother had to carry him from the bed to a big wash tub [for his daily baths]. He couldn't walk anymore. [Mom] had to do the chores.

Not only did Emma oversee the farming operation, but she also took care of four growing children. After Jacob recovered, Emma continued to work both outside and inside the house.

She was always out helping...she was responsible for doing the chores, milking cows, taking care of the kids and haying. Shocking was her job.

Emma also cared for her own livestock. Eggs, cream, and chickens were sold to neighbors, with the money going toward groceries and church.

The supremacy of hard work colors the glasses through which German-Russians view their world. Arbeit macht das Leben suess (Work makes life sweet) was the anthem that enabled the peasant people to survive and thrive on three separate continents. In describing the admirable traits of their spouses, all of the subjects interviewed mentioned their spouses' ability to work. In light of their history, it is not surprising that German-Russians would measure the "worth" of their spouses against the cultural, farming, North
Dakotan work ethic ingrained since birth. Michelle Hoffer Miller said of her grandmothers:

Both of my grandmothers are incredibly strong women. My gramma Hoffer did all of the farming by herself for years because Grampa was sick. Gramma Schmidt is in her 70s and has more spunk and energy than most 20 or 30 year olds. She likes to pick rocks and always offers to help. She rarely sits to relax. Anything she can volunteer for or get her hands into, she does. She was beside Grampa in the fields every day, just as all other German women were back then. I think the women were all very strong and capable physically, because they didn't have a choice. Times were tough, and the conveniences of today were not a part of their lives.

Henry described his wife as a person who "wants things done":

I think she's the best. She's good all the way around. Good cook, you can see, good housekeeping.

Hulda characterized herself as industrious and was not afraid to sweat:

[For the honeymoon we] cleaned up the house...the [day after our wedding], we went and bought some furniture from Jamestown being [Henry] had the farm already. So we went to the farm, cleaned house, painted and put the furniture in. That was our honeymoon for the winter then.

Hulda felt that for marriage and a family to prosper, the requirements included love and a large dose of hard work:

[Henry's] a good provider...I'm sure he loves us--you can see that. We've been married 50 years already and he's a hard worker...some people had to
quit farming... well, they could have [made it] if they'd have worked at it... some can't, and some can.

Judy felt the importance of the work ethic passed on to her in her marriage. In the family she raised with Lloyd, Judy felt a responsibility to make ends meet and pursued a teaching career to that end. In comparing lifestyles, Lloyd perceived Judy as working harder than he:

She's working very hard nine months out of the year, and I pretty much do mine in three. [Besides working in the winter], she works the [summer] months too. But my farm work consists mainly of May, June, July, August, and probably September.

It was Lloyd's mother who taught him, by example, the importance of the work ethic. Lloyd, in turn, felt it paramount that his children know the value of hard work:

[My children are] going to have to learn how to work, and they should pass it on to their kids, because life isn't easy anymore and you only gain something that you work for. If you gain it otherwise, it's not the right way to get it.

Lloyd's daughter, Michelle, who spent years in the fields and cattle barn, also wanted to pass the value of a hard day's work on to her children:

I'm going to try to bring [my children] up in the same atmosphere that I was brought up in. We were a group and we worked together. With all the world's problems, I just think that kids are straying farther and farther away from religion and the work ethic. I wasn't given a choice to go outside and feed the calves in the morning. It was
something I wanted to do in the first place, and in the second place, if I wouldn't have wanted to do it, that was too bad. You did it.

Michelle Hoffer was the second of three daughters born to Judy and Lloyd. Born in 1966, she was raised on the same farm as her father and tilled the same soil he and her grandparents had. Michelle, as did her mother and grandmother, took an active part in the operation of the family farm:

We had to mow the hay and then rake, [while Dad would bale]. I would usually go ahead and mow and then most of the time, I would rake it. Then while Dad was baling and Mom was scatter raking, I would stack the bales. So we would get it all done in just a short time. We always had three tractors out there, and we were always going as fast as we could. Mom helped out with haying, but it wasn't until I left home that she began to have to do more work [outside]. When [Mom and Dad] were first married, she did alot until we grew up and could help Dad. Then she was the cook, now she's back out on the tractors.

Michelle also remembered helping her mother with the chickens, pigs, and geese. The herd of cattle the Hoffers owned was definitely a family operation in which all participated:

[My sister and I] would feed [the cattle] grain in the mornings. When we'd calve them out in the spring, somebody would go outside every two hours to make sure that there weren't any cows getting ready to calve, and I usually took two shifts. I'd try to go out at about 10:00 pm, Dad would go out at 12:00 am, Mom would go out at 2:00 am, I'd go back out at 4:00 am and at 6:00 am Dad would go again and then he would just stay out. It was really cold in the winter time. If a cow was
having a calf, we got it in [the barn] right away...and [had] to pull calves. Mom was by the headgate and Dad and I were in the back working. He and I would usually reach in the cow and get the leg and pull [the calf] out. While I was pulling the calf out, [Dad would] hook the chain on the calf puller and I'd go to the end of the calf puller and work it and [Dad] would sort of assist the calf. So we pulled lots of calves that way.

Because of her virtually complete participation in farming tasks, Michelle's husband, John Miller, felt she would be as capable of operating a farm as he would:

Michelle could run [a farm] alot better [than I could]--she could run the farm as good as I could. She did as many of the farm responsibilities in her situation because [Judy and Lloyd] had all girls, [so Michelle] did pretty much what I did. So if I could run a farm, she could run a farm...we both have the same capabilities of doing it.

John Miller was raised in a more traditional family. His mother was largely limited to her domain as a "housewife," while his father was in charge of the farm. Rarely did John's parent's roles overlap or interchange. John's mother, Ann, worked in the fields,

...only when she was absolutely needed. We had three boys, so we could pretty much take care of all the work. But as we [John and his brothers] started leaving [for college], she got to do more and more work [in the fields]. She does very little with livestock. She'll do some digging, some hay work, some raking, but mostly it's more or less the monotonous jobs. You know, things that aren't so technical.

Rudolph and Christine Miller, John's paternal
grandparents, lived on the same farm as did John's family, where father, son, grandsons, and grandmother entered as one in farming. Christine Miller played an important role in the supervision of this enterprise. Referred to as "The Boss" by her husband, Christine felt she knew how the farming operation was to be run, and had no qualms about imparting her knowledge to the men working in the fields. Christine was indeed the "organizer":

[Gramma] went outside more than my mom [did]. Gramma just liked the outside. She took care of our chickens. She was always outside in the field checking up on us, making sure things were done like she thought they should be done. She was probably more dominating, definitely more dominating, outside than my mom. My grandfather would listen to her. He called her 'The Boss' because she was always out there telling us what to do.

She [would] make sure that we did things right. If we were combining, for example, and the trucks needed to be moved, she'd make sure we knew that this truck had to be moved, and 'did you know there was rain in the forecast,' and 'this bin has to be cleaned.' She more or less was the organizer. [She thought] that if she didn't tell us how to do things, things wouldn't be done right. She wouldn't go as far as to change decisions that were made as far as what types of crops [to plant] and things like that...but it was usually more or less organizational stuff.

Irene Rader's perception (1984) of German-Russian women supports what John experienced at home:

The oldest woman in the household was considered the matriarch of the family, and she was the one who told everyone what to do...Not only did the woman who was head of the household decide what work would be done each day, she also would decide who would do the job. Of course she carried her
share of the load, often working in the fields when
needed, and also working late into the night after
the rest of the family was asleep. (1984: 32)

Although German-Russian women crossed gender lines to
share in the work of their fathers and husbands,
German-Russian men, by and large, were not expected to return
the favor. Henry readily admitted that in spite of Hulda's
invaluable contribution to their farming operation, he did
not interfere with "her business." While she wholeheartedly
undertook the work of farming, Hulda believed in "women's
work" and that men were not obligated to share in that work:

There comes my independence. I never expected him
to do my work, and I never needed no help. I was
always healthy enough to do my own things.

