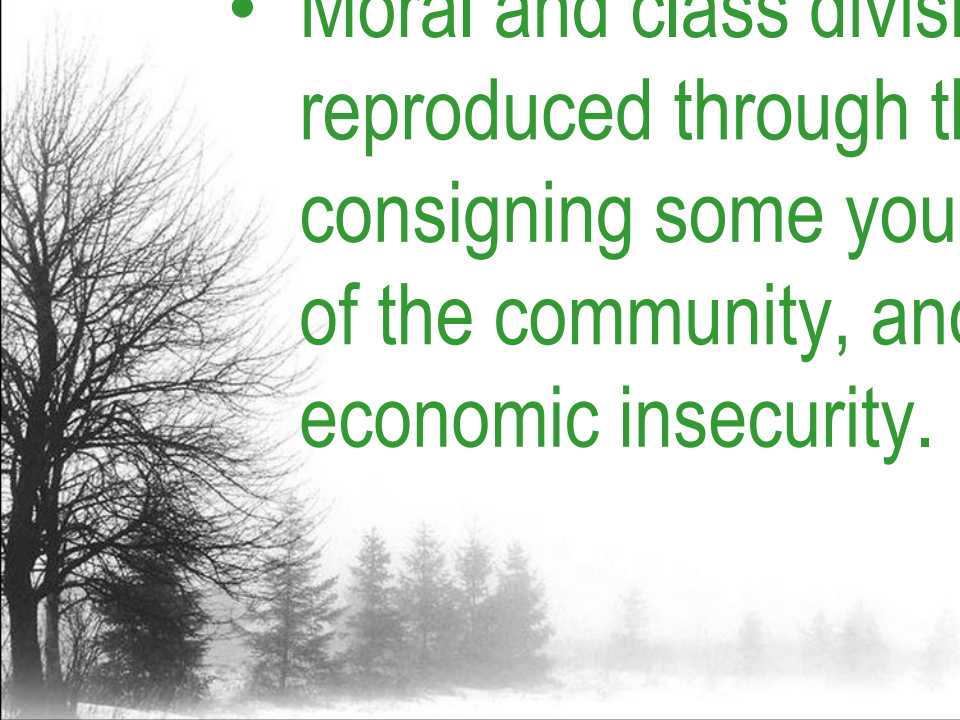
The background of the slide is a faded, sepia-toned photograph of a rustic log cabin. The cabin is built from horizontal logs and has a dark, possibly corrugated metal roof. It is situated in a wooded area with tall, thin trees in the background. In the foreground, there are some logs and what appears to be a pile of firewood or supplies near the cabin's entrance. The overall scene is quiet and somewhat desolate, reflecting the theme of the text.

**“Sending off All Your Good Treasures”:  
Rural Schools, Brain-Drain, and  
Community Survival in the Wake of  
Economic Collapse**

Jennifer Sherman and Rayna Sage  
Washington State University

# Rural Schools and Communities

- Moral categories influence the amount of encouragement or support children receive with regard to education and future prospects.
- Moral and class divisions are magnified and reproduced through the local school system, consigning some young adults to a life outside of the community, and others to chronic economic insecurity.



# Who Stays and Who Leaves? Factors Contributing to the Rural Brain Drain

- Parental Social Class and Socioeconomic Status: Higher parental income, wealth, and education → higher likelihood of outmigration (Corbett, 2007, 2009; Jencks et al., 1979; Sewell & Hauser, 1975; Woodrum, 2004) .
- But social capital may impact effects of social class and SES (Elder & Conger, 2000; Hofferth & Iceland, 1998; McGrath, Swisher, Elder, & Conger, 2001; S. M. Wilson, Peterson, & P. Wilson, 1993).
- Teachers and Mentors: Important in encouraging and launching talented individuals (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. 33) .
- But perceptions of “talent” may be based on other factors, including stereotypes related to class, race, culture, etc. (Ferguson, 2003; Gorski, 2005; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2009).

