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Reducing Stigma Associated with Growing Up Poor: How to Create a More Equitable Future for Working Class Adolescents

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By

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"Money and one of its embodiments, social class, are both riveting and mysterious to children. And if we don't challenge today's stigma around class status, it will warp a new generation's experience of an even more important class - the kind in which they learn. And that's one thing we simply can't afford."

- Alissa Quart (2017), The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/19/social-class-wealth-inequality-children-parenting

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Abstract

I examine how stigma associated with socioeconomic status (SES), or social class, has the potential to negatively impact individuals during adolescence. Specifically, I focus on the impact of class stigma, and the institutional barriers faced by adolescents as they prepare for adulthood. These barriers and the stress felt due to both stigmatization, and environmental stimuli specifically pertaining to low-income neighborhoods/environments, can hinder or alter the development of the four major domains of development: physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Stigmatization has resulted in physically and socially isolating low-income communities from middle- or high-income communities, hindering social mobility for L-SES adolescents. Social class is not entirely based on meritocracy, but rather on social connections to the financially prosperous, and preventing L-SES individuals' access to social and cultural capital will help in perpetuating generational poverty cycles in low-income communities. I infer necessary radical reformation in the welfare system, and in public education on issues specifically pertaining to L-SES individuals. Doing so has the potential to change public opinion, redistribute wealth to those in need, and provide better futures to both L-SES adolescents and younger developing L-SES children. I hypothesize that the stigma of poverty is one of the driving forces behind the lack of resources for those in need, not one's "ability to achieve" in a meritocracy. It is important to give resources to working class adolescents to achieve equity, not just equality; this is the way to increase social mobility and break the cycle of poverty.

Introduction and Research Question

We live in an era where economic inequality has become increasingly stratified between the upper, middle, and working classes of the United States. This wage disparity is important to recognize, as the widespread stratification of income is indicative of the institutionalization of a class hierarchy (Massey, 2007; Waxman, 1977). Not only is this class hierarchy negatively impacting the quality of lives for workers and their families who depend on unlivable wages in the United States through poor standards of living and lower life expectancy (Zimmer et al., 2016), but additionally seems to be perpetuating a cycle of poverty for the next generation (Gitterman, 2009). Alongside this threat, the stigma associated with being in a low-income bracket is not only driven by the consequences of wage stagnation (a financial inability to provide vital resources for oneself and/or others), but seems to be associated with stigma (Gitterman, 2009).

Consistent with the idea of the "American Dream", meritocracy has become a dominant ideology through which many Americans conceptualize success (Waxman, 1977). A belief in a meritocratic social system is still alive in higher socioeconomic areas (H-SES), as they have the financial resources to better assist those attaining social mobility, but this is not the case for every community (Waxman, 1977). Unfortunately, this allows those who are not personally affected by poverty in America to not quite understand how prevalent this issue is. However, according to De France and Evans (2020), poverty is becoming increasingly prevalent, as approximately 1 in 4 children are born into poverty in the United States. This vulnerable population, in comparison to their H-SES peers, suffers from a lack of resources that would otherwise benefit their physical, cognitive, social and emotional development in preparation for emerging adulthood (De France & Evans, 2020).

The experience of coming to age in a lower socioeconomic status (L-SES) household influence various aspects of one's life, including the outlook of their forthcoming adulthood. These aspects may take form as a lack of access to nutritional food, clean water, adequate housing, quality schooling, proper healthcare, and/or ample opportunities within higher education or the workforce (Waxman, 1977). Continual inadequate access to these resources prior to and during adolescence is a profoundly important experience to recognize, as having access to these resources prior to emerging adulthood is a crucial aspect of both increasing social mobility and abruptly ending the cycle of poverty (Cooper, 2016).

The stratification of wealth is a symptom of social categorization and the stigmatizing of low-income communities (Massey, 2007; Goffman, 1963). This is because the exploitation of low-income individuals, as well as opportunity hoarding in regard to academic advancement and career development are reflections of social stigmatization that are connected to the narrative of a financial meritocracy in America (Massey, 2007; Waxman, 1977). Financial meritocracies teach of how financial success, specifically social mobility, is a promised reward for hard work (Waxman, 1977). If social mobility is not achieved, it is deemed to be because the individual is "lazy", or "expecting handouts" (Gitterman, 2009). This worldview is problematic for low-income communities, as social mobility is not simply based on hard work alone, but rather through social and financial connections with successful others (Waxman, 1977; Banerjee et al., 2006). Stigma reduction would involve challenging that narrative not only on a personal level, but up to the institutional level to create an equitable playing field that allows for values of meritocracy to be dissociated from socioeconomic status, or class.

I will be addressing these topics throughout my thesis by answering the question "How would reducing the stigma associated with low socioeconomic status promote equity for low-income adolescents?” My intent is to answer this question by describing the nature of stigma, addressing how this specifically pertains to L-SES adolescents’ development, and what can be done to reduce this stigma and its impact on L-SES adolescents.

What is Stigma?

Stigma is a group identifier accepted by the general public as being a negative attribute (Goffman, 1963). The word stigma originates from Ancient Greece and was in reference to a physical marker or bodily sign of someone's moral status; stigma was the marker that was burned or cut into one's body to identify someone as a slave, prisoner, or traitor (Goffman, 1963). These individuals were seen as "polluted" and should be avoided at all costs (Goffman, 1963). Although the qualifications of what is considered stigma has broadened over time and rarely includes the intentional, physical marking of an individual, this notion of moral pollution and avoiding individuals from stigmatized groups is still prevalent to this day.

The attribute(s) or group membership(s) deemed as being stigmatized can vary between social settings, however, stigma is seen overall as the reason for a relationship between attribute and stereotype, potentially leading to prejudice and discrimination. Stigma can be expressed in many forms, but is commonly expressed in the negative attitudes from those who are not stigmatized, and through their disregard of those in a stigmatized community. From here, those who stigmatize others will frequently use specific stigma-related terms and attribute several other undesirable traits to them that seemingly correlate with the initial stigmatized trait or group (Goffman, 1963). When the stigmatized individual or group becomes defensive toward this negative viewpoint of them, the stigmatizers respond by attributing this defensiveness as a direct expression of the initial stigmatized trait, making their argument sound obsolete (Goffman, 1963). This experience is known to be alienating and ostracizing, pushing the stigmatized individual to view themselves through the lens of failure, regardless of if this is a valid form of punishment.

A stigmatized trait in one's own cultural setting may not be stigmatized in another culture (Goffman, 1963). This is important to recognize, as an aspect of stigma is a lack of societal acceptance. The society one is a member of is responsible for establishing the categorization of traits deemed as honorable, acceptable, or immoral. This categorization of traits then becomes a demand from the public to meet their socially constructed expectations (Goffman, 1963). These expectations, however, are not always explicit, but can rather be a set of subconscious assumptions that one has about another individual or group and is deemed as being responsible for the discrediting of the stigmatized. Whether this stigma is based on physical appearance, the morality of one's actions, or due to belonging to another religion, country, or race, the stigma one faces has the power to override any or all other traits that were once deemed positive or endearing by their society's norms (Goffman, 1963).

General societal beliefs in the United States values capitalistic ideals, which although can be beneficial for those who achieve social mobility, can also be damaging to those who do not due to the ingrained beliefs of financial meritocracy (Waxman, 1977). Financial meritocracies are designed to reward those who have access to growing capital, meaning that those who are from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and do not have access to this same amount of capital as those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds will not be rewarded in this economic style (Waxman, 1977). Class stigma emerges from both this concept, and from the "American Dream" (Waxman, 1977). Because many who have settled in the United States have achieved enough social mobility to claim that they are in a better financial situation than they were when they arrived in America, there is a stigma around not being able to achieve this. Whether it was due to obstacles based on another type of stigma (race, ethnicity, religion, age, etc.), wage stagnation, or it was simply "bad luck", the majority population in the United States recognizes the notion that those who are less fortunate are generally seen as “lazy”, “expecting handouts”, and/or “lack responsibility” (Gitterman, 2009). Although this is an overarching and erroneous conclusion, class stigma arises from it and is still pertinent to this day (Gitterman, 2009; Waxman, 1977).

Low Socioeconomic Status (L-SES) individuals' experience with stigma may be classified under Goffman’s category, “blemishes of character”. This is because those who are L-SES are deemed as “poor prospects” due to their inability to reciprocate financial means with the same ease as those of a higher socioeconomic status (Goffman, 1963; Kurzban & Leary, 2001). “Blemishes of character”, or threats to “dyadic cooperation”, have societal consequences of pity for an individual who is deemed a poor prospect, which in turn may become long-term avoidance (Kurzban & Leary, 2001). During adolescence, this experience becomes more prevalent, as identity exploration and social development with peers and mentors are some of the defining characteristics of this developmental period (McBride et al., 2011). This makes the effect of behavioral responses to stigma, such as the fear of ostracization, manifest in more acute fashion (McBride et al., 2011).

Adolescents are in a phase of development that positions them as young adults once they have finished high school. A portion of what adolescents are taught about adulthood is financial prosperity, and for those who come from low-income households, this is disproportionately unlikely to be their reality. This suggests that a major milestone being taught as the keystone of successful adulthood is largely unattainable for L-SES adolescents receiving this message (Dearing, 2008). Class stigma’s tenacity assists in reiterating the message that if one is not successful, or ready to enter society in a way that will guarantee their success, that they are the ones who have failed, not the system (Banerjee, 2006). The weight of this narrative that is placed on the shoulders of L-SES adolescents can negatively impact every domain of their development, whether it be physical, social, emotional, or cognitive (Dearing, 2008).

What Factors Cause Stigma?

There are a myriad of attributes that tend to be stigmatized, such as differentiating and labeling the variation within a population (Link & Phelan, 2001), or physical appearance (Jones, 1984), but factors that are associated with stigma are cultural beliefs labeling attributes as unfavorable, an “us vs. them” mentality, and the desire to gain or maintain power (Link & Phelan, 2001; Falk, 2014).

Because stigma is a social construct, cultural beliefs play a significant role in determining which attributes are deemed as worthy of stigmatization (Goffman, 1963). Although the variation in the human population would exist regardless of the presence of stigma, it is not until a negative connotation and following stereotypes are included that these variations are socially pertinent (Link & Phelan, 2001). This linkage of stereotypes to seemingly negative attributes becomes problematic when applied to groups, as the process of differentiation throughout the populace involves substantial oversimplification (Link & Phelan, 2001). The amount of variation between individuals makes an accurate grouping of an entire race, gender, religion, or culture virtually impossible. No individual from a given stigmatized group can be guaranteed to have the seemingly negative attribute at hand, so it is not only unjust to ascribe stereotypes to them without a broader understanding of the individual, but it would be a relatively arbitrary act to do so. However, each culture has their own set of morals, ethics and beliefs that dictate how their society categorizes groups, individuals, and their behaviors. With this, each culture has the power to determine what is seen as socially acceptable versus what is seen as immoral or unfavorable (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). If one deviates from their own culture, whether this deviation be from an ascribed trait or behavior they can ensure that stigmatization will ensue and that they will be subject to alienation (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001).

According to Heatherton (2003), stigma is a consequence of cognitive limitation, meaning that one's experiences and social information in regard to a certain attribute or group lacks in some way when a reliance on a stereotype becomes the primary basis of knowledge. Stereotyping and association between attributes and generalized groups of individuals is a natural cognitive process, as we cannot have extensive knowledge and experience with every topic we encounter. Although grouping and organizing new information in this way is a normal process of cognition, this can become precarious when used to separate groups of individuals through an "us vs. them" mentality. This mentality is responsible for dividing a group into a hierarchy, where those who are deemed as "others" are seen as having lesser value, and the group with seemingly greater value becomes the stigmatizers of "them" (Heatherton, 2003). This downward comparison that comes from the "us vs. them" mentality also brings with it the dehumanization of those being stigmatized (Link & Phelan, 2001). This may occur for a multitude of reasons, but some common reasons would be for the boost of the stigmatizers' own self-esteem, and to retain their dominant position in society (Link & Phelan, 2001; Heatherton, 2003).