When asked how Hulda felt about her son-in-law, Lloyd,
helping Judy with the housework, Hulda saw a difference:

I think it's good when a man helps in the family.
But see Lloyd and Judy have a different lifestyle.
Judy is working outside of the home...When the
mother works out of the home, then the men should
pitch in and help...I never worked outside of the
home.

Judy was grateful that Lloyd participated in some of her
household labor but viewed his help as a favor:

I never ask him to cook--he does it on his own. I
don't feel that's his responsibility.

Hood (1983) noted that to ascertain the extent to which
a couple's division of labor mirrors the actual balance of
power in their household, one must consider the extent to which the wife wants and needs help. Hardesty and Bokemeier (1989) similarly found the division of labor in the household to be affected only when the wife believes in her right to participation in the labor force. For many German-Russian women who have careers outside the home, this is not so. While their actions and accomplishments are those of emancipated women, their belief system is still one of tradition.

Evolution of the Frontier Experience

While the frontier experience and the ability to contribute tangible resources to the family farm gave women of the prairie their power in the early and mid 1900s, a different source of power was taking root for women of the 1960s. As extended families gave way to nuclear ones, and as Rural America melted into Urban America, women looked to sources outside the farm for help in contributing to family sustenance. Acock and Desaran (1986) found the increasing reliance of farm families on off-farm employment was one of the most critical changes affecting the structure of agriculture.

While Hulda was not intimidated by the hard work inherent in farming, she saw a better life for others, and that better life was attained through education and a career.
The importance of an education was stressed continually to the Schmidt children—unusual for many German-Russian families in the 1950s. Most German-Russian parents hoped their sons would be successful farmers and their daughters would marry good men and build solid families. Hulda wished for her children to have an easier life than what she had experienced:

I wanted them to do something more than just stay home and do housework. Education is so important nowadays. You've got to have it whether you're a housewife or a farmer or whatever. If farming doesn't go well, you have something to fall back on. I strongly believe in a good education...if you don't get that education, you can't do it. This is what happened to all these gals and mothers who had no education, look what happened. They had to stay home. If I had some kind of a career, I would never stay home and bake buns for everybody or babysit...but that's all I know.

Besides a good education, Hulda believed women should experience life on their own before being saddled with a family. Hulda's granddaughter, one year into college, was engaged to be married. Hulda reacted to the news with dismay: "She's got a brain on her shoulders—why get married and ruin it all?" Hulda's lectures regarding education did not fall on deaf ears, and Judy followed her mother's advice:

[My parents] didn't want [my siblings and me] to have to work as hard for our money as they did. My parents never had that opportunity [for an education] and they wanted us to have it...[Teaching] was just something I wanted to do. If I wouldn't have chosen teaching like alot of
these other women—they do something else like milking—they're helping [with income] that way too. And I guess I could have stayed home and milked cows, but what an icky job...that's what my mom did—they milked cows until us kids were through high school...So I chose teaching instead of staying home.

Education and her subsequent teaching career became a source of independence, liberation, and freedom for Judy. Secure in the knowledge that she would be able to support herself and her family if she were ever a sole provider, Judy had control over her future:

I probably could [operate the farm by myself without Lloyd], but I wouldn't want to. I would move off of the farm and go to some city and teach. I'd make my own living, and I wouldn't have to go to a restaurant [and be a waitress], or to a nursing home or someplace like that and be a nurse's aide...I'm feeling comfortable in knowing that I would be able to make my own living.

Judy's drive to keep that security and independence later propelled her to continue her education in a city over 150 miles away from home. Blumberg and Coleman (1989) have noted that an individual's increased economic power leads to an increased sense of self and, over time, changes in the actual balance of power within a household. Judy chose to continue her education in the face of the hard work that it would be and in the face of her husband's early opposition:

That's one thing I thought about before I went on to more schooling. It was either go on to school [to finish my degree] or quit [teaching] and I decided to go on because us living on the farm and accidents upon farmers is so great, anything can
happen and I could be a widow within no time at all. So I often thought about that, what would I do if something happened to Lloyd, and so that's another reason I chose to go on to school--so I could make my own living if anything ever does happen to [Lloyd].

The decision for Judy to return to school to earn her bachelor's degree in education was a difficult one to make, because she received little support from Lloyd. When they first married, Lloyd's reaction to Judy's pursuing a career outside the home was negative. Judy sensed Lloyd was threatened by the independence a teaching career would bring to her life. In families as traditional as farm families, off-farm employment of wives may unbalance the distribution of power and roles (Godwin et al., 1991). However threatened Lloyd may have felt, reality was a necessary obstacle in the path of his opposition: the Hoffer family needed the income from Judy's teaching career to survive.

When I first went to college [Lloyd] didn't want me to go to school. But after I went to school and had my teaching certificate, he liked me to go. It was an extra income, but we were always hoping that as time went on, I could quit and be home with my family. But times got tougher. The economy has changed so much that that was never possible. It seemed like it took more and more money to make a living and I was never able to quit, and so here I am. Then when I decided to go back to college, it was either go back to school or quit [teaching]. In this day and age, it takes two incomes to make it go, so here I am...when we first got married, I think that [my career] was probably a threat more so than it is now.
Decisions regarding off-farm employment of a farm spouse can become complicated because of employment's effects on the farm production and income (Scholl, 1983). Because of such concerns and others, it was a long time before Lloyd came to terms with Judy's teaching career:

She decided that she had some education and that she wanted to teach, so I really didn't say alot until the kids were born. Then it was really kind of hard, and then she decided she would like to stop teaching. She did for about a year and a half, and then she went back to teaching again. Then at one time we talked about buying some more cows and forgetting the teaching. Then she got a job as being a teacher's aide, which was no homework involved. She had to be there a half an hour before school started, and a half an hour after [school was dismissed], so she kind of liked that, so we got some more cows and she still taught school. But we did talk about it, and at times finances were pretty tough, and we just decided that she should go back [to college] and teach, and that's what she did.

According to Judy, much of Lloyd's opposition to her return to college centered around his added responsibilities of taking care of the farm, house, and two children while she was away at summer school:

I think what scared him more than anything was being alone with the two kids and knowing that I would be gone...he knew it would be a strain on me too, being away, and he didn't want me to have to do that. I think he was just as homesick as I was many times, although he didn't show it and I did. I bawled my eyes out. But he never did. That's just the difference between a man and a woman. But I think he was homesick too because he'd call me alot.
Judy, throughout her return to college, heard of Lloyd's displeasure over the fact that school took her away from him. One night while sitting in the kitchen doing her homework, Lloyd came out from the TV room, stating, "Oh, I'll be glad when you don't have to sit out here anymore and work."

Michelle too felt that Lloyd offered resistance to her mother's efforts at continuing her education:

My mom is...very strong in pursuing her career. She has had little to no support from Dad in her decision to go back to college. I can't imagine going through something so difficult [by yourself]. She's incredible!

Lloyd remembers Judy's return to college differently:

She talked about [going] back and getting her degree because [her] teacher's aide salary wasn't very good anymore, and...the only way she could get back into teaching is if she could finish her [bachelor's] degree. I never said she shouldn't go, never tried to discourage her about it. I think Michelle is probably the one who pushed harder than anybody. But I never said or thought she shouldn't go. She really didn't want to go for a while, then thought she should. I pretty much left it up to her and she finally decided to go.

Michelle planned to have a successful teaching career, help support her family, and share household and childcare responsibilities with John. Education and Michelle's resource contributions from her career outside the home will be manifested in a more egalitarian division of household labor than was present in Hulda or Judy's homes.