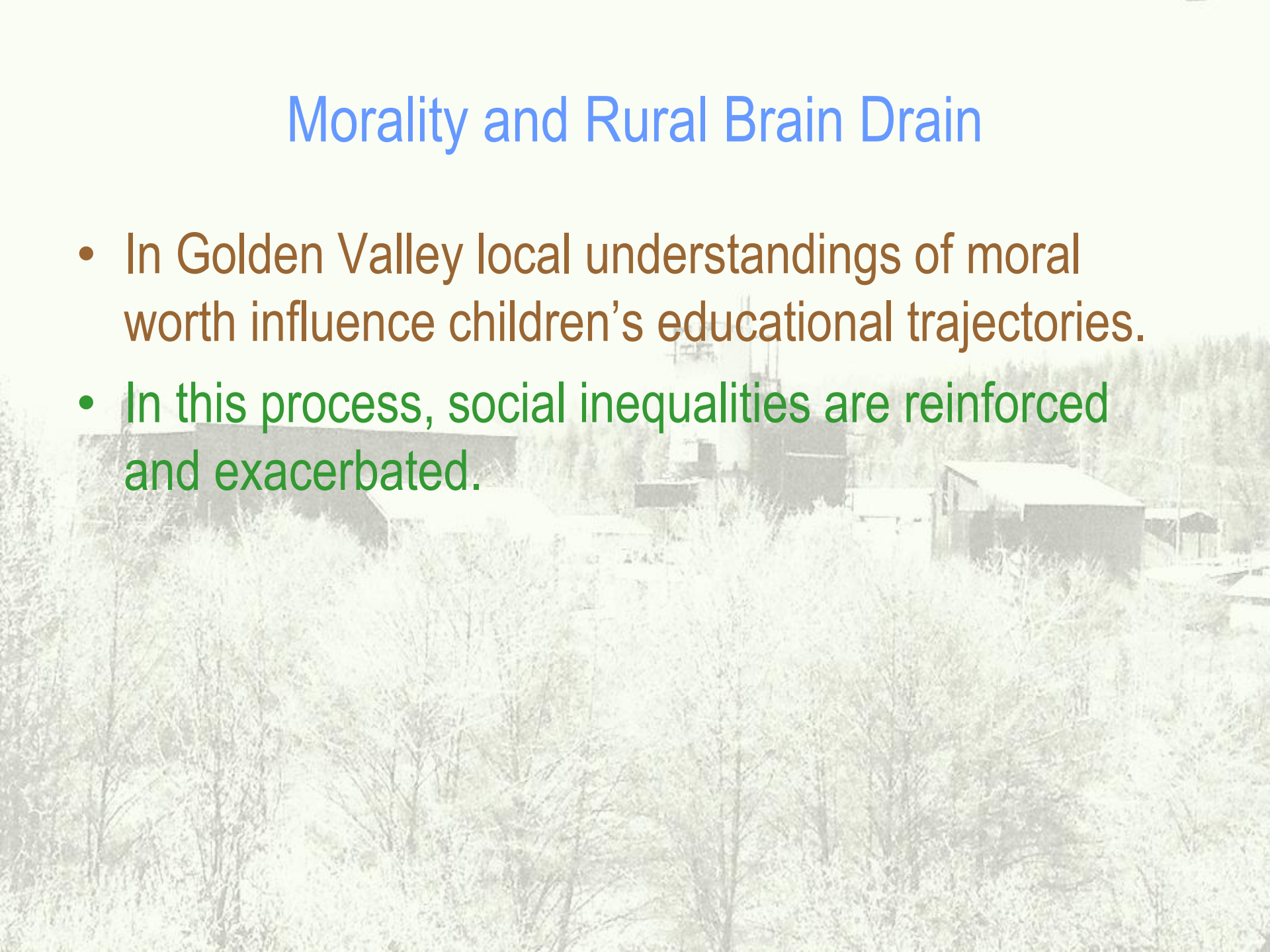
# Who Stays and Who Leaves? Factors Contributing to the Rural Brain Drain

- Divisive noneconomic social boundaries in cohesive communities often “become more important during periods of rapid social change” (Stein 2001, p. 8).
- In Golden Valley, families with weak labor market ties, and/or histories of public aid receipt, drug use, or alcoholism are judged and excluded from community’s resources (Sherman 2006, 2009).