The desire to gain or maintain power, whether it is through social, financial, or political means, is an indicator of stigmatization of another group (Falk, 2014). This is because a grasp at power over another group or individual reflects a cultural or societal divide (Falk, 2014). Power feuds in social settings occur when the minority party concludes that they are underrepresented and seek to gain the majority of power, while the majority party actively resists their cause through the utilization of more power (Falk, 2014). When this occurs, a common tactic used to decrease and prevent power for the minority party is stereotyping, ridicule, and dehumanization by the majority party (Heatherton et al., 2000; Jacoby, 2005). An affixed trait is then designated to the minority party, which will be used to negatively describe them, regardless of accuracy, long after the power feud ceases (Jacoby, 2005). When access to power becomes more important than the representation or respect of those who are in less powerful positions, whether this dynamic occurs in a social, financial or political hierarchy, it has the potential to impact an individual for a lifetime, or a group for generations to come (Jacoby, 2005).

What each of these specific factors have in common is that each one suggests that stigma is essentially acting or existing outside of the social norm of the society one resides in. Whether or not the specific stigma is targeted toward ascribed traits such as race or sex, or if it targets actions such as criminal activity, stigma is the societal response to others being on the outside of what is deemed as acceptable and favorable (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). All of the factors mentioned above are simply ways to portray this divide between the stigmatized and the stigmatizers.

What are the Harmful Effects of Stigma?

Although stigma is present in virtually every society, it is known to have a negative effect on development in every domain, whether it be physical, social, emotional, or cognitive (Flaherty et al., 2013; Hansen, 2014). Regardless of the stigmatized trait, being subject to stigmatization is associated with a surplus of harmful effects on developmental trajectories, some of which are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) (Anda et al., 1999), changes in lifespan health trajectories (Zimmer et al., 2016), and altering the capacity for emotional regulation (De

France & Evans, 2020). I will be further explaining these effects by briefly addressing each of the previously mentioned domains of development.

Physical Development

The alteration of one's physical development due to the stress of experiencing stigma is the most outwardly apparent manifestation of resulting harm. These effects, however, take place gradually across the lifespan, making it more difficult to identify on a short-term basis, or as a preventative measure (Zimmer et al., 2016). The commonly noted harmful effects of stigma within the physical domain are shortened lifespan trajectories, and the long-term effects of ACEs on physical health (Zimmer et al., 2016; Su et al., 2015). According to Zimmer and colleagues (2016), group membership with a stigmatized group significantly correlates ($p<.01$) with premature death, varying as much as 17 years between the stigmatized group and majority groups' trajectory at 50% estimated survival probability. Those who were a part of a stigmatized group were also significantly more likely to develop comorbid conditions toward the end of life, such as congestive heart failure, chronic pulmonary disease, diabetes, and malignant tumors (Zimmer et al., 2016). These impacts on health were associated with the stress of enduring stigma, and the lack of social support that coincides with stigmatization. These effects are noted in ACE scores as well, as Adverse Childhood Experiences often coincide with being a part of a stigmatized minority group (Oregon Health Authority, 2013). The events that would impact one's ACE score are not directly caused by any specific type of stigma, but because there is known stigma surrounding situations such as substance abuse, and mental illnesses (both of which are addressed in the ACE questionnaire), this could impact whether help is sought out, while also potentially impacting the severity of one's ACE score (Oregon Health Authority, 2013). According to Gardner and colleagues (2019), an ACE score of 4/10 or more is significantly associated with increased rates of obesity, diabetes, cancer, COPD, heart disease, and strokes in adulthood. Because experiencing stigma is a moderating factor to high ACE scores, this becomes significant in consideration to how stigma is maladaptive to physical development (Gardner et al., 2019).

Class stigma specifically impacts L-SES development through two factors: physiological responses to Adverse Childhood Experiences, and a lack of access to vital resources, such as high-quality food (Flaherty et al., 2013; Rasmussen et al., 2019; Gardner et al., 2019). According to Flaherty and colleagues (2013), young adults who had high ACE scores were more likely to take up risky health-related behaviors, such as substance abuse, physical inactivity, and smoking. However, the negative health effects of developing with Adverse Childhood Experiences can be felt as soon as early adolescence, regardless of the increased risk of impulsive behavior that impacts health across the lifespan. These effects often come in the form of unexplained nausea, headaches, skin problems, body aches, eye problems, and constipation, amongst others. Minors with high (4+) ACE scores were significantly more likely ($p<.05$) to have a chronically hyperactive HPA axis, and impaired prefrontal cortex functioning. However, it is important to note that efforts to reduce ACE scores from rising have a positive impact on health across the lifespan. Rasmussen and colleagues (2019) concluded that having a high ACE score is also associated with an increase in inflammation in adulthood, measured through higher levels of IL-6 and suPAR. These results are indicative of a hyperactive HPA axis, as these proteins are predominantly over-created under psychological stress. Gardner and colleagues (2019) concluded that obstacles preventing school children (K-12) from receiving quality food to nourish them throughout the school day negatively affected their physical development through the increased likelihood of obesity. The strongest association between obesity and psychosocial factors in this study was through low family income; there was a significant difference in children's weight who had high ACE scores compared to those with low (fewer than 4) or no Adverse Childhood Experiences (Gardner et al., 2019). A mediating factor in this relationship was routine access to high quality food.

Social Development

Social development is impacted by class stigma through the environment that L-SES adolescents develop in. Because neighborhoods are typically divided by the cost of living or the cost of homes, and school zones are divided by neighborhood, adolescents are more likely to socially define themselves by these immediate environments (McBride et al., 2011). This is because adolescents' development is embedded in the context of their physical environment, among other factors, which will have an influence on their identity as they continue to develop. McBride and colleagues (2011) suggest that L-SES adolescents are more likely to have their identity exploration inhibited, which has a direct impact on immediate and future success, as they struggle to overcome stressors such as social stigma, limited opportunity in their economically disadvantaged. According to McBride and colleagues (2011), without identity exploration, adolescents will have to conclude that the societal expectations and social environment they have spent their lives in is imperative in defining who they are. This alone is not necessarily a negative trait, but when considering how the adolescent can internalize an L-SES environment as being foundational to one's identity, it can result in the feeling of being trapped in a cycle of generational poverty (McBride et al., 2011).

Stigma can affect the social domain of lifespan development through how one's particular stigma an individual experiences interact with the surrounding social environment. This is the realm in which ostracism can be measured and interpreted based on the public/outgroup view of an individual or group. According to Reutter and colleagues (2009), individual and group interviews with a stigmatized group of low-income individuals determined that the more exposure an individual had to negative stereotypes from the public eye, the more likely they were to attribute negative stereotypic traits to themselves. These stereotypes and the separation of this population from the “majority” Populus defined the social identity of the stigmatized group as their poverty, while also ensuring that they remain stigma conscious when around others who are not part of said group (Reutter et al., 2009). Stigma consciousness was deemed as harmful to their social development because each participant reported that they encounter new social situations already assuming a hierarchical power dynamic, in which they were seen as being inferior (Reutter et al., 2009). Although their personal identities negate these stereotypes, their place in society seems to always be informed by the stereotypes that others place on them. This leads to suffering in social relationships before the stigmatized individual is given the opportunity to interact with the majority populace (Reutter et al., 2009).

Emotional Development

Emotional development’s interaction with class stigma follows the same general pattern as social development, as the two tend to coincide. L-SES adolescents emotionally connect with their peers and social identity to interpret the world around them. When an L-SES adolescent’s social identity, and community is informed by the experience of poverty, emotional processing is informed by these experiences. Unfortunately, this can lead to maladaptive traits such as emotional dysregulation and lack of impulse control (De France & Evans, 2020; Holmes et al., 2019). De France and Evans (2020) determined through a longitudinal study that a lack of resources significantly increased risk-taking behavior and lower self-control behaviors in adolescents. The research specifically addressed reliance on disengagement use and internalizing/externalizing symptoms rather than emotional regulation skills, which leads to an increased likelihood of developing anxiety and/or depression later in life. Low family income, unsafe neighborhoods, and underfunded schools were some of many factors that contributed to this result. Holmes and colleagues (2019) studied the links between environment stability, socioeconomic status, and risk-taking vs. self-control behaviors. Their results determined that children with increased homelife instability due to being of low-socioeconomic status (L-SES) were significantly more likely to indulge in risky behaviors such as truancy, antisocial behavior, and substance abuse; this would go hand-in-hand with lowered self-control behaviors, such as self-regulation. The conclusion of this study suggests that having a positive and stable home environment is important for the development of self-control (Holmes et al., 2019).

The emotional domain is informed by the developmental phase of the individual and can vary widely within and across the lifespan. There are numerous ways in which emotional development can be harmed by experiencing stigma, yet according to De France and Evans (2020), one of the primary impacts on this domain is a decrease in emotional regulation and the coping strategies that follow. Emotional regulation occurs through both automatic and conscious effort to reduce anger or anxiety with certain coping mechanisms that allow us to behave appropriately when distressed (De France & Evans, 2020). This process is controlled by the limbic system, but more specifically by the amygdala and hippocampus. Their responsibilities are to process short term or working memory, such as the current situation and environment (hippocampus) and to retrieve previous knowledge through emotional reactions to the environment (amygdala) (De France & Evans, Holmes et al., 2019). When one is facing the stress of stigmatization routinely, this emotional regulation process becomes clouded, as it allows for increased apprehension for social interactions (De France & Evans, 2020; Reutter et al., 2009). Someone facing stigma is significantly more likely to approach situations and environments with the assumption that they will be stigmatized once spotted, while also recognizing that the emotional turmoil caused by this incident will inevitably be placed on their reputation, regardless of if the incident put them at fault (Reutter et al., 2009). Because of this, emotional regulation decreases, as the weight from the previous interactions are carried into the present. There is recognition that regardless of how consciously one manages their emotions, there will be blame for any wrongdoing, and the desire to prevent exhausting one's self-control is prioritized (Reutter, 2009; Holmes et al., 2019). Although this is a natural response to repeated stigmatization, this is harmful for emotional development, as this reaction can often lead to the excessive internalization or externalization of emotions. According to Fatima & Sheikh (2014), the conflicts that arise from the excessive internalization of emotions are an increased risk of developing depression and/or anxiety, and the conflicts that arise from the excessive externalization of emotions are increased risk of committing violent criminal acts, and increased aggression. Although facing stigma is not the fault of the individual facing it, the negative impacts of these interactions can determine how one interacts with the world and their rate of future success.

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development is impacted by class stigma through two factors; school climate and access to higher education in late adolescence and early adulthood (Stephens, 2014; Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008). The structuring of public education highlights the ideal of independence, which has led to the structural disadvantage regarding access to education, equal political rights, employment, livable wages, and healthcare among others (Stephens, 2012). Children being raised in working class conditions not only have the previously listed obstacles to overcome, but they are more likely to be raised to value resilience, interdependence, and obedience to authority over independence. This is reinforced in school, work, family, and community contexts. This is not because these are the value systems of working-class communities, this is because it is their survival methods. Krywosa and the Educational Resources Information Center (2008) reinforce this notion by studying the impact of providing resources to first-generation and low-income students, such as information about affordable college or job training options, FAFSA, college applications, and scholarship applications. Allowing this group of under-privileged students to find the resources necessary to attend college will help to overcome issues such as social mobility. However, if it is not recognized that working class college students experience attending college differently than middle class students do, providing financial resources for working class adolescents who want to pursue a higher education will be a disservice (Stephens et al., 2012). Stephens and colleagues (2012) concluded that cultural norms are not designed to include marginalized or poor students. Uncertainty about college choice, socio-cultural mismatch, and individualistic mindsets hinder the ability to traverse a traditional college experience. Having a lack of a safety net, both financially and culturally, further increases the likelihood of the inability to complete college. This study additionally determined that those who did not traditionally conform to the college experience were more likely to perform poorly academically.