Since both Michelle and John anticipated having
nonagricultural careers outside the home, it was mostly household labor in which they shared:

Before we were even close to getting married, we talked about housework...one of the reasons I was concerned about it is because [John's] mother does everything. I mean, she makes their beds everyday and he had never washed a dish at home or picked up one...never picked up a piece of clothing in his room. He didn't know what cleaning the house was. He worked outside with his dad, but he never knew what it was to work inside. So I was kind of concerned about it, and I asked him what he thought about men helping in the house. He always told me he thought it was not too bad of an idea, but we didn't push it any farther.

And I guess I was concerned because I'd seen my mom working long days...and I'd seen how much my dad helps and how appreciative [Mom] is and how things just wouldn't get done if [Dad] didn't help her. It's hard to work a long day and then being a teacher to come home and have papers to correct and bulletin boards to plan. It's almost impossible...[John] does help [with the housework, but] I always have to initiate it. He knows basically what his duties are. I never touch the bathroom. He cleans the whole thing, toilets, shower, scrubs the floor, sweeps it. He hates the kitchen, so I have to clean the kitchen. But that's all right. He helps me a lot. I'm sure he doesn't like it, but I don't really like to clean house either, it just has to be done. I know he can clean the whole house because when I was student teaching for five weeks [away from home] and [would] come home on a Friday night, this place was spotless. And he'd tell me during the week how bad it was. He said he had dishes piled up to the ceiling, and when I'd get here, it was spotless. So I know he can do it. He does a good job.

Michelle predicted that childcare would also be a shared responsibility. She and John were excited about potential employers who would offer John paternity leave:

If a child is sick, you get a certain number of days a year for paternity leave...it's not
necessarily the mother who has to stay at home. We were talking about that and John's mom was just shocked. She thought we were kidding when we were talking about paternity leave. She said, 'I've never heard of anything so dumb.' And I looked at her and said, 'Dumb, I think it makes sense. Why is it always the woman who should leave her job? My job is going to be important too...these are the 80s. This is not the time when the wife stays home all the time. I'm going to work.' She didn't say anything because I kind of flew off the handle there a little bit.

Maybe it's because [John's parents have] never gotten out of New Odessa. Maybe it's because Ann's never worked [outside the home], and so when her kids were sick, it wasn't a question. John's mom and dad were both always there. But I know my mother being a teacher, if my dad hadn't been a farmer, and he had a nine-to-five job, I know my mom would be grateful [if] Dad [would have had] paternity leave. I mean, Dad was always automatically there for us, but if he couldn't have been...I mean, it's a real relief. There was some kind of security about [having Dad there]. You know, fathers are mostly there when the kid is feeling good and I think it's important that they be there when [the kids] are throwing up as well and things aren't so rosy.

As demonstrated, the shift from rural to urban careers, coupled with more liberal gender role attitudes the younger generation of the Schmidt family held, resulted in a gradual shift to shared labor inside the household. The care of the home and the nurturing of the family, long a domain inhabited largely by women, is opening up to men.
Nurturers and Kinkeepers:
The Extension of Resource Theory

Historically, resource theory has looked to economic power to determine the familial power both men and women possess (McDonald, 1980; Safilios-Rothschild, 1970). However, the value of nurturance and kinkeeping, which has been overlooked, surmounts economics in the context of family solidarity and preservation. Sustaining their families through good and bad times, the emotional support offered by women was a solid foundation upon which family cohesion was built. The nurturing of their families was evidenced in the German-Russian women's roles of keepers of traditions and customs, kinkeepers, and orchestrators of life.

Pioneer German-Russian women literally brought their own people to life as midwives and "Brauchers." These "super women" were among the earliest of dual-career families in which women pursued their own careers outside the home. Hulda's sense of responsibility and nurturance was developed early as she watched her mother's healing hands. Besides being a full-time housewife and "farmhand," Hulda's mother practiced midwifery, delivering many of the babies for surrounding farm families.

I don't think [my mother] really liked [delivering babies], but it was something to help the people out. And she never had no problems with a baby dying. They were always healthy kids.
Martha delivered Hulda's first child and set the standard for the others:

When we had [our second and third children]...I had midwives too. Being my mother was a midwife, I just believed they were the only ones who could deliver a baby. In fact, I was afraid of doctors. I did not want anything to do with a man doctor.

Martha was the family practitioner, tending to her children when they were sick, making use of home remedies passed down from previous generations of healers.

Hulda brought that sense of "taking care of others" into her marriage. She knew even before meeting Henry that she wished to care for him with the kind of love he had never received from his own immediate family. When Hulda was a young girl, her parents would visit relatives in South Dakota, and come back with stories of a child named Henry, who was severely abused by his family:

So [I] just sat there and listened to this sad story. One day this Henry came to our yard and I thought 'Oh no, this is the guy I want to take care of?'...that was the first time I saw him and I just fell for him right away...We kept on courting and finally got married.

Henry Schmidt, born in 1915 in South Dakota, did indeed have a difficult childhood. When he was only two years old, Henry's mother died. His father married Selma shortly thereafter and had three more children, all girls. Henry's stepmother made life harsh and unpleasant for the young man.
Selma was both verbally and physically abusive to Henry—giving him smaller portions of food than her daughters received at mealtimes, making him sleep outside the house, and even restricting his contact with his half-sisters. In Henry's words, "It wasn't rosy every day."

Henry's father was aware of the abuse heaped upon his son but felt unable to voice his objections in the face of Selma's strong rule both inside and outside their home. At threshing time, Selma worked in the fields with Henry and his father. If she felt Henry was not pulling his weight, Selma reminded him:

If I didn't do what I [was] supposed to, or didn't go the way she wanted, she'd punch me with the [pitch]fork. I had to be very careful.

Henry's only respite from the abuse of his stepmother came with the visits of his Uncle Carl and Aunt Lydia. Lydia, who was aware of his abuse at the hands of Selma, treated Henry with kindness and made sure he ate his fill at the dinner table. Aunt Lydia was one of the few people who would take a stand for Henry. A grade school teacher also gave Henry some of the care he desperately needed, "brauching" for a toothache and ringworm, and warming his frozen hands on bitterly cold winter days. Sadly, even the care received from others was not sufficient. His stepmother made life so miserable for Henry that he eventually ran away.
Years later, after courting Hulda, another woman was instrumental in Henry's life. An aunt arranged his marriage, telling him it was time to start a family. Henry credits his aunt for getting the ball rolling with Hulda:

Oh gee, I don't think we would have gotten married then, but it was my aunt who says, 'Henry, you get this gal.' In fact, [my aunt] was the one who really asked [Hulda's] folks for us. I'm not gonna ask them. I wasn't ready for anything like that. I figures a person should have some money at least or something. I had $90 in my pocket when we got married. That was pretty scary.

Hulda acquiesced to Henry's proposal of marriage:

...He got a little farm. I thought 'Oh no.' Sure enough, he come and said, 'I think we should get married.' I didn't say nothing, but I thought, 'Oh no, not me.' I wasn't ready. I was only 18 at that time. But I didn't want to say 'no' and I didn't say 'yes.' I let him hang there. Finally, his aunt, she got mad and said, 'You better ask her or her parents'...so finally, we got together.

Women in the Schmidt family have demonstrated a history of orchestrating marriage rites. When Judy Schmidt began dating her future husband in high school, he wanted to get married shortly after graduation. Judy, however, insisted on going to college. Lloyd remembered:

I wanted to get married earlier than she did...I know I wanted to get married after she was out of high school and she decided she wanted to go to college [first], which I'm glad she did.

After obtaining a technical degree, Judy's daughter, Michelle, decided to return to college to study elementary
education. Michelle and John Miller were married in 1989, after Michelle had completed her teaching degree, and John was near completion of his engineering degree.

John wanted us to get married the summer before we did. I said 'no', we should finish school first. He didn't actually propose then, he just hinted towards marriage. One summer later, he proposed and I accepted and [one] year later we were married.