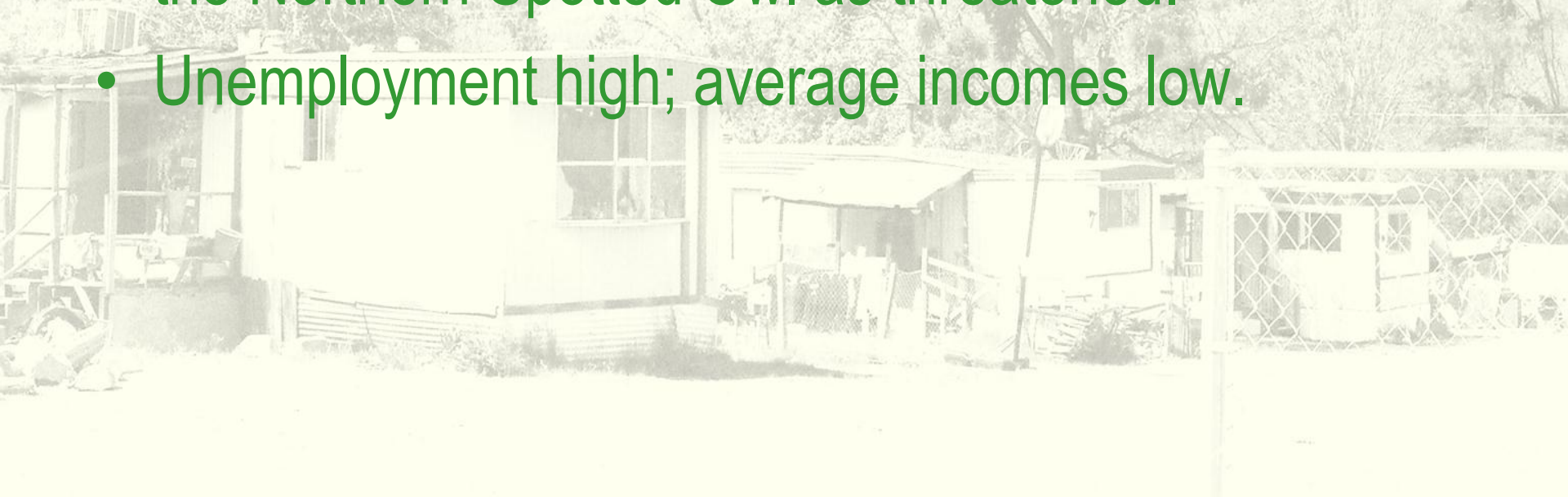
# Morality and Rural Brain Drain

- In Golden Valley local understandings of moral worth influence children's educational trajectories.
- In this process, social inequalities are reinforced and exacerbated.



# Golden Valley, California

- High-poverty rural community in Northern California.
- Physically isolated.
- Reliant on forest industry for most of 20<sup>th</sup> Century.
- Lost most men's jobs in 1990s due to the listing of the Northern Spotted Owl as threatened.
- Unemployment high; average incomes low.



# Research Methods and Interview Sample

- 55 in-depth interviews and a year of ethnographic fieldwork.
- Age range 23-60 years.
- 25 women and 30 men.
- 92% white and 8% Native American.
- 30% out of workforce at time of initial interview.

## Results: Schools, Community, and Moral Decline

“The local kids are leaving and we’re getting a lot of welfare families that have replaced the younger generation in school, so, uh, you got a lot more lower socioeconomic group in here, which makes for a larger free lunch program, and problems in the schools.”

- Fred Graham, 50 year-old Forest Service Employee





# Schools, Community, and Moral Decline

“[When] the mill closed a lot of the families that really cared, that worked hard, they’re gone. So the majority, I would say, of the ones that are here now, are lower economic situation... So yeah, we lost a lot of our families that are really interested in participating and helping [with the schools] when the mill closed, and that’s a bummer.”

- Kate Burton, 30 year-old hairdresser and married mother of two

# Education as Necessary Evil

“You’re sending off all your good treasures, but truly there’s no employment here. So you can’t ask your son or daughter to stay, because there’s nothing for them to do. You know, there’s no jobs. I don’t know what they would do if they did stay here. And I would think that a lot of them – the kids that are college bound, obviously – they all want to experience the city before they decide. I mean, this is a decision you have to make.”

- Cathy Graham, 50 year old schoolteacher

# Education as Necessary Evil

“There’s nothing for them here. For them to stay here there was nothing they could do. They could box groceries.”