The prevalence of internalizing symptoms, and decreasing emotional regulation becomes increasingly prevalent in L-SES adolescents, as the processing of their ever-changing environment utilizes much of the resources available, resulting in cognitive load (McBride et al., 2011). Emotional regulation is an asset of executive functioning, meaning that the performance of this task can be reflective of the individual's cognitive functioning and developmental stage

(Fuller-Rowell et al., 2015). According to De France & Evans (2020), emotional regulation can be altered in the face of stigma, as the stress of experiencing ostracization can lead one to becoming hypersensitive to stressful situations. When this occurs, the ability to self-soothe, perceive stress, and to utilize problem-solving skills are hindered by the hyperactivity of the limbic system (De France & Evans, 2020). This aspect of executive functioning being impeded upon impacts other reliant aspects of executive functioning, such as task persistence (Fuller-Rowell et al., 2015). Task persistence relies on a calm state of mind and previously enriched problem-solving skills to reach the end of any task successfully, but without fully equipped executive functioning skills, task completion will largely be unsuccessful (Fuller-Rowell et al., 2015). Ostracization due to stigma is also significantly associated with internalization of stressful events, which is a common side effect of both depression and anxiety (Fatima & Sheikh, 2014). When one internalizes events in their surroundings, such as stigmatization, this portrays itself through them attributing these actions to their individual nature, and blaming the interaction on themself, rather than recognizing that actions outside of themself are uncontrollable by them, and should not be connected to their self-worth (Fatima & Sheikh, 2014; De France & Evans, 2020). It is when the internalization of events driven by stigma occurs where self-stigmatization becomes potent (Reutter et al., 2009).

Where Does Stigma Take Place?

Stigma can potentially take place in any social interaction, as well as occurring internally. However, some of the most common places for stigma to occur are in public places, institutionally, and from self-stigmatization. Public places would include social interactions with peers, or in larger public gatherings. Institutional stigmatization often occurs occupationally, and academically, but can occur in any hierarchical organization, such as religion. Self-stigmatization is the accumulation of stigmatizing experiences from public interactions and from institutions that leads one to believe that they are inherently bad or wrong based on the stigmatized trait(s) at hand (Reutter et al., 2009).

Stigmatization from others towards someone with an outwardly apparent stigmatized trait can, and often does, occur on a daily basis (Reutter et al., 2009). These interactions can range from micro-aggressions, a more passive-aggressive or subconscious reaction from the stigmatizer, to a physical discriminatory attack, such as a hate crime. There will undoubtedly be ranging reactions from the stigmatized individual based on the severity of the interaction, but there is also little doubt that the accumulation of stigma-based interactions will impact their daily life. Stigma from others in a public forum is frequently utilized through the indoctrination of institutionalized stigma that we experience on a day-to-day basis (Reutter et al., 2009). Because we as a society are used to seeing stigmatized individuals and groups disproportionately have less access to social esteem, and mobility, we are either aware of how few interactions we have with stigmatized individuals, or we are so unaware of their lack of space in important roles (such as an institutional lack of diversity in H-SES communities) that we do not think to look (Gitterman, 2009). The subsequent harboring of self-stigmatization for stigmatized individuals is partially due to this systemic response to lack of representation of stigmatized minority groups or individuals in any public or institutional setting (Reutter et al., 2009).

Self-stigmatization is one of the main byproducts of internalizing emotions regarding stigma-related interactions. When this occurs, often the individual will view themselves as being worthy of public and institutionalized stigma because they believe that the stigmatized trait(s) they possess truly does define them, despite all the evidence of the contrary (Reutter et al., 2009).

Although the stigmatized individual(s) are aware that these traits were either ascribed to them at birth, or "achieved" through certain behaviors or actions, this does not change the fact that they are routinely exposed to social, economic, and systemic barriers that remind them of their lower status societally (Foladare, 1969). This constant reminder can then become internalized and used as a foundation for one's own personal identity, even if this identity is crafted around these stereotypes in order to negate them (Reutter et al., 2009).

How is L-SES Defined?

Low socioeconomic status is defined through four distinct factors: wealth/net worth, poverty area, social class, and occupation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Wealth and net worth are measured by comparing assets and liabilities through a debt-to-income ratio. The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) also uses this factor to measure whether the family units are homeowners, have vehicle(s), and whether their incomes reach or exceed $50,000 annually. Poverty area is a broader measure, as it determines the percentage of community members in the neighborhood who are at or below the federal poverty threshold. An area or neighborhood with a 20% or higher poverty rate (1 in 5 experiencing poverty), is considered to be an impoverished area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Social class is defined as the percentage of a family unit or neighborhood that are in working-class occupations. These occupational groups consist of, but are not limited to unemployment, unskilled manual labor, and skilled manual labor (Szreter, 1984).

Defining low socioeconomic status, however, is more nuanced than simply an occupation, a neighborhood, or a debt-to-income ratio. Socioeconomic status also must be defined by individual or family incomes, and how many people are reliant on said income. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2012), a family of four making an annual income of $46,100 are considered to be at 200% of the federal poverty level, while a single individual would only have to make $22,340 to reach the same percentage. Because the official poverty measure on the federal level has not been adjusted to the cost of living since 1963, this is not the most reliable measure (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The supplemental poverty measure attempts to correct this by including the data for the cost of low-income housing in certain regions and adding noncash benefits such as Medicare, thus increasing the threshold for what is considered to be at the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The U.S. Census Bureau (2017) does account for inflation, but it does not account for the rise in cost of living on top of inflation, and it does not account for a debt-to-income ratio. In order to correct this, I will be considering Low-Socioeconomic status as being at 200% of the federal poverty level throughout the remainder of this research.

Outside of income to needs ratios (ITN), there is one key factor the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) utilizes to define low socioeconomic status: education attainment. Although education attainment does not define socioeconomic status, the two tend to coincide (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Of the families that were considered to be at the federal poverty level or lower, approximately 73% of the respondents had no more than a high school diploma or equivalent certificate, with approximately 23% of the total respondents having less than a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In comparison, the percentage of the total national population with a bachelor's degree is approximately 35%.

None of the categories previously mentioned completely sum up the experience of being of low-socioeconomic status, however they do provide a uniform basis for reference. Throughout this section, I will be addressing the social and emotional factors that also leave an impact on the lives of those in low-income households.

How is Class Stigma a Barrier to Social Mobility for Low-Income Families?

Class stigma is a barrier to social mobility based on numerous factors, but some notable mentions are institutional or systemic barriers created by stigma, and a lack of ability to conceal this stigma (Reutter et al., 2009; Goffman, 1963). Because it is incredibly difficult to conceal low socioeconomic status by obtaining high price point, or “big ticket” items (cars, house, attire, etc.), or creating social and economic connections to mislead both the public and the institutions they exist in, it is highly unlikely that a low socioeconomic (L-SES) individual will be able to disguise their economic status successfully (Abramovitz, 2006). The lack of material possessions alone would not necessarily be an issue, as they can generally be considered as socioeconomic cues rather than vital for social mobility, but when accounting for what neighborhood one lives in, what type of education this allows individuals to access, and how the family income impacts the ability to meet basic needs, this can severely impact social mobility (Waxman, 1977, Reutter et al., 2009). This is because the socioeconomic level of expectation (SEL-E) that the individual has of themselves is increasingly lowered with each generation their family has been considered working class or below the federal poverty line, and the majority population distances themselves from generational poverty, as they negatively associate this experience with the family’s work ethic or innate nature (Waxman, 1977). This distancing becomes more polarized as the majority population chooses to push low socioeconomic status households out of sight, meaning that the neighborhoods are increasingly pushed outside of desirable areas of a city or town, and is pushed further into the outskirts as development occurs (Waxman, 1977). This physical distance is representative of the cultural distance, which informs a “culture of poverty”, where L-SES communities create cultural norms distinct from main society that does not stigmatize them, but also further isolates them from the main culture (Waxman 1977).

Disassociating with stigmatized views of your community is positive for many realms of development, but because it creates more observable differences between the two communities, it plays a role in the majority group driving a wedge between themselves and L-SES society (Waxman, 1977).

What Impact Does Class Stigma Have on Educational Opportunities for Low Income Adolescents?

Educational opportunities for tertiary education are designated to those who have shown success in moderately or significantly rigorous schooling in secondary school (Stephens, 2012). These rigorous programs take funding, resources, and a deep understanding of the student body at hand. Because property taxes are primarily utilized to pay for local public-school funding, low-income neighborhoods do not have the financial resources to provide many programs outside of those that are deemed as essential (Stephens, 2012). This means that programs such as advanced placement programs, dual enrollment, extracurricular activities, and elective class options are severely restricted in low-income areas due to cost (Stephens, 2012; Stephens, 2014). This is undoubtedly at no fault of the adolescent, but is rather a fault of an institution that allows for low-income neighborhoods and students to fall through the cracks and does not see L-SES communities as having equal value compared to H-SES communities.

The grit ideology theory and growth mindset are mediating factors regarding the effect of class stigma, as grit ideology studies the impact of perseverance as a protective factor, and the growth mindset is intended to teach school aged children (K-12) perseverance (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Duckworth and Quinn (2009) studied how the consistency of interest and effort throughout one's education can lead to "grit", or perseverance throughout difficult tasks. If L-

SES adolescents can establish and maintain a consistent level of perseverance through their academic journey, they will be able to have the means to overcome the adversity they face. This is not to say that success will be as simple for them as it would be for adolescents who have access to more financial and educational resources, but rather states that focusing on how to manage the obstacles at hand instead of believing their aptitude is less than will be beneficial for academic mobility (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

How Does Class Stigma Impact the Low-Income Adolescents' Future Prospects?

As mentioned previously, future prospects in emerging adulthood directly correlate with adolescent experience. When one is not able to access enriching and advanced education, the prospects for tertiary education, and vocational training are fewer. This is because of the obstacle of financial burden (Friedman et al., 2000; Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008). Friedman and colleagues (2000) concluded that with a significant portion of welfare recipients not having access to a job market that pays a living wage, providing job training, GED tutoring, post-secondary education, and access to affordable childcare could significantly reduce the amount of families that need to rely on programs such as TANF. By using examples of successful job training from companies, counties, and states, it is apparent that simply providing resources to low-income families will increase social mobility. Increasing public support for these programs by actively reducing the stigma associated with social welfare programs have a direct impact on the funds provided to social programs, and the amount of L-SES adolescents who have access to these resources as well (Jarrett, 1996). Although these issues do present as exclusively class-related, the stigma associated with class correlates with the low public support of taxpayers to provide financial support to low-income individuals directly impacts the success rates of these programs, and therefore, the accessibility of jobs training programs, or educational support (Zhiyong, 2010; Friedman et al., 2000). Until or unless affordable access to job training programs are available to all L-SES adolescents to choose from, their future prospects are more likely to diminish.

The Nature of Low Socioeconomic Status (L-SES) in Adolescence

In brief, the nature of Low-Socioeconomic Status during adolescence is a lack of resources and facing undue stigma (Gitterman, 2009; Jones et al., 1984). The impact of lacking these resources can manifest in every major domain of development (Anda et al., 1999; McBride et al., 2011; Holmes et al., 2019; Stephens, 2014). For instance, an indirect factor, such as Adverse Childhood Experiences, are known to have lifelong effects (Flaherty et al., 2013). Although resilience, social support, and providing some lacking resources during adolescence are acknowledged as being significant protective factors, L-SES adolescents still face many obstacles, both financial and cultural, that those of higher socioeconomic statuses (H-SES) will not have to overcome (De France & Evans, 2020; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

During this segment of my thesis, I will be addressing the specific environments associated with low-socioeconomic status, how this experience can affect this stage of development, as well as the following stage of early adulthood, and how to utilize protective factors and resilience to prevent further harm.

How Can the Classification of L-SES be Problematic?

Low-socioeconomic status classification was originally measured federally based on the cost of living in 1963, and adjusted annually for inflation since, however it has not addressed the rising cost of living across the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). None of the formulas used to define economic status address that in 95% of the United States, a full-time minimum wage employee cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment (Aurand et al., 2020). Continual wage stagnation and a lack of an increase in the federal minimum wage since 2009 means that young adults today are more likely to be poorer than previous generations at the same age (Gitterman, 2009).