Both Michelle and Judy said it was out of Hulda's sense of nurturance that she became the dominant partner in her marriage to Henry. Judy thought her mother tried to "guide and direct" Henry in life:

...Dad was quiet and being that he had such a poor background, [Mom] kind of guided him and directed him in his life. And so she just had the authority in the family. And she would always tell us kids what to do and what not to do and still does. My dad never did. I think it was because she felt she had to take over or something. I feel she is the person who says 'we do this now'...more so than my dad.

Since women have played such central, pivotal roles in Henry's life, he pointed to women as the critical factor in holding families together:

...[women] don't want to stay home and take care of the family, that's the biggest let down with the women today.

"Taking care of the family" was accomplished through providing a loving environment and a full stomach. For German-Russians, who have struggled for centuries to retain
their culture, food is a tangible symbol of heritage, tradition, affection, and family cohesion. At holidays the Schmidts gathered around a table at Hulda's parents' home. Even Sunday afternoons were spent with Hulda's family:

...and you know what that was, always the same thing--chicken noodle soup or borscht. [My mother] loved to [cook for us]. She never complained. She was always happy to have us come.

Judy has few memories of her grandfather but did remember her grandmother for her cooking talents:

[Gramma] was a good cook. She always spent time with us when we went there. Sometimes we would go there after school and [Gramma and Grampa] were good to us. I can't remember them reading to us or anything, but just being there and getting candy and homemade cookies and bread and stuff like that.

For her own family, Hulda brought the holidays alive by preparing traditional German-Russian foods and talking about the "old days." When her grown children would travel home for the holidays, Hulda was asked to prepare treats of strudels (a rolled dough food) and dumplings. When Hulda's nephew visited, his request was for egg drop soup:

When Kevin was done eating, he said, 'Now I can go home, I've had what I wanted. That's what we had at Gramma's and I enjoyed that so much.' I usually cook something when I know [the relatives are] coming. When there's a bunch here, it doesn't take very long [for the food to be gone]--a big kettle of stuff and I use the biggest kettle I can find.

For Michelle, food is the most tangible representation of her grandparents and her German heritage:
If we want dumplings, strudel, or kuchen, or things like that, we have to get them from Gramma. Mom doesn't have the knack for it and she's been spoiled all these years because Gramma has been doing it for her. Food is the one thing that is handed down from both sides [of my family].

Michelle intends on keeping that tradition alive for her children:

That's one thing about Germans. We have to eat all the time. Oh, that's another thing about my grandparents, both sides. If you come [to their house] at noon, 11:00 in the morning, 2:00 in the afternoon, 10:00 at night, whenever, you sit down at the table and eat. You have cookies or caramel rolls, or whatever they have made. I see myself doing that too...That's probably a big thing I'll pass down. Anybody who comes to visit, I've always got food or something around for company. I can't imagine having company come or somebody drop in and not being able to offer them anything to eat. That's when I think, 'I'm just like my grandmother.'

For Michelle, and many young German-Russians, heritage and tradition are brought to life most vividly by family elders--most often the family matriarch. As one young German-Russian commented:

Gramma was the person who made me realize my German heritage. When I thing German--I think of Gramma. (Dockter, 1988)

German-Russian women embraced and instilled the values of tradition and family in their children and kept those values alive and meaningful for them. Michelle's heritage is
not a dusty piece of history for her--she feels it coursing through her veins every day:

Heritage, I think I have a real strong German background. I'm stubborn like a German, although I think college has granted me the opportunity to be a little more open-minded than my relatives, but I have all the German qualities inside of me, peeking out every once in a while. I have high values in myself, high respect for other people, and a close family bond. I know my parents would...climb the highest mountain or give their last penny if one of their kids was in trouble.

I'm proud to say I'm a German. I don't know why. Maybe it's because my grandparents and my parents are proud to be German...But I think that there is respect in ourselves, pride in ourselves, pride in who we are. I have a lot of determination and a lot of expectations for myself. I think that's the German background too. I think I'm the hardest on myself. I expect more from me than anybody else does. I think that's true of most Germans...there are lots of not-so-good qualities either, like stubbornness, which I am; opinionated, which I can be if I don't stop and think about what I'm saying.

Without my family, I would have nothing. Family is central to me and always will be. It doesn't matter if I'm a thousand miles away or ten, my family is going to always be the most important thing in my life. Even when I have my own family, my mom and dad and my grandparents are still going to be as high [in my priorities] as they always were. I'm going to pass that on to my children, how important their grandparents and great-grandparents are to them. And [my children] are going to know their background and their heritage.

The nurturance Michelle received from her grandmothers was a shared endeavor for her parents. Because of Judy's teaching career, she and Lloyd experienced somewhat of a role reversal, depending upon the season. In the winter months,
when Judy was teaching school during the day, Lloyd had sole responsibility for his daughters' physical nurturance. Judy recounted: "Lloyd took care of [the girls] and he loved it. He did a lot for them." Michelle recalled:

I would say nine months out of the year, my Dad babysat us. He potty-trained us--he did everything. He was just such a big help to Mom [with babysitting] and things like that. He changed more diapers on us. He was real good with us...I used to like being home with him. I thought it was just great, and I remember one time I came down with pneumonia pretty bad and they didn't have room in the hospital for me. I was home with Dad almost a whole week. He was by my side every waking moment. Even now when I get sick, or when I was in high school, he was constantly standing over me making sure that I had medicine and aspirin if I had a headache. It was him that I remember the most, but then again, in the summertime, the roles just reversed. Mom was the one who was there.

Lloyd also did a good deal of the cooking while Judy was in school:

Lloyd likes to cook and so every chance he gets, he will cook. But like in the spring of the year when it's calving time and he's outside a lot, then it's difficult for him and he doesn't do much of it then. And in the fall of the year when he's...making hay...or there's fencing and cattle to work and so on, then he doesn't do much of the cooking...I always encouraged his cooking--even when it was bad--otherwise he'd quit.

Lloyd stated:

I like to cook. I do a lot of it. When [Judy and the girls] come home from school...usually I make sure that...food is ready for them because when kids come home from school, they have a habit of eating junk food. I never did like that. I thought they should eat the junk food after they've had their meal.
Michelle agreed:

When I'd come home from school at 5 o'clock, supper was on the table and dishes were set and all we had to do was walk in and sit down.

As were many German-Russian women, Judy was responsible for the religious instruction of her children, and was the Sunday School superintendent at the family's church. Judy's mother-in-law also supervised the religious upbringing of her family. When Emma and her husband, Jacob, first married, Jacob followed Emma to her evangelical church. Jacob followed Emma back again to his "home" Lutheran church after she decided it was more closely aligned with her own personal beliefs:

...she asked Dad about his religion...and that's when she decided that she wanted to go to a different church, and they've been there ever since. She's the one—he went with her all the time and never said anything...it was her decision.

Judy has made sure the fibers holding together the fabric of her family were strengthened by passing on what she treasured most to her children: family gatherings, celebrating birthdays and holidays, or just simple occasions to gather together. Judy placed great value on her marriage and family:

I would rather give than receive. I would rather give my children and husband everything that I have rather than to take anything from them...things would have to get real, real, real bad before I would consider divorce because I feel that you can work through [things]. And I would give up anything to hold my marriage together. I always
feel if you love your husband, then you'll do anything for him, and if I were to divorce him and find another man, that person has faults too. So everybody has faults and we need to work around those.

The value of nurturing was important to Lloyd and was one of the qualities he admired most in Judy:

Judy has been a very, very, good person. She's very easy going. She reminds me alot of her dad. Nothing seems to be too much for her, and she's especially good with kids, her own and everybody else's. She's never abused or neglected any children, whether they were hers, or whether they were dirty or poorly clothed or whatever. They were all treated equal. I feel that's really something.