- Eric McCloud, 48 year-old public employee and married father of two



## Education as Necessary Evil

*“Do you hope that your kids will stay here when they’re done [with high school]?”*

“No. I wouldn’t care if there was one who actually came back and schooled themselves so that they could survive here, like I did. But if you’re not a teacher and you don’t own a business it’s kind of hard to. I wouldn’t want them to stay unless they schooled themselves so that they could survive here. I have one that wants to be a vet, they could survive here.”

*“So you’d like to possibly see them come back?”*

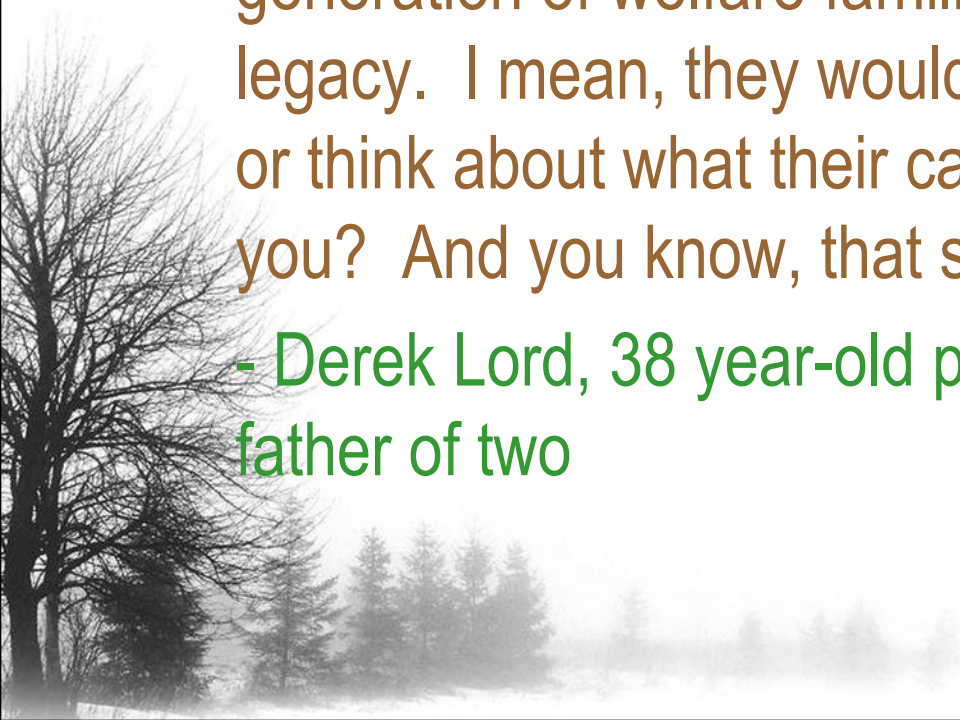
“Yeah. Well, I want them all to go to college.”

- Allison Butters, 30 year-old nursery school teacher and married mother of three

# Educational Trajectories and Moral Judgments

“Now there’s a percentage of kids in school that it wouldn’t even dawn on ‘em to go work for it, and [they think] somebody’s gotta give that to me. And I see that a lot here. We have in some cases third and fourth generation of welfare families that that’s almost their legacy. I mean, they wouldn’t even think about college, or think about what their career is. You know, why would you? And you know, that scares me.”

- Derek Lord, 38 year-old public employee and married father of two



# Educational Trajectories and Moral Judgments

“The ones we get to keep are the ones that you didn’t want. You want ‘em to leave. Seems like that’s what happens a lot. And that happens with a lot of the drugs I think around here. You know, the ones that have no future, I mean just didn’t get an education, or they’re stuck here, they turn to drugs.”

- Jeff Taylor, 33 year-old mechanic and married father of two



# Resisting Moral Judgment, Education, and Brain Drain

“I’m telling [my children], you know, they’re being graded by people that don’t know shit...The schools are terrible, terrible, you know? Um, yeah, they hire friends to run our schools, to teach it, with no professionalism at all.”

“In all my life a high school diploma wasn’t something that was necessary to do anything but go on to the next school. I mean, a job resume, who wants to know if you’ve got a high school diploma? You know, and then everybody I’ve seen go to college, including myself, it didn’t affect their life at all hardly.”