This affects adolescents who are preparing to enter the workforce or continue their education, as the financial prospects are not set up for their success. The way that class identification is defined by the federal government, whose responsibility it is to provide financial assistance to upcoming college students via FAFSA, does not recognize the negative impact on financial stratification (Krywosa and the Educational Resources Information Center, 2008). Relying on antiquated data that focuses on family income rather than the individual's income, their income to debt ratio, or income to needs (ITN) ratio plays a significant role in the national student debt crisis (Gitterman et al., 2009). As social service programs rely on the same data set, it can also be said that debt and financial barriers faced by L-SES individuals can also be significantly impacted by arbitrary income marks (Jarrett, 1996). According to Jarret (1996), who interviewed mothers receiving welfare benefits, many of the participants in his survey claimed having to refuse a raise of $2/hr. or less in order to maintain their housing, medical, and food benefits. If an addition of $2/hr. before taxes can make the difference between having housing, Medicare, and access to high quality food at an accessible price, or losing each of these benefits entirely, the data set that is relied on to make these decisions requires upkeep.

Is There Harm in Social Categorization by Class?

According to Kraus and colleagues (2012), a majority of United States citizens assume that social class is not an important factor, or even claim it to be "superficial". Nonetheless, socioeconomic status determines one's social class, which is a central context that determines one's relationships, access to connections, and defines how one exists in social spaces (Kraus et al., 2012). Because socioeconomic status and social class are deeply intertwined, it is difficult to discern between the two. However, socioeconomic status is predominantly concerned with the financial aspect of class, while social class focuses on social and cultural impacts that socioeconomic status has on entire communities (Stephens, 2012; Waxman, 1977). According to Kraus and colleagues (2012) social categorization is a fundamental human experience, as we make social schemas through which we explore our environment, and these categorizations can be harmful to those who are seen as being on the bottom of the “social ladder”. Through this concept defined by Kraus and colleagues (2012), there are two aspects that moderate the harmful impact of social categorization on L-SES individuals: material resources, and social orientation.

Material resources can range widely between access to high quality foods and clean water to home ownership, but emphasize occupation and educational attainment. Social orientation is the outcome variable that creates a divide between low and high socioeconomic status individuals. Those who are considered to be H-SES exude “solipsism”, which is defined as perceiving the world from an individualistic perspective, and being motivated by internal sources (Anderson et al., 2012). As their basic needs are met and they have little to no worry surrounding financial stability, they are able to freely venture out and expand their life in a form of their own choosing. For L-SES individuals however, they are considered to be contextualists (Anderson et al., 2012). This means that they view their surroundings through an external lens, as they are compelled to navigate their environment with extreme constraint and fear of whether or not they can meet their basic needs. Financial limitations also affect their social interactions, as L-SES individuals are more likely to form close bonds within their communities, as they rely on each other for survival, while H-SES individuals do not require this type of community reliance to get by (Anderson et al., 2012). Because L-SES individuals do not have the same luxury to explore with freedom and choice, they are not able to pursue the same goals at the same rate. Obstacles that are placed before low-income individuals against their will tend to position them further behind their H-SES counterparts, while simultaneously making it more difficult to achieve the same rate or speed of progress.

As economic inequality has been on the rise in the past decade, social class signaling has steadily increased as well (Connor et al., 2021). Signaling alone is not necessarily harmful, but Connor and colleagues (2021) suggested that with an increase in signaling within a significant class divide comes class stereotyping, which suggests that those considered poor are warmhearted, but not competent enough to create and grow their wealth. The stereotyping of a lack of competence is inherently harmful to L-SES individuals, as this narrative perpetuates and justifies an unjust cycle of poverty. Although this stereotype is harmful for any low-income individual who faces it, it is especially harmful for adolescents, as they are faced with choosing to enter the workforce or continue their education. If an L-SES adolescent is told that they are not bright enough to succeed in a university setting, they are going to be less likely to be inclined to try, thus furthering the cycle of poverty through at least maintaining, if not lowering educational attainment expectations.

The stereotyping of L-SES individuals as being incompetent and unable to grow their own wealth is explained further by Kraus and colleagues (2015), as they suggest that individuals across all demographics, except those in low-income brackets, in the United States significantly overestimate social class mobility. This study suggests that our society both overestimates the ease at which one can gain and grow wealth or capital, especially for social mobility in L-SES settings, and underestimates the effort and obstacles at which one can break the cycle of poverty and enter the middle or upper classes. For those from low-income communities, they tend to relatively accurately guess their level of social mobility, as they tend to internalize their Socioeconomic Level of Expectation (SEL-E) (Kraus et al., 2015; Waxman, 1977).

Kraus and Keltner (2013) explain that this lack of understanding regarding social mobility is partially due to the culture of a meritocracy, but mostly due to system justification theory, which creates dissonance between L-SES social mobility and financial success. They suggest this is because people tend to falsely attribute biological bases for socioeconomic status, claiming that the stereotype of L-SES individuals being less intelligent is based on genetics, and/or brain composition, rather than recognizing that if this stereotype holds any merit that it might be explained by a lack of educational resources to low-income communities and is unrelated to biological differences in intelligence abilities.

What is “Poverty Culture”?

According to Waxman (1977), “poverty culture” is defined as a minority subculture of individuals who are perceived as developing unique value systems that does not rely on the access to, or amount of, financial resources. This change in the value system allows “poverty culture” to therefore rely on their own communities for shared resources and create an honor system in place of a class system to rank those within their communities. The “American Dream” teaches that anyone can rise through the ranks with enough time and effort, as it is based on a “meritocracy”, but fails to recognize that it takes wealth and capital to grow wealth (Waxman, 1977). “Poverty culture” understands this concept, and rather than focusing on that, low-income communities choose to value others through their honor systems. As the likelihood of the wealthy providing resources to the poor is at best improbable, those in low-income communities tend to isolate and be isolated from the majority population (Waxman, 1977; Kraus et al., 2015).

Stephens and colleagues (2012) suggest that this is partially because a majority of L-SES individuals are born into financial hardship, and therefore rely on not only limited financial resources within the community, but also on the limited educational resource available to them. “Poverty culture”, or customs of L-SES communities, is not informed in many teaching styles, meaning that the contextualist mindset adopted by these communities are not prioritized or understood in the classroom (Anderson et al., 2012; Stephens, 2012). Teachers in low-income communities are usually coming in from outside communities to teach at Title One schools, and do not recognize that the reasons these students fall behind academically are because of a lack of basic needs being met, teaching styles being based on individualistic perspectives, and a lack of funding for extracurricular programs that encourage further academic prioritization and achievement (Kraus et al., 2012; Stephens, 2012; Stephens, 2014).

Because L-SES individuals rely on their community for financial, social, and emotional needs, Kraus and colleagues (2010) suggest that “poverty culture” involves a higher likelihood of empathetic accuracy. Their study with 200 participants found that L-SES individuals with a high school diploma or equivalent had higher empathetic accuracy than their H-SES counterparts and their more educated peers. This is suggested to be the case because L-SES individuals are more likely to display their emotional state in an ambiguous way, making it more difficult for individuals who are not of low socioeconomic status to determine or code the emotion being expressed (Kraus et al., 2010). It is also stated that L-SES individuals do not simply rely on the emotional expression alone, but rather the social context the emotion is occurring in, as low-income communities rely on contextual perspectives to perceive their surroundings through. Collectivist perspectives are central to “poverty culture”, as the individual’s limited resources are often combined with their communities to create the best possible environment for themselves and others.

How Does a Lack of Knowledge About "Poverty Culture" Harm Educational Development of Low-Income Adolescents?

A lack of understanding that low-income communities are more collectivistic, and that the adolescents of the community often have to financially provide for their families while simultaneously attempting to balance school requirements and expectations can be harmful for educational development through cultural mismatch, and inability for adolescents to perceive themselves as successful college students (Stephens, 2012).

Cultural mismatch theory explains how L-SES adolescents are taught values of individualism and to expect certain aspects of identity exploration in early adulthood involving going to college, neither of which are accessible to working class families (Stephens, 2012; Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008). Low-income communities rely on each other for social, familial, and financial support because without this community reliance, nearly everyone within the community would be significantly lacking a vital resource. Unlike with higher income neighborhoods, resources such as caregiving support, or reliable transportation involve a financial burden at best, but often are unattainable resources. Many teachers who are employed at Title One schools do not always seem to understand the impact of a lack of vital resources on their students before they step foot in the classroom (Stephens, 2012). Teaching on a basis of individualism and identity exploration to a room of students who do not know where their next meal is coming from is going to be unsuccessful in regard to academic motivation. These principles assume that the basic needs of the adolescent are routinely met, and they have a secure base that they can explore from, while also assuming that community reliance and resilience are not a foundational aspect of their identities (Stephens, 2014).

The stereotype that L-SES adolescents are less likely to succeed academically can also be attributed to "poverty culture", as this stereotype plays a role in educational attainment trends in low-income neighborhoods. "Poverty culture" is also the perpetuating cycle of poverty, being reinforced by a lack of educational access. Even if an L-SES adolescent is able to attend college, they are more likely to be told that they will not succeed and that they should try to follow in the footsteps of their family members or community leaders (Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008). Managing a perceived, or real, lack of support from your community is likely to hinder educational success, opportunity, and motivation toward completion (Stephens, 2012; Stephens, 2014).

How Does the Social Class Divide Contribute to an Unequal Access to Resources?

The physical divide of social classes in our neighborhoods and public-school systems have brought forth complications in regard to unequal distribution of resources among all public schools: school funding by property taxes leads to financial disparities and disproportionately less programs for schools in low-income communities, and the lack of training in low-income schools on how to teach in a trauma-informed way (Stephens, 2012; Stephens, 2014). Lacking vital resources in every aspect of one's life is compelled to be traumatic for low-income adolescents, and public schools should accommodate these students by addressing the crisis at hand.

School funding distribution has been a poignant topic of issue for decades, but with the impact COVID-19 has had on the public education system, these issues have been brought to life and elevated for those who rely on schools for childcare, feeding their children, and for providing the highest quality education possible (Frontline PBS, 2020). Because low-income neighborhoods are less likely to have a stay-at-home parent to aid with schooling, less likely to be able to afford breakfast, lunch, supplies, and quality computers with broadband access for each student, schooling in crisis has been practically impossible for low-income communities. This is going to have a significant impact on any K-12 students, but especially for adolescents who are utilizing this period of their education to prepare themselves for either a career after high school or higher education. Underfunded schools before COVID did not have the means to maintain infrastructure, and provide the resources children need to learn effectively because of the system where property taxes are the primary source of income for each individual campus. This leads to many students having to go without a quality education, extracurricular activities, arts and physical education (as these are the first programs to be cut when funding is scarce), and potentially food for the day (Stephens, 2012; Stephens, 2014).

Trauma informed teaching is intended to attempt a bridge over these obstacles by providing a classroom environment that allows students to feel heard, seen, and understood. Because many teaching credential programs lack the curriculum to teach upcoming educators about the difference in culture between “mainstream” middle-class campuses and low-income campuses, new teachers are woefully unprepared to enter these classrooms and inspire students to learn (Stephens, 2014). According to Kraus and colleagues (2010), L-SES adolescents value collectivism and tend to view interactions with their environment through social context, rather than as an incident independent of the environment surrounding it. This is less likely to be the case for those who have adopted an individualist perspective, as they are more likely to see social interactions as independent events. Stephens (2012) claims that because these educators have become accustomed to the culture of higher education, they have been surrounded by the influence of individualism, and tend to adopt this influence into their lesson plans and outreach programs for students. Although the intention to allow students to be more involved in their education as independent individuals itself is a positive standpoint to have for high school education, not understanding how low-income communities are vastly interconnected compared to middle-class communities will inevitably lead to low motivation and inspiration, as well as L-SES adolescents believing that they are incompetent academically (Stephens, 2014).

Is There Evidence to Support Stereotyping Associated with Class Stigma?

In short, evidence-based reasoning to support the stereotypes of laziness and poorer potential due to biological factors simply are not there (Kraus & Keltner, 2013). There is, however, evidence to support that experiencing stigma is associated with increased ability toward resilience (Shih, 2004), and increased empathy towards others (Kraus et al., 2010). According to Shih (2004), stigma is seen as a "constant stressor" that can cause detrimental effects, but some individuals can live with stigmatized identities with relative success. Only half of children in disadvantaged living conditions develop to experience symptoms of antisocial behavior, delinquency, and/or mental illness(es) (Shih, 2004). She determined that resiliency was a positive factor that developed as a result of stigmatization for the approximately 50% of disadvantaged children who develop to become successful adults. The provided benefits of resiliency are listed as being (but not limited to) social compensation, increased attunement toward their social environment, development of a multi-faceted identity, and a form of coping that relied on empowerment rather than focusing on more passive coping mechanisms.