People [in marriages] really don't get to know each other as good as they thought they did. There are too many functions going on where couples are going in separate directions. They're not going as a family. Things happen that shouldn't be happening.

Michelle was aware of her mother's stabilizing force in the Hoffer family:

[Mom] is the strongest woman I have ever met. I used to ask her why she doesn't let things bother her or worry her. She always seemed so carefree. She basically never showed us her emotions, but I know that they're there. And now that I've gotten to know her a little better, she has told me her secret. I've always said, 'How can you do it, how can you be so strong.' And she said, 'I'm not.' Mom finally told me that everything bothers her and she does worry, but she has to be strong because Dad is so verbally negative and a worry wart. He paces the floor for any little thing, and if she let her fears show, home would be a mad house. I can't imagine the strength to hold in your fears and worries.
Michelle's husband, John, also felt that his mother nurtured the bonds of relationships more than his father:

[Mom has] probably influenced me more as far as caring for people...to make other people happy more so than doing to make yourself happy.

...if I had a question about religion, I'd go ask my mom just because I think my mom and I have more of an open relationship than my dad and I had. My dad and I had more of a, I don't know what you'd call it, he'd punch me and I'd punch him type of relationship, but we wouldn't actually talk about personal things where my mom and I would.

Dad influenced me more in sports than anything...[we would] come home from the field and it would be dark and we sat under the lights and would throw a baseball or something. Personal-wise, like I said, we really didn't get into alot of personal things—that was more my mom and I. I guess I felt uncomfortable and he probably felt uncomfortable too. Neither one of us are very—didn't show our affections enough—we still don't. It's getting alot better now. There are still things that are personal that I don't feel comfortable going to him with. It's more of a superficial type [relationship].

In John's extended family, although his grandmother was referred to as "The Boss," her softer side was exposed on occasion:

My gramma probably taught me the transition between being tough and being a softy. She's probably the toughest softy I know. She can be yelling at you one minute and telling you what to do, being domineering and two seconds later, she can be in a burst of tears. I learned about caring from her. She worries about things every day of every minute. If it's not one kid she's worried about, it's the other, and her family means alot to her. She probably doesn't show it. To other people on the outside she probably seems like a really tough old lady, but her family means alot to her. You learn to respect your family and your elder family. It's just unspoken [that] you make it home for...all the major holidays.
It was from the women in his life that John learned the importance of family ritual, and it was the women in his life who continued the tradition. Decisions on family holiday gatherings were left to the discretion of Michelle, who was more the family kinkeeper than John:

As far as the final decision as to where we stay, [when we go home for holidays], I think it means more to her than it does to me so there has been a few times that we've doubled up and went to [her family's house] twice in a row or something. It depends on the situation, but I pretty much leave that up to her. As we're driving home, I usually ask her, 'Where are we staying this week?'

Extended families are more characteristic of farm families than nonfarm families (Dorfman and Mertens, 1990). To maintain the ties of the extended family, the kinkeeping role becomes a vital link between the past and present. The efforts of the Schmidt women, "orchestrators" in their own realms, have forged that link.

Each generation of Schmidt women played a role in shaping each successive generation. Through their investments in relationships along the vertical bonds of family, legacies of strength, independence, and nurturance have been passed down. Hulda's personality was shaped by rebelling against what she saw as her mother's submissive position in the family:

My mother was a role model to me...she could not read nor write, but she knew alot in the Bible. I don't know how she knew...I think she was an easy learner and she picked up alot that her mother
taught her, like the commandments, Bible verses...prayers, and that's what she taught us. She knew more songs by heart than I know from the book. But she had to depend on herself because she couldn't read it or learn it.

I have alot of favorite memories [of my mother]. She was a person that never got mad. She had alot of things that bothered her...she never got what she should [have] had. But she never argued about it.

I think my dad was more the head of the house. My mother didn't have much to say about anything. We had a small house...all the neighborhoods around there were building new houses, nice big wooden structure houses. [My mother] wanted [a wooden house] so badly, but [my father] would never let her have a home, and to this day I thought he was the cruelest father in the world because he never let my mother have anything that she really, really liked. No, he was still head of the roost then. She was not very [aggressive] at all. I think she should have been. But she wasn't. She was quiet about it. She cried alot about it to me...and that hurts me to this day that she didn't get what she should have had, because she worked hard.

I suppose I just felt like I'm not gonna sit back like my mother did because you don't get no place that way. You've got to fight for yourself.

I like to do things by myself. I don't depend on anybody else to do anything for me...I'm not afraid of hard work...I'm very independent. I describe myself as an independent person and I'm not looking for sympathy. I'm very progressive. What I do, I want to do well...I'm not lazy. I don't look back--you shouldn't, you know. What's back behind you is behind you...In our generation, they looked back too much. That's Henry's big backfall. He looked back too much. He said, 'I can't do this because [I] couldn't do that when [I was] younger'...I says, 'You're looking back too much, look ahead of yourself and go on and do things.'

Judy learned independence from Hulda, but tempered that with a strong dose of humility, as Henry demonstrated
throughout the years. Both her mother and father influenced Judy, but she discerned she was more like her father.

[Mom] worked hard and took care of us. She taught us right from wrong. So did my dad. My dad's background taught me a lot too. He was an abused child. And when he told of his stories, it taught us to be thankful for many things.

Michelle appreciates what she has witnessed in her grandparents and parents:

I admire each one of [my grandparents] for their own particular reasons. My grampa Schmidt had a very tough upbringing. He was abused as a child [and] ate his meals in a chicken coop. He went without shoes until the snow flew. Everytime I think about how bad life is for me, I remember the stories he's told me, and I think, 'Man, I have it so good.' He's my saving grace a lot of times when I think, 'This is just terrible.' Then I flash back to how he was treated. He's really influenced me the most in the fact that I appreciate the life that I have, the parents that I have, the grandparents that I have, the caring people that I have been given...

My gramma Hoffer, I think I could learn a lot from her because she is so good to other people...her whole purpose in life is to serve others and to be gentle with others. She's the kindest person I know. She would never say a harsh word about anybody. I could ask her to do anything, to walk to the end of the earth and she would do it.

Gramma Schmidt has taught me too. She's spunky. She's taught me to stand up for what I believe and to think highly of myself. Gramma has really made me feel that I am a good person because...if she doesn't like somebody, she'll tell them. She's always made me feel like I'm a real special person. That was a real compliment [from] her because I know that if she didn't like something I did, she wouldn't waste any time telling me. I like that about her.

[My father] was such a central figure in my life when I was growing up and I'm just starting to realize it. Everything he believed in, I believed
in. Whether it was politics, religion...if he could have one opinion about something one week, the next week, that was my opinion. That's just how it was. I thought he was always right. I'd argue with kids in school because I knew I was right and it was only because I had heard his opinion at home. He could do no wrong as far as I was concerned. He was God to me when I was home. He really influenced me to be honest and truthful and to appreciate what other people do for me. He was really big on that, and he still is.

I admire so many little things about [Mom] that I could never even begin to tell you. But, her ability just to go all the time, non-stop. When I come home, I'm tired and she's cleaning the house, making supper, working on a bulletin board. I just want to go to bed, or sit down and relax and do nothing and she's always on the move. I don't know where she gets the drive. [She's] giving too. She would give a perfect stranger her last dime as to where I'm a little bit more tight and conservative, and I think, 'Gosh, I wish I could be like that.'

The obvious family solidarity the Schmidt women maintained and nurtured is one of the most salient realms from which their familial power is generated. Interestingly, the enormity of the power possessed by the Schmidt women is often denied.