- Greg Smith, 42 year-old unemployed married father of two

# Resisting Moral Judgment, Education, and Brain Drain

Eli: “What’s bad is the teachers. They take kids that are smart, you know, and they say, ‘Oh, look how smart this kid is, he’ll do this.’ And then the ones that aren’t so smart, throw ‘em in the corner. And the ones that need the help don’t get it, and the ones that don’t need it get all of it. It’s true. You go look in a classroom. I didn’t believe it ‘til I seen it. It’s ridiculous. I wouldn’t send them to that school ever again. Ever.”

Laura: “I don’t plan anything on what they want to do. Whatever they want to do is fine. If they wanna hang out at home for a while until they figure it out, that’s good. You always hope your kids do certain things, but...”

Eli: “Well, they can be a doctor or they can shovel snow, whatever makes ‘em happy. It wouldn’t make any difference.”

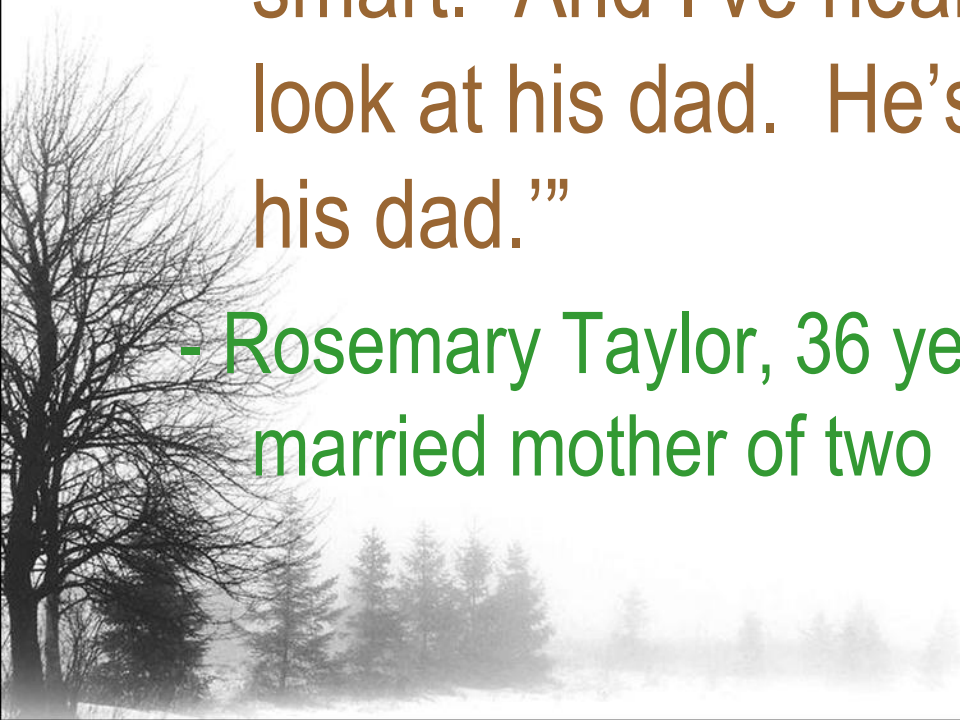
- Laura and Eli Jordan, married parents of four, secretary and unemployed



# Educational Trajectories and Moral Judgment

“It’s like they don’t have a chance. You know, they’re labeled... [by] the teachers and stuff. I mean, a lot of ‘em are you know, really smart. And I’ve heard people say, ‘Well, look at his dad. He’s gonna wind up just like his dad.’”

- Rosemary Taylor, 36 year-old teacher’s aide and married mother of two



## Education and Life Chances

- In current labor market, few good jobs available for those without education.
- Those who reject education more likely to stay; also likely to end up with lower incomes and life chances.

# Conclusion

- Rural schools act as agents of social division, as well as of brain drain.
- Brain drain literature fails to problematize terms like “best and brightest.”
- Need to critically examine the ways in which the “best and brightest” tend to be constructed around moral and social schisms within rural communities, predestining children for one trajectory or the other.

# Conclusion

- Rural schools are often agents of brain drain, as well as firming and defending social boundaries.
- Anger over brain drain leads those who send their children away to further judge those who stay behind.