Garmezy (1991) suggested that factors such as social, emotional, and/academic intelligence were protective factors from stigmatization, and foundational factors of resilience for adolescents. Intelligence in disadvantaged adolescents allowed for them to develop competence in coping skill mechanisms and the ability to actively adjust their trajectory into adulthood through empowerment. Stellar and colleagues (2012) expand upon this by noting that another protective factor towards resilience is compassion. This is because of reliance on social environmental cues to compensate for social class stigma (Shih, 2004; Stellar et al., 2012). Utilizing the Dispositional Positive Emotion Scale (DPES), Stellar and colleagues (2012) were able to determine that those classified as being low socioeconomic status answered the questionnaire with more compassion and empathy than those of higher social status (α =.92). Côté and colleagues (2011) elaborate on an increase in empathetic responses from L-SES adolescents, and increased attunement to social cues by determining that L-SES adolescents display more empathetic accuracy than those of higher status. It appears that those in higher-power positions, particularly being a member of a majority, non-stigmatized group, does not require empathetic accuracy and attunement to social cues at the rate that those in lower-power positions would need to compensate for their stigmatization (Côté et al., 2011). This is partially supported by the collectivist perspective proposed by Stephens (2012), as communal identity was one of the key moderating factors of the relationship between empathic accuracy and social class.

How do L-SES and Adolescents' Socio-Emotional Development Conflict?

The context of low socioeconomic status environments conflict with adolescent development in many ways, however there are two factors that significantly affect development:

emotional regulation (De France & Evans, 2020; Fatima and Sheikh, 2014), and impulse control (Fuller-Rowell et al., 2015).

De France and Evans (2020) studied the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on adolescents' usage of emotional regulation strategies. The research points addressed are reliance on disengagement rather than emotional regulation skills leads to mental health problems later in life. Disengagement was hypothesized by previous studies to potentially be moderated by SES, but was not studied specifically. This longitudinal study took place across the span of nine years, utilizing questionnaires, and self-report checklists. There were 341 thirteen-year-olds from low-income families living in rural counties. By the time the study was completed, they were 24 years old. De France and Evans used a self-report to measure internalizing/externalizing symptoms, as well as disengagement, and U.S. Census Bureau data to determine the SES and Income-To-Needs (ITN) ratio of each participant. The findings determined a significant relationship ($p<.05$) between disengagement use and internalizing/externalizing symptoms that was significantly moderated by SES. During measurement 1 (13 years) and measurement 2 (17 years), the L-SES participants were more likely to show externalizing symptoms, but during measurement 3 (24 years), the L-SES participants were more likely to show internalizing symptoms. These findings reiterate the necessity of recognizing that the context of low-income communities, class stigma and adolescent development do not occur in vacuums, but can rather inform each other in damaging ways during crucial phases of cognitive development.

Fuller-Rowell and colleagues (2015) studied the effect of childhood poverty on household chaos, specifically focusing on how this alters an adolescent's ability for task persistence and perseverance. The research questions addressed to answer this was: Do childhood poverty and community violence exposure alter an adolescent's ability toward task persistence and perseverance? This study was conducted partially because there seems to be an overemphasis on intelligence when studying L-SES adolescents, but limited research on skills such as perseverance and task persistence, as well as there being little research on the potential chaotic environment that L-SES adolescents live in. This is important to study because household chaos and community violence exposure could have a significant effect on development. This study had 256 participants, with an average age of 17.5 years. Half of the participants have a family Income-To-Needs (ITN) ratio that would put them at or below the federal poverty level. The researchers' design was a prospective longitudinal design, utilizing interviews, and a performance task to determine task persistence as forms of data collection. The data collection methods were mixed, with qualitative methods such as open-ended at-home interviews, and puzzle solving to determine task persistence, and quantitative methods such as family income ratio, and questionnaires for household chaos level. The findings determined that there was an association between childhood poverty, household chaos, and lack of task persistence ability that increased with exposure to these experiences. According to Fuller-Rowell and colleagues (2015), the strongest relationship in their study was between childhood poverty and a lack of task persistence. However, the implications addressed that these findings indicate that more than household chaos, SES and community violence exposure are the strongest indicators of whether or not adolescents are able to complete daily activities needed to be successful in adulthood.

How does L-SES Impact Executive Functioning?

Fatima and Sheikh (2014) studied the effect of socioeconomic status (SES) on executive functioning, and adolescent aggression. The research points addressed were how previous studies have determined childhood poverty to be associated with juvenile delinquency and criminal activity, but there is limited research associating this type of adolescent aggression in L-SES teens with cognitive development. This cross-sectional study utilizes executive functioning performance tests, questionnaires, and census data for their information. The participants are Pakistani adolescents who range in age from 13 to 19 years. Information from open-ended questions about family income, occupation, and education level were utilized in this study. National census data determined one's socioeconomic status. Likert-Scale 5-point questionnaire was used for aggression scales. A nine-part performance exam determined overall executive functioning. Findings revealed that correlation between SES, executive functioning, and adolescent aggression was significant. On average, the lower an adolescent's SES was, the lower their executive functioning was and the higher their level of aggressive behavior was. This indicates executive functioning and aggression are connected through emotional regulation, and when one is of low-socioeconomic status, it acts as a moderator of development. This is likely caused by the stress of living in a L-SES environment and experiencing class stigma, but because this is a cross-sectional study, a causal relationship or direction cannot be confirmed.

Holmes and colleagues (2019) studied structures of the brain impacted by L-SES, and its impact on emotional regulation through self-control and risk taking. Because the amygdala, hippocampus, and cerebral cortex have all either shrunk or thinned, the behaviors of self-control tend to lower, while risk taking tends to increase (De France & Evans, 2020; Holmes et al., 2019). Self-control is defined as "the volitional act of managing attention and arousal in a manner that facilitates goal-directed behavior", while risk taking behaviors are listed as acts of "increased crime, delinquency, truancy, substance use, risky sexual behaviors, and antisocial behaviors" (Holmes et al., 2019). This study was a longitudinal study consisting of 1083 members, and to determine SES status, an income to needs (ITN) ratio was taken, showing that approximately 24% of the children were determined as poor (ITN ratio < 2) (Holmes et al., 2019). While calculating for the controls of the study, the participants and their parents were given questionnaires to determine the level of self-control and risk-taking behavior they exhibit, then during the second visit of the longitudinal study (first visit age= 8.5-11.5, second visit age= 15), they were given those same questionnaires (Holmes et al., 2019). It was determined that there was a negative correlational relationship between high-risk behaviors and low self-control behaviors, with L-SES environments as a moderator (α = 0.81-0.86) (Holmes et al., 2019). The findings within this study suggests that this relationship could also partially be a result of the structure of the home and neighborhood that one lives in (described in short as "household chaos") as well as the overall, disadvantageous nature of living in poverty (Holmes et al., 2019).

Why Is There a Correlation Between ACE Scores and L-SES Environments?

Adverse Childhood Experiences overlap significantly with L-SES environments through their associations with poor environmental resources (Su et al., 2015; Flaherty et al., 2013). According to Lacey and colleagues (2020), poverty is correlated with both individual ACEs and cluster ACEs. Cluster ACEs are ACEs that tend to co-occur, as 81% of the participants who have at least one ACE would have at least one other. The Latent Class Analysis (LCA) identified clusters in certain individuals to compare with others reporting the same ACEs. The results from this LCA determined that ACEs are socioeconomically patterned, and poverty was correlated with an increased chance of experiencing every ACE, being qualified as a "poly adversity" cluster. Financial strain on the family system increases the chance of parental conflict, violence, and separation. The impact was felt by the children especially if poverty affected the mother while she was pregnant with them.

Physiological reactions to stress in L-SES environments is a moderating factor for ACE scores, as exposure to long-term stress increases the likelihood of a hyperactive HPA Axis (Su et al., 2015). According to Flaherty and colleagues (2013), the negative health effects of developing with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can be felt as soon as early adolescence. These effects would often come in the form of unexplained nausea, headaches, skin problems, body aches, eye problems, and constipation, among others. Children exposed to violence were likely to have a chronically hyperactive HPA axis, impaired prefrontal cortex functioning, and epigenetic responses through gene modification caused by exposure to violence. Rasmussen and colleagues (2019) expand upon these findings by measuring the levels of C-reactive protein (CRP) and interleukin (IL-6) in the blood. It was determined that children exposed to more ACE had higher levels of IL-6 and suPAR. The increase in suPAR was associated with cumulative exposure to adverse childhood experiences, with low socioeconomic status being positively correlated with suPAR levels.

The socioemotional context of L-SES environments has an impact on adolescent's ACE scores, as Holmes and colleagues (2019) have determined that there is a significant link between environment stability, socioeconomic status, and risk-taking vs. self-control behaviors. The results determined that children with increased homelife stability due to being of low-socioeconomic status (L-SES) were significantly more likely to indulge in risky behaviors such as truancy, antisocial behavior, and substance abuse; this would go hand-in-hand with lowered self-control behaviors, such as self-regulation. The relationship between decreased impulse control and an ACE score of 4 or more is seen through actions such as smoking initiation (Anda et al., 1999). According to Anda and colleagues (1999), the mean age of smoking initiation for someone with an ACE score of 0 was 20.9 years, while with an ACE score of 4 or more, smoking initiation began at 17.3 years of age. The suggestion is that the nicotine found in cigarettes is used as a coping mechanism for those with high ACE scores.

What are the Long-Term Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences?

One of the long-term impacts on L-SES adolescents with high ACE scores is the increased tendency toward unhealthy coping mechanisms (Anda et al., 1999; Oregon Health Authority, 2013). Anda and colleagues (1999) concluded that having exposure to one adverse childhood experience not only increased the odds of being exposed to other adverse childhood experiences (85% chance for a second ACE, and 70% chance for a third), but it also increased the likelihood of habitual smoking of tobacco. It is apparent that tobacco usage is dangerous for long term health, as some of the most common illnesses that occurred in those with an ACE score of 4 or more were suicidal thoughts, depression, and chronic bronchitis or emphysema (Oregon Health Authority, 2013).

Health trajectory of those with high ACE scores, therefore, is shortened in comparison to those with low or not ACE scores. This is related both to unhealthy coping mechanisms, and with the interaction of prolonged stress that L-SES environments unfortunately tend to provide. According to Zimmer and colleagues (2016), H-SES children were less likely to have high morbidity and mortality rates throughout their life (adulthood and well into old-age), compared to their L-SES counterparts. This study also determined that social mobility could reverse some of the effects of childhood poverty, while also determining that going into poverty could reverse some of the effects of higher SES in childhood. With participants ranging in age from 66 to 105, this study was able to measure and account for the confounding effects of childhood, early and middle adulthood. Some of the reasons for SES being associated with later in life health is a lack of quality resources throughout life, and a lack of understanding how to navigate the healthcare system. Su and colleagues (2015) determined through a 23-year longitudinal study that people who grew up in poverty and were exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACE) were more likely to have high blood pressure in adulthood. This was measured by following people of varying family incomes and demographics through a longitudinal study for 23 years. Those with an ACE score of 4 or more were significantly more likely to experience not only high blood pressure, but also other physical and psychological problems such as mental illness, obesity, and increased likelihood for developing cardiovascular disease. This is because the HPA Axis in those experiencing stress from both poverty and their adverse childhood experiences are more hyperactive, and continue to be hyperactive well into adulthood.

What Tactics are Used by Low Income Adolescents for Resilience?

Perseverance is a significant predictor of overcoming adversity, as it is beneficial for developing a growth mindset for both academic and socioemotional contexts (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Duckworth and Quinn (2009) studied how a grit ideology would encourage adolescents to remain consistent and engage with their academic work, allowing them the opportunity to succeed in the face of adversity. Growth mindset is foundational in this model, as it teaches L-SES adolescents that failure is not only inevitable, but an opportunity to learn and grow (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The way this is adopted into the classroom and internalized is through encouragement from their teachers and peers, as well as the reinforcement of a positive outcome. Although grit ideology can often be misinterpreted as reinforcing the meritocracy that stigmatizes them, in practice, grit ideology combined with a growth mindset is created on the knowledge of a structural ideology that recognizes the obstacles that classism has placed before them (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Gorski, 2016).