Contradictions to Power

Although Hulda demonstrated daily her autonomy and authority, she did not seem to realize, or rather, admit to her power. Hulda described herself as wanting to be under a man's control and, furthermore, believed women would not be capable as leaders. For all her independence and progressive
views and actions, Hulda is comfortable in "allowing" Henry to be the symbolic head of their household:

Yea--I like to be under a man's control. I still believe that the man is supposed to be the leader and head of the house. Equal Rights had good points and also its [had] bad points. You know, women want to take over and I don't think that's good...I think the man should still be a leader of the world...you know we had some women politicians already, one running for the presidency...there'll be a weakness involved if a woman gets in there.

Women give [in] too easily or get carried away too easily. I think we'd have more divorces, more abortions...I would never want to go on as a higher up in office...I couldn't take care of it and I know alot of [women] can. I've heard alot of women pastors, but there's a weakness. I might be wrong, but this is my opinion. Teachers, I can see because they act like a mother, or a nurse, where a man can't do all that. That's where the kids were left behind while the man was teaching. Women know kids' needs.

Clearly, women are to stay where they belong, fulfilling their roles as teachers, caretakers, and nurturers. Hulda, leader and caretaker of her own family, chose not to become involved in that which was outside of her own world:

I'm really not much into politics. I just let the world slide along and let somebody else take care of it. So if [Henry] wants to vote, I'll vote [the] same as he does.

Henry, married to a wife who orchestrated most of the major decisions in their marriage, with daughters and granddaughters fulfilling careers of their own, feels women
are the centers of families and should stay home to care for them:

In a way, [Equal Rights] means to me the women got too much. I call it Women's Lib. I think the women want to do more than they are really fit for...Number one they don't want to stay home and take care of the family--that's the biggest let down with the women today. I know with us here, if we had had to get babysitters and all this... [babysitters are not] like at home with the mother taking care of [the children].

You know today it's different, [women] say they have to work, otherwise they can't make a living, which I think is true. But there's a lot of women that...don't want to stay home. They want to get a little job.

Feminism and equal rights can be taken too far in Judy's opinion. Women want to do what men do; and according to Judy, women are just not as capable as men. In her view:

Feminism is when females get their way and are able to do pretty much what they please. Equal rights, the women want to do what men do and I don't think they're capable of doing everything a man is able to do...I couldn't [farm] as well as [Lloyd] does, and I know that he couldn't teach school. He wouldn't last there one day, especially with little kids. He could not handle that...I think we're going overboard. When it comes to divorce, the woman wants everything in some instances. I don't think that's fair either. Equal rights should be fifty-fifty and that's not the way it's done most of the time.

Lloyd, who was surrounded by strong, capable women his whole life, whose mother singlehandedly endured the stress of nursing a sick husband while supporting a young family, still perceived women as the weaker sex. Lloyd speaks
proudly of his eldest daughter, who as a child was rarely sick:

We didn't even know we had a girl in the house...

I believe in equal rights. I think there is a limitation of equal rights. I have no problems with a lady being [in] on the board of directors meeting. I have no problems with a lady lawyer, or running a business, or running a tractor, or whatever. But I do have some problems with equal rights when it comes into service [military] people. I don't think the ladies should be drafted into the service like the men and put on the front lines. I'm not saying that some of them can't handle it, but I know that the majority of them can't and shouldn't, whether it's for physical reasons or whether they just absolutely can't take it for stress. I think it would be a little hard to be on the front lines for a lady [and] to be really active and try to shoot somebody. I don't think she should do it and it isn't her place--it's nobody's place, but especially not for a woman.

John, who was also raised by powerful women, felt that in the final analysis, a man should be the head of the household and should have the closing authority in making decisions:

I try to be a leader in the household and out. Not so much of a leader as to push my way on other people, but I guess I've seen that more in my marriage--trying to make a decision that will lead us both in a direction I think would be right. But then again, not trying to push it, but talking it over with Michelle, trying to make the best decision. Now more than ever...as a husband...I find myself prioritizing things that will affect the family more than will affect myself.

I like to think of myself as an Equal Rights activist. I think...it's kind of difficult for me because...[alot of my] morals are from the Bible and I know the Bible says woman was created for man...But then again if you read later on in the Bible, it talks about man should treat woman as an
equal as is part of him because she was created from him. So, I think that man is the head of the household, but...I think he should consult the wife on all major issues...I just think that is how it was created and originally meant to be. But then again, I don't think a man [should] domineer in any manner. I think when it came down to it, I would consult [Michelle], but if we disagreed and I felt [I] was right, I would [make the decision] without her consent, maybe for the sole reason that I think that man should be the head of the household...But as far as equality, I think that the woman is just as equal and man is not superior in any way.

As did Hulda, Judy depended upon Lloyd to "take care" of the "outside" world and followed her husband's lead in areas she preferred not to become involved. Lloyd remarked:

Politically, Judy doesn't get too involved. She always asks how I'm going to vote. I tell her what I'm going to do, but I never tell her what to do. She'll ask me why, and I'll tell her and my reasons I'm sure aren't always right or the right thing to go by, but neither are anybody else's either. Most of the time she votes the way I do, but that's entirely up to her. I do explain the issues to her.

Judy, who felt she was insecure, admired Lloyd's "take-charge" attitude and looked to her husband to make the decisions that directed their lives together. "...he tells me what to do and where to go."

Although she prevailed over Lloyd's opposition in her decision to return to college, Judy believed she usually "gave in" to Lloyd when they disagreed on other subjects:

He's always right and I can argue my head off and I'm never right and so over the years I've just gotten accustomed to the fact that when we have an argument, I'm quiet. I'm always the one to back
off because I don't want anything...you know if anyone has to give anything, it's me usually, and I guess I'm happy that way.

Lloyd did not fully agree with Judy's assessment, but admitted to his more verbal role in disputes:

I usually say what I have to say--sometimes even if it isn't right, I still say it. I say what I think is right...I always want to be the person directing or giving orders...As far as giving in--I don't know. Depending upon the situation, it's probably pretty equal. We can both get pretty darn stubborn at times.

Lloyd's propensity to "give orders" extended beyond Judy to include his children:

I would say he does most of [the disciplining] because he's got a deep voice and all he had to do was holler and [the girls would] jump. When I discipline, it goes in one ear and out the other. But when Dad says something, they mind it. And sometimes I would give them permission to do something without asking him, and then I'd say, 'Well, maybe you'd better go ask Dad first.' And then, they'd ask him and he'd have a different opinion, so after awhile, whenever they'd come and ask to do something, I'd just say, 'Go ask your dad.' He had the final say and I just kept quiet. I didn't like it but that's the way it is and so he says I don't discipline. But actually, I didn't have to because he did it.

Although Judy may have appeared quiet and meek to others, surely under Lloyd's authority, her children recognized her subtle power and hidden talents. Michelle observed:

[Mom] has more little qualities that make her a
great person that maybe aren't visible on the surface.

John has witnessed his mother-in-law give Lloyd "The Look":

Judy has a say in nearly every aspect of their lives. While in public Lloyd tries to show himself as the dominating father figure, but in private things are quite different...I have seen [Judy] throw a look at Lloyd for something she didn't agree with. Since she was in public, she didn't say anything, however, [she] just [gave] that look—which no one else saw—[and that] was enough so that he either changed his mind or said he'd think about it, when actually he'd wait until they got home to ask her. To tell you the truth, [Lloyd] doesn't even get dressed on Sundays without [Judy].

John's own mother, likewise appearing quiet and meek to others, developed her own ways of taking a stand. When her inheritance [from an uncle] was used to purchase farm equipment, Ann countered with the purchase of a vacuum. Although small, the act of rebellion was Ann's attempt to assert her independence:

[Mom] wanted something that she could say she got...from her relatives...Dad thought our vacuum was just fine—why do we need a new one? It vacuums—what else do you want?...she ended up buying it anyway because she wanted to buy something with that money. I think then that she didn't care. She wanted something with her money, so she went ahead and bought [it]. She rubbed that in his nose more than anything else. She'd vacuum around in the house [in front of him]. That is the only time I can think of that she actually did that. Otherwise, [Mom] didn't spend money without [Dad's] consent.
John has felt his wife Michelle's assertions of independence:

...right now we're not very financially sound so I'd be involved in a lot more of the decisions than I would be later when we have...more money. But again [Michelle] just bought a washer and dryer and she pretty much purchased that without--well, she did call me, and I was kind of against it and we ended up buying it anyway.