The Impact of Stigma Reduction

Stigma has an overreaching effect on the groups and individuals who experience it, as it holds the capacity to impact every aspect of one's development and the ability to change one's self-concept (Goffman, 1963; Reutter et al., 2009; De France & Evans, 2020). Because of this, most individuals' moral compass will not allow them to hold illegitimate biases against outgroups (Jost & Banaji, 1994). People have an inherent need to be good and moral, and stigma reduction is the ideal way to counteract any negative attitudes or beliefs about any one group (Fein & Spencer, 1997). However, the predominant response is to carry biases implicitly and outwardly show support (Crandall & Eshelman, 2003). Challenging one's bias and taking deep accountability for one's actions and beliefs can be troublesome, meaning that authentic stigma reduction is the most difficult route for changing one's worldviews. However, there are two primary behaviors being studied that can aid in the reduction of stigma: outgroup perspective taking (Chung et al., 2013) and psychological help seeking attitudes (Keum et al., 2018). These practices allow for an individual holding prejudice, or believing in certain stereotypes, to experience empathy and to acknowledge that desiring a professional support system is not an admittance of failure.

Chung and colleagues (2013) studied how perspective taking and social identity theory combine when participants were asked to relate to a perspective of someone with a highly stigmatized identity. For instance, participants were asked to compare the similarity in their understanding of events to the target person, and if they understood the reasons for her actions. This helped to create an environment of empathy between the participants and the stigmatized target person through this social exercise. Although the less stigmatized target person (the "single mother") was more likely to have created an empathetic environment than the more heavily stigmatized target person (the “recovering drug addict”), there was a significant reduction in prejudice beliefs for both groups ($p < .05$).

Keum and colleagues (2018), however, studied the impact of stigma reduction through self-stigmatization felt by their participants. In this study, participants predominantly held a negative association toward those who seek psychological help and a self-stigma toward personally seeking this type of help (α=.84). After enrolling in a college course that taught the importance of helping skills in therapeutic relationships, the participants trended toward openness to the concept of therapy and were able to create a deeper understanding of the benefits. Through education, these individuals were able to reduce their self-stigma associated with seeking help, while also conquering their fear of what others would think of them being in therapy. This benefitted the participants through the creation of an open and accepting environment that supported their growth, and did not further stigmatize them in regard to their help seeking behaviors. Changing out behaviors as a society by creating environments such as this in a “real world” setting would be beneficial for any and all marginalized individuals or groups.

What Does Class Stigma Reduction Look Like?

Utilizing strategies such as public education on matters affecting L-SES communities (Stephens, 2014), practicing empathy (Chung et al., 2013), and integrating neighborhoods and public settings to create a mixed-class environment (McCormick et al., 2012) would reduce the stigma of low-income individuals. As the public is exposed to topics that affect these communities, while also becoming more integrated into this community, this will increase the likelihood of empathetic responses towards L-SES individuals, and allow them to have increased access to opportunities for success.

McCormick and colleagues (2012) studied those in public housing, and how they experience stigma for accepting government subsidies. It is suggested by the researchers that those relying on social welfare programs are stigmatized for two main reasons: being seen as low prospects due to relying on taxpayer funded programs, and through the physical separation between low income and higher income communities. The physical and social space allows for animosity to grow through “micro-interactions”, in which higher class individuals have very brief interactions with L-SES individuals, and overgeneralize their experience to be an overarching truth of the entire community without considering their input within the conversation. Because of this, a strong “us vs. them” mentality forms between both communities, and expands the already existing social and cultural divide. However, when the housing options became more mixed income, the communities were likely to interact more positively on a daily basis. This is because routine exposure to a stigmatized group tends to make their stigmatized trait(s) more widely accepted in their new community. As one surrounds themself with class diversity, they are less likely to stigmatize another based on social class.

Zhiyong (2010) expands on this by stating that welfare stigma and optimal tax theory are driven by our inherent need toward personal agency. In this study, Zhiyong suggested that societal stigma of low-income individuals played a significant role in how much participants were willing to “give” in taxes in their experimental setting. Participants tended to want to give less money to social welfare programs at the beginning of the study, arguing from the standpoint of stereotypical views of laziness and lack of accountability. However, once they were informed on wealth disparity and how limited social welfare programs are due to lack of funding, participants began to feel more empathy for L-SES individuals who were still financially struggling despite having access to welfare. The results suggest that deep understanding from the public in regard to L-SES issues positively affects public policy that impacts both stigma reduction and welfare funding.

What is the Foundation for Acceptance and Equity for Low Income Adolescents?

Acceptance and equity are terms with nuance in regard to class stigma, as both of these terms would require the abolition of stigma toward the marginalized group at hand. However, the foundation that would allow for stigma reduction rely on redistribution and reallocation of resources (Zhiyong, 2010), increase in empathy for L-SES individuals societally (Chung et al., 2013), and increased effort to provide opportunities for L-SES adolescents that are available to the middle or upper class (Friedman et al., 2000).

Financial resource distribution is simultaneously a moderator and an outcome variable between acceptance and class stigma, as financial resources allow L-SES individuals to care for their needs and provide vital resources to themselves and their families, and financial resource distribution (especially regarding taxpayer-funded social welfare programs) often does not occur without social support (Zhiyong, 2010). The reallocation of funds is frequently followed by public education, and overwhelming public support, if not funded privately by an individual or group. However, when vital resources are reallocated to a stigmatized group, it tends to reduce the stigma associated with that group and increase their chances of social mobility (Zhiyong, 2010; Friedman et al., 2000).

While increased empathy frequently occurs prior to financial resource distribution, it also tends to expand further after the public is able to appreciate the impact of their decision to redistribute financial resources (Zhiyong, 2010; Chung et al., 2013). According to Chung and colleagues (2013), this effect is initially felt through developing the skill of perspective taking. When participants in higher power, less stigmatized positions were able to understand the motive, decisions and situation the highly stigmatized target person was in, they were more likely to feel a strong sense of empathy toward the target person. The high external validity of this study suggests that perspective taking can be generalized to many marginalized groups, and that if individuals in higher power positions were to practice this skill in regard to those in stigmatized groups, that public empathy for those stigmatized individuals would increase.

Equity requires greater acceptance and minimal, if not nullified stigma (Jarrett, 1996). This is because equity is an expansion of equality that intends to atone previous societal negligence. Providing equal opportunities for L-SES individuals after providing necessary resources and increasing societal empathy toward L-SES environments is fundamental in creating an accepting and equitable environment for L-SES adolescents to develop in. Friedman and colleagues (2000) studied the impact of providing educational, occupational, and childcare resources to families that meet the income requirements of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). This study concluded that after the participants utilized the resources provided, social mobility significantly increased ($p < .05$).

How do we Support Individual Empowerment?

According to Jennings and colleagues (2006), youth empowerment consists of regaining control in "social, economic, and political contexts", so that they can personally create a more equitable environment for them to reside in. This can translate to youth-led programs, and/or engaging in community action, but however adolescent empowerment manifests, the outcomes of these experiences are increased autonomy, competence, and optimism, which are beneficial in individual empowerment for marginalized teens (Bulanda, 2015). Some important factors that can support L-SES empowerment specifically are encouraging self-confidence through teaching that their voice matters (Bulanda & Johnson, 2015), informing L-SES adolescents that they are not failures, but that the system was unfortunately not designed to truly support them (Pinkerton & Dolan, 2007), and educating them on what control they do have within the system and over themselves (Northington, 2018).

According to Bulanda and Johnson (2015), adult allyship in regard to youth empowerment can easily turn into a relationship in which there is a hierarchical power structure, not allowing the adolescent to freely form their own decisions. This can be troublesome, as youth-led programs are impactful through adolescents' ability to use newfound freedom as a form of self-exploration, autonomy, and empowerment. Community organizations specifically mentioned by Bulanda and Johnson (2015) focused on providing L-SES adolescents a voice of their own through activities and responsibilities designed to provide support through compassion rather than punitive measures. The results of providing L-SES adolescents with responsibilities within their community through outreach programs was a higher rate of identity exploration, lower risk of distal behavior (teen pregnancy, truancy, substance abuse), perspective taking through social bonding, and a sense of purpose. All of these skills are important as L-SES adolescents prepare for young adulthood, as higher education and the workforce both require some form of introspection and self-competence. Providing these resources to L-SES adolescents better prepares them for adulthood by empowering them through their own success.

Connecting the family unit to an adolescent's perseverance through structural obstacles is also important, as the teen brings their life experience as reference (Pinkerton & Dolan, 2007).

The “whole child/whole system” perspective supported by Pinkerton and Dolan (2007) recognizes how integrating the primary systems that influence the child’s life, such as peer, familial, and academic influences, all contribute to who they are as a whole. Their whole is not defined by the systemic barriers placed before them, however, recognizing that this system is not designed for them to overcome class-related obstacles easily will help them cope with the restriction they may feel in regard to their achievements so far. According to Pinkerton and Dolan (2007), family support through the “whole child/whole system” model will help to build resiliency and the understanding that institutional hurdles do not discount a considerable effort to succeed.

Resiliency continues to develop in adolescence as they focus on what they can control, and act, rather than focusing on what is out of their control (Northington, 2018). Northington (2018) studied a group of disadvantaged teen girls in an art group, and focused on how building positive relationships with peers while simultaneously developing new skills boost the self-esteem of adolescents and provided pathways toward developing leadership skills. Through providing a network of peers and adult mentors, L-SES adolescents are able to connect with others who have similar lived experiences, and be given positive affirmation from the adults running the program. L-SES adolescents are not only able to voice their concerns with the structural barriers placed before them, but are also able to turn their voice into a peer support system, newfound social skills, mentorship, and the self-confidence needed to transform resistance into resilience.

What Institutional Barriers Prevent Success in Breaking the Cycle of Poverty?

Many institutional barriers have the capacity to prevent social mobility and the breaking of the cycle of poverty, but some of the institutional barriers that impact L-SES adolescents are academic (Stephens, 2012; Stephens, 2014), occupational (Friedman et al., 2000; Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008), and cultural (Waxman, 1977).

Collegiate academia relies on the previous success of students throughout their academic careers without truly understanding the barriers that L-SES students face. According to Stephens (2012), some of these barriers are routine access to quality food, a clean and quiet environment to study and do homework in, and limited familial and/or occupational responsibility outside of school. Unfortunately, this is not always the case for many students in low-income communities, as their families may rely on them for help in regard to caregiving, financial help from a part time job, and/or other pertinent household responsibilities. This means that L-SES adolescents are more likely to have less time to focus predominantly on their academic success (Stephens, 2012). Their prioritization of familial matters over academics is in no means a reflection of their intelligence, but the institutional barriers for academic success will likely interpret their grades in this way (Stephens, 2014). It is known that most, if not all, colleges and universities have a GPA minimum for applicants, which can be a barrier L-SES students face before enrolling in a college course. However, a more pressing barrier that prevents L-SES adolescents from reaching a higher level of educational attainment is the cost of tuition (Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008). Because tuition costs require even the middle-class students to rely on FAFSA to afford tuition, it is increasingly difficult for L-SES adolescents to legitimize potentially losing years of full-time employment to support their immediate family, while simultaneously taking on debt (Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008).

Jobs training programs have simultaneously been out of reach for many low-income communities for some of the same reasons as academia has been. Because many trades schools require a tuition, involving one to reduce or eliminate work hours outside of the training program while simultaneously taking on debt, it is increasingly unattainable for L-SES adolescents to seek employment in a unionized career (Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008). It is also important to mention that the Financial Aid program that supports American students who are seeking a college education does not cover, nor have an equivalent, for an individual who decides to go to a trade school (Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008). Occupational barriers, however, are not only financial, but social as well. This is because successful job searching often relies on social networking with financially successful individuals who have connections to successful others looking to employ. Many L-SES adolescents cannot build these connections, as low-income communities rarely have access to these types of resources (Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008).