The power Hulda and Judy possessed to build strong family units and to instill values did not seem to be legitimate power in their eyes. While the German-Russian woman's power of nurturance keeps families and societies in some semblance of order, she sees people with titles of "leader," "president,"--even "male," as possessing the only power that counts. German-Russian women seem to be secure in their own private spheres of family and do not tamper with issues they believe to be unimportant or out of their control.

In spite of their obvious operation from bases of power, German-Russian women paradoxically seem to deny their liberation and strength. Although the Schmidt women possessed power in their own right, their reluctance to verbally recognize that power may have its roots in preservation. Breaking away from traditional gender role attitudes represents a move from what is secure and stable to that which is new, complex, and dynamic. For women, any
break or separation is accompanied by an aura of loss (Nin, 1976: 51), which threatens unity and ties. Labeling their attitudes and actions as "feminist" represents for German-Russian women a break from all that is traditional, familiar, and secure. To flaunt their emancipation and power may jeopardize its very existence; thus, German-Russian women may be practicing the truest form of feminism: knowing they have power and knowing how to keep it.

Decision Making

All of the couples interviewed were strongly inclined to state that their most important decisions were made together. For Hulda and Henry, and Judy and Lloyd, most joint decisions centered around farming, as its operation took precedence over all else. Henry felt good management, accompanied by the decisions a husband and wife made as a team, were paramount in running a successful farm operation. Henry thought that most farm-related decisions were discussed with his wife, but that the final decision was usually left up to him. Hulda, however, recalled things just a bit differently:

I saw what he needed [on the farm] and I agreed to letting him have it because I knew he needed it.

Both Judy and Michelle said Hulda makes most decisions for herself and Henry:
I think Grampa and Gramma discuss most things together, but they usually do what Gramma says. Grampa is more submissive and does what Gramma wants.

Lloyd possessed the authority for most decisions in the Hoffer family; however, he would try to include his wife. Judy listened attentively when Lloyd discussed a purchase for the farm, but usually left the final decision to Lloyd:

We discuss it. He always asks me what I think and I always tell him, 'Go ahead.' I never say no to anything that better the farming situation. He does all the buying, I don't. Well, sometimes he'll say, 'Look at this with me--[tell me] what you think.' Well, I never say no to anything he wants to buy.

As expected, some sex-stereotyped expenditure patterns did exist. Lloyd thought Judy managed most decisions concerning the house ("I just let her do that"); however, Judy thought Lloyd made many of the decisions involved in the upkeep of the house:

I guess he's usually the one who says we're going to buy this or that. Because usually he does it before we need one... I'm satisfied with the old things and he'll buy before I think we need it many times. If a blender burns out or something... he'll just go buy it. He doesn't even ask me... this dishwasher has been sitting here for years not being used--he'd like to sell it and get a built-in one. And I always tell him I don't need a dishwasher and he thinks we do. He keeps threatening that someday he's going to put [a dishwasher] in and I won't know anything about it. [The family] bought me this kitchen carpet a few years back, and I didn't want a kitchen carpet. They went ahead and bought it and put it in. When it was in, I came home one night after school and there it was, and then you can't say, 'Take it
out, I don't want it.' So it stayed. I've really enjoyed it, but would have never gone and bought one on my own or told him I wanted one. I was happy with what I had.

Lloyd was also involved in decisions regarding several of Judy's extrafamilial activities. Judy has kept her community involvement down except for her teaching. She used to be active in more organizations but dropped out because she wanted to be home with her family.

Years ago, I was in Homemakers and [Lloyd] really grumbled about that because I was gone. Besides being gone all day in school, I was gone in the evening. He felt I should be home and I agreed with him. But at that time, he was in a few things too, like bowling, and he belonged to the church council. I really wanted to quit because I really didn't feel I was learning. It was a night out away from the family and I didn't feel I needed that because I was gone all day. I wanted to be home at night and so, it wasn't hard for me to quit that at all.

The youngest couple, Michelle and John Miller, strive to make decisions as a team:

We don't ever make decisions without consulting each other that I can think of. If we would, one [of us] would probably be offended. Just for the fact that, 'You could have asked. I'm sure you know I'd say yes, but you still could have asked'...we talk about [decisions] alot, weigh the pros and cons and it's a mutual decision. We're going to drive each other crazy. I know he would never make a decision without asking me. I mean, he couldn't even go buy an answering machine without asking me. He knew exactly what I was going to say, but...and I'm the same way. That's good in the respect that we were both brought up the same way there. My parents made every decision
that I can ever remember together. That's one thing that I guess I really expected before we got married.

Although many studies have relied on decision making outcomes to determine familial power, the results of this research indicated that decision making outcomes address only one area through which familial power is attained.
CONCLUSIONS

To gain an understanding of women's power, three generations of a German-Russian farm family were interviewed. Previous research has wrestled with conceptualizing and operationalizing power. Although Blood and Wolfe (1960), Blumberg and Coleman (1989), and Emerson (1964, cited from Osmond, 1978), have reported on power, none have done so from the woman's perspective. As Kranichfeld (1987) notes, few studies examine power in the private sphere of family, where women operate as matriarchs of power constellations (Rosenthal, 1985).

Legitimizing the power inherent in women's roles as nurturers and kinkeepers is a first step toward accurately assessing women's power. This research is an attempt to scrutinize the galaxies of power constellations at their most elementary levels to expand the work of power research beyond its structural, "public," male domain to the private, familial domain, where women's power operates daily. In legitimizing women's power in the private domain of family, one must begin with rudimentary exploration to formulate an operational definition that would benefit future research.
Consistent with research on the frontier experience and resource theory, one base of power for the women in this study was derived from their experiences of living on farms. While farm families do hold traditional values and attitudes about family roles (Dunne, 1980), German-Russians adhered to a strong work ethic for both men and women. German-Russian women crossed boundaries defining typically male-dominated tasks to make significant contributions to family sustenance. The unique characteristics of farm life predicated mutual cooperation by all members of the family, whether in the fields or in managing subsidiary subsistence ventures.

Evolution of the frontier experience for the modern-day German-Russian woman has been manifested in education and off-farm employment. Education and the opportunity to be in control of her future gave Judy Schmidt Hoffer the courage to return to college in the face of her husband's opposition. Michelle Hoffer Miller's education and anticipated career outside the home have placed her on an equal footing with her husband, who will also be employed in an urban area outside the home.

Perhaps the greatest base of power for the Schmidt women arose out of their roles as nurturers and kinkeepers. The bulk of their power rests not in the horizontal marital tie but along the vertical, generational bond (Kranichfeld, 1987). This is true especially for farm families, who
emphasize the extended family (Kerckhoff, 1966b, cited from Dorfman and Mertens, 1990).

Contact and interaction between generations is most often maintained through and by women (Hagestad and Neugarten, 1985); thus, for the German-Russian farm family, the role of kinkeeper is an especially valued and powerful position. For the Schmidts, the extended family was brought together at holidays, gathered around a table laden with traditional German-Russian foods, which symbolized most palpably their heritage.

The Schmidt women's enduring power in nurturance was proven in the works of Hulda's mother Martha, the "Braucher," and was passed on in some form to each of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Hulda's caretaking was set in motion by "guiding" her husband, Henry, through life. Judy Hoffer, who appeared meek to others, demonstrated to her daughter, Michelle, her strength in providing a stable environment in which to nurture the Hoffer family. As John Miller admitted, his wife, Michelle, had more investment in maintaining family ties and traditions than he did. Michelle, too, has inherited the legacies of her ancestors, striving to maintain the bonds of family.

Ann Keim (1976, cited from Salaman and Keim, 1979: 116), in a study of women land owners, found that they tended to view themselves as "conservors or maintainers of family
holdings for the next generation, but not as expanders who are ready to 'take a chance' in the land market." Like the Schmidt women, they too view themselves as conservors and maintainers of family but do not generally expand their power to community or political levels.

Political involvement is viewed as something that does not affect women's "invisible work...of restoring, putting things back, and of making things (and people) clean again" (Berk, 1988: 287). What German-Russian women, and all women, must recognize is that to preserve their roles in maintaining family cohesion and stability, political involvement is necessary and crucial. As long as men continue to make the decisions affecting this county, women's positions and power in the private sphere of family will continue to remain invisible and will be treated as such. For the contemporary woman who is increasingly seeking employment outside the home, public policy agenda regarding home and family must reflect her concerns.

Caution must be exercised in using data from this research to hypothesize further about women's power. Because of its focus on the variables of ethnicity, farming as an occupation, and cross-generational influences, this study relied on a necessarily small homogeneous population as its base. Time and monetary constraints were additional
limitations that made this one-family study the most feasible alternative.

One danger of "inside" research in which subject and researcher are known to one another is "interviewer effect." Members of the Schmidt family may have given "desirable" answers, which they felt the author wished to hear. However, as the author knew the family's history, she could check informant reports against actual behavior the Schmidts had demonstrated over the years.

Replication of this study among farm families of other ethnic backgrounds could define further the relationship between ethnicity and farming as an occupation. What has not been determined is how much of the German-Russian woman's power is derived from her ethnicity, and how much is derived from her experience of living and working on a farm.

Future investigation might also show additional factors that contribute to the base of women's power. From what bases of power do non-German-Russian, nonfarm women operate? Study of urban families would show that women's roles in providing income for family sustenance provide as much power as farm women who work for the benefit of farm and family survival. The implications of such power derived from resource contribution for urban women may mean a more egalitarian division of labor inside the home than farm women experience. Hardesty and Bokemeier (1989), suggest that to
alter the traditional division of housework, women must hold liberal gender role attitudes, which reflect their beliefs in their right to work outside the home and the importance of paid work in the lives of women.

The dynamics of women's unpaid work inside the home and their increasing participation in the labor force will be cataclysmic in shaping social change in the family (Berk, 1988: 288). As urban women experience more egalitarian divisions of labor, and as men begin to share more equally in childcare, one must ask if women will continue to fulfill the roles of nurturers and kinkeepers. The private sphere of family may become a source of power men and women share more equally.

As men participate more fully in the nurturance of home and family, women may be reluctant to allow men full entry in that sphere. To retain their superior power positions in that arena, women may continue, as Salamon and Keim (1979) suggest, to view males as heads of families (although a woman might be the actual head) and continue to support males in positions of power on the larger societal level (1979: 115). However, while John Miller may participate more in household labor than did his elder relatives, Michelle does retain her power in that sphere. She is still the kinkeeper and has the final decision in orchestrating family gatherings.

Accompanying the shift from a rural to an urban society
is the move from the extended to the nuclear family. Much of women's power is a direct consequence of their roles as kinkeepers--keeping generations of families in touch with one another. It may be hypothesized that the nuclear family results in amputation of power derived from the role of kinkeeper; however, distance relegates the role of kinkeeper to an even higher status, commanding even more power, as compared with extended families who are near one another and who do not have to work as hard at maintaining those family ties.

The German-Russian woman's experience may not differ from women of other ethnic backgrounds. Strength, endurance, faith, and the preservation of family were the themes important in the lives of the Schmidt women, and transcended one generation to the next. Most often these women's positions were more secure than they seemed to others or even to themselves. While the German-Russian woman's power was not always legitimate in her eyes, her power to influence, mold, and sustain families was unsurpassed. German-Russian women may not have marched in the streets or served in the state legislatures, but they knew the score in their own homes. They had, and still have, power where they think it counts--close to home:

The determination, persistence, and faith that all of these German-Russian women possessed was remarkable. These were the most powerful qualities they passed on to succeeding generations. It was
the women who helped pass on the customs, values
and history of our people by the foods they cooked,
the home atmosphere they created and nourished, the
skills and lessons they taught and the stories they
told of their own past. (Rader, 1984: 37)
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¹Pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the informant.


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APPENDIX A

SCHMIDT FAMILY LINEAGE

Hulda Becker Schmidt m. 1938 Henry Schmidt
b. 1919 . b. 1915
Becker . Schmidt
a. 70 . a. 74

Judy Schmidt Hoffer m. 1962 Lloyd Hoffer
b. 1942 . b. 1940
Schmidt . Hoffer
a. 47 . a. 49

Michelle Hoffer Miller m. 1989 John Miller
b. 1966 . b. 1966
Hoffer . Miller
a. 23 . a. 23

KEY

b. = year of birth
p. = parents
a. = age at time of interview
m. = year of marriage
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Biographical Information:
Name
Sex
Birth date
Place of birth
Parents
Siblings
Where raised
Languages spoken
Education
Religion
Married (How you met, proposal)
Children

1. How do you identify yourself? (Describe the roles you play/fulfill.)
   - Homemaker
   - Teacher
   - Mother
   - Wife
   - Student
   - Farmer
   - Father
   - Husband
   - Student

2. What do you like most about yourself? About your spouse?

3. How involved are you with farm labor (crops, livestock, etc.)/house labor (cooking, cleaning, finances, etc.)/familial labor (childcare)? Estimate spousal involvement as well.

4. A. Who actually makes these decisions:
   Rank importance of decision as well.
   - Where to live
   - What job to take
   - Purchase of machinery/livestock
   - Borrowing money
   - When, where, and which crops to plant
   - Changes to be made on the farm
   - Buying household appliances
   - Changes to be made in the household
   - Childcare/allowances
- Doctoring/medical decisions/Brauche
- When and where to vacation
- When to entertain/choice of friends
- Where to spend holidays/relations with in-laws

B. Who ought to make these decisions?
C. Do you wish it were different?

5. Who owns the farm? Machinery? House? Vehicles? Who should own them? Is that typical of other couples you know?

6. Whose name appears on loans? Savings and checking accounts? Credit cards?

7. If widowed could/would you run the farm alone? (women) If widowed could/would you run the house alone? (men)

8. Would you want to exchange roles and positions with your spouse?

9. What changes have taken place since you began farming do you feel are most important/significant?

10. To what organizations do you belong? (civic, political, religious, leisure) (offices held, sustenance of belief, etc.) Would you like to be more active?

11. What happens when you and your spouse disagree? EXAMPLE: When you and your spouse disagree about something, do you usually give in and do it your spouse's way, or does your spouse usually come around to your point of view?

12. What do you do when you want something to be changed in your relationship?

13. What are your feelings on divorce? Is it ever right?

14. How do you decide whom to vote for?

15. What is your definition of feminism/equal rights? How do you feel about it?

16. If you could start a new life, would you plan it in a different way?

17. Who is/was a role model for you?
18. In what ways has your mother influenced you?  
Your father?  
Your grandparents?  

19. What customs/traditions were passed on to you by your mother?  
Your father?  
Your grandparents?  

20. What customs/traditions will you/have you passed on to your children?  

21. What are your hobbies?  

22. Who has had an easier life, you or your partner?  

23. Do you think you have had an easier/harder life than your grandparents/parents/children?  (physical labor, choices, financially)  

24. What do you think of today's younger/older generation?  

25. Do you feel you are representative of other German-Russians?  
Why did your ancestors come from Russia?  

26. Do you feel you are representative of other Americans?  

27. Can you give me examples/stories of strong German-Russian women you have known?