Although low-income communities are more collectivistic and rely on each other for vital resources, cultural aspects of higher social classes present institutional barriers to L-SES adolescents preparing to begin adulthood. According to Guillory (1993), cultural capital is the ability to understand and comply with certain spoken and unspoken norms that signal inclusion in a certain group. An example of this would be fine dining etiquette at networking events, which would likely not be taught to L-SES individuals, as they likely would never have a reason to acquire this knowledge. Because of this, L-SES adolescents and young adults in these settings would stand out in an unflattering way (Guillory, 1993). This is to no fault of low-income individuals, but rather a system that relies on nuanced cultural norms of the upper class that inadvertently discriminates against those who were not raised in this setting (Guillory, 1993).

Cultural barriers become institutionalized in other settings where occupation is not of importance, such as social interactions (Guillory, 1993). The negative impact that cultural barriers have in these settings are important to recognize, as cultural capital is associated with social mobility (Guillory, 1993). Without acknowledging and actively changing cultural boundaries to social mobility, L-SES adolescents will continue to be at the disadvantage in regard to breaking the cycle of poverty.

What are the Strategies we can Use to Reduce Public Stigma?

There are many strategies that could be beneficial in reducing public stigma, but the most researched concepts are public education, advocacy for the stigmatized group, & integration of stigmatized individuals or groups into "main society" (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006). I will preface by stating that there is very limited research in regard to how these strategies would specifically impact L-SES adolescents. However, considering the high external validity of each of these concepts, it can be hypothesized that these interventions could also reduce public stigma of L-SES adolescents.

The job of public education in regard to stigma reduction is to counteract the negative stereotypes and prejudice that is felt generally by one's society. According to Heijnders and Van Der Meij (2006), public education is seen as the first step toward stigma reduction because of its ability to increase the general knowledge base surrounding the stigmatized group at hand. Public education can occur in many forms, but is most commonly seen through the targeting of specific populations within a society to receive the message, and utilizing methods such as presentations and discussions to deliver the message. Public education strives to inform those with a bias toward another group that many of the claims they utilize as justification for their biases are based in false narratives (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006). This step is an important foundation for further steps toward stigma reduction, but can be difficult and have mixed results alone. Many who have strong biases are resistant to changing their beliefs and worldviews based entirely on public education. It is only with assistance from other public interventions in which the benefit of each intervention can be recognized (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006).

Advocacy inherently focuses on applying the message taught to policy change on a state or federal level, and providing support systems for stigmatized communities. According to Heijnders & Van Der Meij (2006), the combination of public and governmental change in attitude helps stigmatized individuals to receive resources that were previously unavailable to them due to discrimination. Steps such as presenting protective laws which would later become public policy, and oversight committees to ensure that the protective laws in place are being practiced with due diligence are some of the most common ways advocacy is practiced in reduction of public stigma. Without education, this step in reducing public stigma would not be possible, as it is the foundation on which advocacy stands. In order for advocacy to be successful, public education must coincide and routinely remind the public about the unfair and arbitrary power dynamic between groups. Advocacy runs the risk of being viewed as being too “bureaucratic” and developing a negative public image without the general public’s knowledge of why these specific steps are being put in place (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006). Advocacy focuses on transforming education and public support into support from those in positions of high enough power to enact change. This is important because much of the experience of stigma is defined by the distinct power dynamic between the stigmatized and the stigmatizers (Knowles et al., 2014).

Integration of the stigmatized group with non-stigmatized groups serves the function of allowing public education and advocacy work to be practiced on a daily basis. It is in these integrated settings, where various social classes share the same community, individuals of higher class will be more likely to interact with lower class individuals and be compelled to address their implicit biases (McCormick et al., 2012). According to Heijnders and Van Der Meij (2006), contact with stigmatized groups allows the non-stigmatized individuals to develop a schema that addresses the diversity within a group, rather than relying on a stereotype far too broad to encompass any group of people. When McCormick and colleagues (2012) ran a study following a class-integrated community, they discovered that the social and cultural divide began to diminish as the physical divide between social classes became smaller. This is presumed to be because the "micro-interactions" relied on by the upper classes prior to community integration have become merely one of many interactions they have experienced with L-SES individuals. They learned that L-SES individuals, like themselves, are multifaceted people who also cannot be defined solely by their income or means (McCormick et al., 2012). This allows for H-SES individuals to focus on commonalities rather than an "us vs. them" mentality exclusively.

Do Anti-Stigma Campaigns Work for Classism?

Using evidence from Thornicroft and colleagues (2014), it is shown that broadly, anti-stigma campaigns are a success. However, an anti-stigma campaign of large enough scale in regard to classism has yet to be studied by social psychologists. Until then, we can make a hypothesis about efficacy through recognizing the high external validity of studies addressing anti-stigma campaigns as a whole (Thornicroft et al., 2014).

Thornicroft and colleagues (2014) studied the efficacy of anti-stigma campaigns by following the "Like Mind Like Mine" campaign against mental illness discrimination. This study focused on unfair treatment based on the presence of mental health symptoms, and the desire to conceal mental illness. This anti-stigma campaign utilized methods, such as policy initiatives, advertisements in multiple forms of media (news articles, television, etc.), and celebrity endorsements (Thornicroft et al., 2014). The majority of the 1135 participants (69%) claimed that the anti-stigma campaign either moderately or significantly reduced the amount of stigmatized interactions they experienced. The result of this was an increase in employment, and public social interactions between those with mental illness and those without mental illness. Because this study has high external validity, it can be hypothesized that an anti-stigma campaign of this style has the potential to be significantly effective in reducing class stigma (Thornicroft et al., 2014). L-SES adolescents, like those with a mental illness, are stigmatized through acts of prejudice and discrimination, which lead to less future prospects. Although the traits of social class and mental health are vastly different from each other, the impact of stigmatization is felt for both groups in ways that damage existing relationships with others, and inhibit the building of future relationships or social interactions (Thornicroft et al., 2014).

What is Welfare Reform?

According to Morgen and colleagues (2009), welfare is a public policy intending to redistribute funds to help those in poverty. All social welfare programs designed to help those in poverty, such as SNAP, TANF, and rental assistance, have an income maximum which if exceeded, means the loss of all benefits (Jarrett, 1996). This system can be precarious because according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), the financial measures to determine one's poverty level, such as cost of living ratios, have not been adjusted since 1963. Adjustments for inflation have been made, but how cost of living and wage stagnation have impacted the working class has not been addressed by social welfare programs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). This directly impacts the lives of working-class families who rely on these programs. According to Jarrett (1996), who interviewed Black women using SNAP benefits (food stamps), discovered that many women relying on these benefits have refused or turned down raises or increased hours because the extra income that would come along with this would simultaneously cut her benefits, while also not being enough to reduce the need for SNAP. Welfare reform will require the social redistribution of wealth to the poor that provides resources such as food benefits, housing, and medical care, in a way that better benefits the working class (Jarrett, 1996).

Morgen and colleagues (2009) suggested a method that would increase the maximum family income to reflect increasing cost of living and current wage stagnation, while also suggesting a "phase out" method. This means that instead of cutting all benefits once an individual's monthly income goes $1 or more over the maximum income, the benefits instead are gradually reduced. This would allow L-SES communities more opportunity to create more family income without the fear of losing their housing, food, or medical insurance. If this were to be enacted, it would involve a gradual decrease in the percentage of benefits based on the percentage of monthly income one has over the full benefit threshold. This would be similar to what we witnessed with the March and December 2020 stimulus check, in which individuals making under $75,000 annually received the full benefit, but those making between $75,001-150,000 annually would receive a portion of the stimulus check, with those making $125,000 annually receiving half of the benefits (Mengle, 2020). The result of this would likely be that over half of individuals in the working class and/or experiencing poverty who are currently unable to provide all the vital resources necessary for themselves and their families would be able to cover all of their basic needs (Morgen et al., 2009). This would allow L-SES adolescents more opportunities to focus on their academic and social development, as it would free them of much of the financial burden that low-income communities routinely face (Stephens, 2014).

Berkobien (2002) specified how this impacts Oregonians by addressing the state's legislative body in regard to the working requirements of programs such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). In order to meet the requirements for this program, the federal government requires at least one parent to work full-time (Berkobien, 2002). Understandably, this can cause issues when addressing single parent families or job loss. According to Berkobien (2002), welfare reform would require a grace period for job loss, an understanding of childcare responsibilities, and an understanding of academic requirements for the parent(s) in each individual household. Although an L-SES adolescent can work part-time while in school, many of which do, this income cannot be recorded for hours worked by the family unit per week, but their income can be used to cut benefits if their income combined with the parent(s) exceeded the maximum monthly income (Berkobien, 2002; Lerman et al., 2000). Welfare reform, both statewide and federally, would ensure that L-SES adolescents' jobs can be used as a way to help their families receive benefits, rather than only being counted in regard to monthly family income when their income brings the family's reported earnings at or above the threshold for benefit recipiency.

How do Social Welfare Programs Help Low-Income Adolescents' Social Development?

Social welfare programs are responsible for providing vital resources to those who otherwise could not afford them (Brooks et al., 2001). Having access to these resources as an L-

SES adolescent would be beneficial, as it would afford them and their family the ability to utilize their income to pay for other pertinent needs (Gennetian et al., 2002). Being able to trust that needs such as housing, food, and medical care are attended to grants the family decreasing financial burden and increasing financial freedom (Gennetian et al., 2002). The adolescent is then able to focus on their social development, which in turn helps to close the achievement gap through increased ability to take on leadership roles, both in their household and throughout their social spheres, as well as being a role-model to younger peers and/or siblings (Brooks et al., 2001).

Brooks and colleagues (2001) study the impact of the 1996 welfare reform laws and how these positively benefited L-SES adolescents. They determined that through increased access to programs, such as TANF, families were able to redefine family system roles with their adolescent children. This allowed L-SES adolescents to experience and experiment with increased autonomy, which led to an increase in identity exploration behaviors. Although L-SES adolescents practiced agency more once their family was receiving reliable welfare benefits, parents also reported more assistance in household chores for late adolescents (ages 15-18). This is explained as adolescents adopting an adult-like role in the family unit as the desire to take on greater personal responsibility is reinforced by increasing maturity. Many of these responsibilities include assistance in childcare for younger siblings, cooking/cleaning, or obtaining a part time job outside of school. All of these provide the L-SES adolescent with social development through the installation of positive values regarding increasing responsibility that can be transferred to higher education and/or the workforce.

Gennetian and colleagues (2002) study the impact of the 1996 welfare reform act as well, but through a separate lens of potential hindrance to development. The change in requirements for TANF required eligible families to meet a weekly work hour minimum of 30 hours a week per single parent household, or 35-55 hours per week for dual parent households, while putting a timeline on the access to benefits. Although these benefits allowed access to cash assistance and employment programs for L-SES families, the change in the policy added a 5-year lifetime limitation, meaning that after the 5 years are up (including if you used the 5 years of benefits sporadically across the lifespan), there would no longer be financial or benefit assistance that could be given to the family through this program. Many of the changes to this law were intended to reward dual parent households and discourage an increase in single-parent households. The consequence of this is that households with L-SES adolescents quickly needed to take on more responsibilities around the house, often while working part-time and being in school. This led to an increase in delinquency for teens who felt “burnt out” from splitting time academically, socially, and occupationally, while also taking on increased household responsibilities. These teens, who have taken on more adult responsibilities than their schedule reasonably allows were more likely to drink, smoke, and have unprotected sex. Gennetian and colleagues (2002) suggest that this is because social development in adolescence is defined by identity exploration and voluntarily taking on larger responsibilities rather than mandatory, excessive responsibility in exchange for welfare benefits. This effect is not because of the access to the financial resources this program provides.

How do Social Welfare Programs Increase Educational Opportunities?

One of the main reasons educational attainment is difficult for low-income communities is because of the financial barriers faced in regard to higher education (Krywosa & Educational Resources Information Center, 2008). Institutional barriers such as tuition, a lack of funding in low-income communities' public schooling, and limited access to high quality food for children all have a role in hindering educational attainment for L-SES adolescents. Without the help of programs such as FAFSA, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and federal aid to the public-school systems in low-income communities, educational opportunities would be extremely limited for L-SES individuals.

According to Krywosa and Educational Resources Information Center (2008), financial aid to L-SES adolescents through programs such as work-study and the Pell Grant contribute significantly to their ability to accept college admissions. The Pell Grant is responsible for providing sizable tuition deductions that do not have to be paid back, which is granted based on a family income threshold. Those in working class or low-income families are eligible for the full benefit. With the assistance of scholarships from the university and low interest loans from the FAFSA program, late L-SES adolescents (ages 15-18) can realistically plan for bridging the gap of educational attainment in their family by becoming the first-generation college graduate. This is important because college graduates are more likely to be financially stable than those whose highest level of academic completion was high school or high school equivalent (GED program completion). Although student loans have the capacity to increase stress and the degree of financial success post-graduation, the combination of these programs with academic and financial-based scholarships allow for L-SES adolescents to graduate with significantly less debt than those who do not meet the income threshold for assistance.

The National School Lunch Program provides school-aged children (K-12) with access to high quality food for breakfast and lunch 5 days a week for approximately 9 months a year, which both gives the students nutritious meals to ensure they are nourished before they learn, and gives the parents increased financial stability, as meals are a significant cost in L-SES households (Bhatia et al., 2011). Although barriers to participation in the NSLP include enrollment and outreach, limited menu options, student preferences, lunch service capacity, and open campuses, a significant obstacle to those who qualified, but did not receive free or reduced lunch was stigma. This is because for many states, the NSLP meals are distinct from the meals that school children who pay full price for their meals get. This draws undue attention to L-SES students, and can often lead to bullying or social isolation for the student eating an NSLP meal. However, a pilot intervention conducted in San Francisco discovered that once the NSLP included all lunch options instead of a select few for only NSLP students, the rates of participation increased up to 154%, at the 3 sites used in this study. If this method for NSLP lunches were conducted federally, every school could practically ensure that their students are eating at least 2 meals a day that have high nutritional value. This will allow students to focus on their academic work instead of being distracted by their hunger.

Closing the academic achievement gap between social classes, however, involves federal aid to the schools in low-income communities that allow for updating infrastructure, class materials, and class options (Burnett & Educational Resources Information Center, 1995). According to Burnett and the Educational Resource Information Center (1995), urban schools in low-income neighborhoods are disproportionately overcrowded and underfunded. This creates an alarming student to teacher ratio of 40+ students to one teacher, and results in the lack of extracurriculars or elective classes for L-SES adolescents to choose from on their high school campuses. Students in these types of school environments are significantly more likely to score lower than the national average on standardized math and language tests, which give light on the academic achievement of the students, and in turn lead to increasingly tightening budgets. Those with higher scores on these standardized tests in turn receive more funding, when in reality, the schools that need most funding are the ones that receive the lower scores. When low-income students benefit from the federal aid proportioned via standardized testing scores, the achievement gap begins to close. When a pilot study gave aid to classroom settings with lower scores, they were able to redistribute the funds in order to relocate administrative spaces and turn those spaces into classrooms, thus reducing the overcrowding per class. These changes in the classroom settings allowed students to aim more attention into their coursework, resulting in higher standardized test scores the following year. This study concluded with a "student space 'Bill of Rights'", which addressed overcrowding in all urban and low-income schools, and requested for federal aid to public schools be redistributed more fairly across the nation. It is with these changes in financial federal aid where low-income schools can be reformed and L-SES adolescents can begin to close the achievement gap.

How Would Redistributing Governmental Funds to Social Welfare Programs Increase Prosperity for Low Income Families?

Supporting the redistribution of government funding would allow for more egalitarian utilization of taxpayer funding. According to Gitterman (2009), the percentage of the federal budget that is reserved for social welfare programs have been decreasing since approximately 1968. Changing this would benefit the effort in closing the wage and achievement gap, aid in diminishing wealth disparities, and allow L-SES adolescents to finish child development in more opportune circumstances.

According to Vianna and Stetsenko (2011), there is a significant link between identity development and learning that is mediated by minority group membership. This case study specifically focuses on the impact of child welfare for L-SES adolescents whose group home had participated in a collaborative program teaching welfare reformation. The participants were followed by monitoring the academic performance, extracurricular activities, and resulting level of achievement in young adulthood. Due to access to welfare benefits, and participation in a government-funded transformative activist project to reform the current welfare system, the participants were able to utilize this experience to attend prestigious universities on scholarships, with some participants continuing on to become prosecutors in the welfare system fighting for reformation. Without access to this program, these L-SES adolescents would not have had the opportunities of higher education or their current successful career paths. However, it was only at the intersection between personal experience and learning where a rise in prosperity was recorded. The participants in the program reported a higher sense of purpose, and a significantly reduced rate of behavioral issues in their group home. This effect lasted beyond the length of the program, and followed the participants through their adulthood. It is important to fund extracurricular programs that are engaging to a wide range of L-SES adolescents in order to provide opportunities for identity exploration, and the potential to utilize transformative activism by pursuing higher education and subsequently breaking the cycle of poverty.

Stephens and colleagues (2014) studied the impact of academic achievement in L-SES adolescents, but did so through the lens of the social class achievement gap and ease of college transition. This study followed a demographically diverse group of prospective first-generation college students throughout the course of both high school and college. The focus of the study specifically was to determine the efficacy of teaching a framework based on the importance of diversity. The intended effect of this is an ease in college transition, as first-generation college-students are disproportionately L-SES, and later success in the career of their choosing. Social mobility is the ideal outcome for these students. To determine their rate of social mobility in adolescents, the researchers monitored the sense of belonging felt by each individual, their overall GPA's, and the continuity between college and career path. The results determined that those who received and retained the information given by the diversity framework group were significantly more likely to succeed into and throughout college ($p < .05$). This, in turn, led to a higher rate of job offerings and job acceptance for this group than the control L-SES group who received no diversity framework teachings. Teaching first-generation students who are intending to break the cycle of poverty that students with their background matter and offer great value can be beneficial for their success into and throughout adulthood.

What Could the Creation of New Social Programs Do for the Working Class?

In conjunction with welfare reformation and the redistribution of government funding to social welfare programs, creating new social programs that address areas current welfare programs are lacking could be quite beneficial to L-SES families, while potentially lessening the wealth disparity in the United States. Programs such as the permanent implementation of the child tax credit, and universal healthcare have been mentioned by researchers as having a positive impact on L-SES communities, most of whom would not have access to these resources otherwise (Shaefer et al., 2018; Congress of the U.S., Washington, DC. House Select Committee on Children, Youth, Families, & Educational Resources Information Center, 1990).

Shaefer and colleagues (2018) studied the potential effects of a "universal child allowance", or child tax credit, which would provide L-SES families with a $1,000 check annually per child and $4,000 per child in tax exemptions. This proposed wealth redistribution would be a reformation of the child tax credit additions enacted in 2014. This additional $5,000 annually has the potential to end as much as 69% of child poverty in the United States. Recently, President Joe Biden addressed the nation regarding a child tax credit increase of this style, but with approximately $3,600 for families (Lubby, 2021). However, if this plan were to become permanent and last beyond the COVID relief fund, it could effectively end up to 50% of child poverty in the United States. The working class would have greater opportunities for vital resources, investments, and educational attainment through this social program that would not have been available to them otherwise (Shaefer et al., 2018; Lubby, 2021). A permanent implementation of a child tax credit could potentially give the financial resources needed to boost L-SES adolescents into the position of poverty cycle breakers.

Congress of the U.S., Washington, DC. House Select Committee on Children, Youth, Families, & Educational Resources Information Center (1990) suggested the idea of universal healthcare as a form of social welfare that could benefit L-SES families by stating that universal access could not only prevent the development of medical debt, but may also be the solution to the life expectancy gap between social classes. Zimmer and colleagues (2016) mention that there is as much as a 17-year life expectancy gap between H-SES and L-SES individuals due to stress, stigmatization, and lack of access to medical care. If there was no cost or financial burden associated with medical care, citizens would be more likely to use healthcare as a readily available resource whenever necessary (Congress of the U.S., Washington, DC. House Select Committee on Children, Youth, Families, & Educational Resources Information Center, 1990). Currently, the United States medical care system is designed on a basis of profit, and therefore cannot accommodate those who do not have the means to pay exorbitant fees. Similar to the Child Tax Credit reformation, this is a program that every U.S. citizen would benefit from, so sufficient planning and funding to a program of this nature has the potential to increase in popularity over time and eventually be implemented in the same fashion as any other developed nation.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Stigma is associated with harm and hindrance in all domains of an adolescent's development (Zimmer et al., 2016; Reutter et al., 2009; De France & Evans, 2020; Fatima & Sheikh, 2014). Physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development all have the potential to face harm from both class stigma and the specific environmental factors pertaining to class. This is due to the stress responses from class stigma, and the resulting lack of resources, financial and otherwise. As stigma is defined as being the relationship between attribute and stereotype, leading to prejudice and discrimination (Goffman, 1963), it is important to recognize that the lack of resources distributed to this community, whether it be a lack of funds to their public-school systems, lack of access to resources such as food, high-paying jobs, or social connections with other social classes, naturally are impacted by class stigmatization. The impact of being L-SES during adolescence, a developmental phase that is highly influenced by class, simultaneously influences future prospects while containing the greatest potential for the perpetuation of the cycle of poverty (Connor et al., 2021).

The impact of class stigma on L-SES adolescents can be observed in areas such as educational attainment, and career paths in early adulthood (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) through institutional barriers such as job opportunities and college acceptance/affordability (Reutter et al., 2009; Krywosa & Educational Resource Information Center, 2008). L-SES adolescents are frequently hearing the narrative of inevitable academic failure, without regarding how L-SES adolescents are more likely to assume more familial responsibilities than their H-SES peers (Gitterman, 2009; Stephens, 2012). The disproportionate lack of future prospects given to L-SES adolescents can be altered through providing the resources they need to prosper, but until those resources are easily accessible, this is a reality for far too many in low-income communities (Vianna and Stetsenko, 2011).

Reducing stigma begins with changing public opinion. There are many avenues in which this can be done, but some of the most common methods include integrating social classes to reduce the physical distance between H-SES and L-SES individuals, public education on issues specifically pertaining to low income communities, subsequent reformation of welfare laws, and the redistribution of funding for public school systems so that L-SES adolescents are given opportunities to learn about topics that interest them and inspire passion (Vianna and Stetsenko, 2011; Stephens et al., 2014). According to Stephens (2012), public schools in low-income neighborhoods are disproportionately underfunded, which results in L-SES adolescents having less access to educational resources such as textbooks with up-to-date information, extracurricular activities/clubs, and elective courses, as well as a lack of functional resources such as safe school buildings. Future research focuses on the redistribution of funds to low-income neighborhoods, predominantly involving welfare reformation and jobs programs, however, it also suggests ideas for potential programs that have yet to be implemented (Jones et al., 2018).

Future Research

Researchers have broadly determined how an equitable future can be ensured for L-SES adolescents, however, there is limited research on how to implement these topics into political discourse. Because many of the issues pertaining to low-income communities are largely systemic, they will likely require a political body to change legislation in order to ensure the redistribution of funds and resources is fully pursued (Gitterman, 2009). Ideas such as the integration of social classes for developing neighborhoods would benefit L-SES individuals, as increased socialization is one of the first steps toward public education for this stigmatized community (Heijnders & Van Der Meij, 2006; McCormick et al., 2012). Providing other resources, such as altering restrictive barriers to welfare benefits, would provide L-SES families with the resources to support their adolescents (Berkobien, 2002; Lerman et al., 2000). This can either be through allowing their teen to make academic achievement a main priority, or by providing the financial boost needed to increase generational social mobility (Lerman et al., 2000). A welfare reformation suggested by Congress in 1990 mentioned how changing the amount of fund redistribution, and way in which funds are redistributed for the Child Tax Credit, has the potential to bring a significant majority of families with children above the poverty threshold (Congress of the U.S., Washington, DC. House Select Committee on Children, Youth, Families, & Educational Resources Information Center, 1990). As of April of 2021, President Joe Biden has implemented a child tax credit, which is intended to remain permanent (Lubby, 2021). Research on stigma reduction and prosperity for L-SES children would be greatly benefitted by the potential permanent implementation of this program.

Our first priority as a nation, in regard to human services, should be providing an equitable environment for all children from infancy to late adolescence. Investing in the future generations to provide opportunities for prosperity is not only important for their development, but is the most humane and equitable service we can provide.

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