

# A Framework For Conceptualizing Social Class As A Diversity Factor

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# Learning Objectives

- Describe the Social Class World View model
- Explain how social class world view impacts students' experiences in higher education
- Discuss ways that social class world view may impact presenting concerns and therapeutic alliance

How Do We Define Social Class?

# Objective Measures

- Income
  - Research has shown little correlation between reported income and self-described social class.
  - Income is highly volatile and is frequently inaccurately reported.
  - Even asking about income has been shown to prompt negative thoughts about the self, impacting the response.
- Education & Occupation
  - A good predictor of occupational type for men but not women.
- Objective measures don't do a good job of accounting for perceptions related to social class such as greed or entitlement

# Gradient Approaches

- Access to resources
  - Unequal access to social resources, such as education and health care
- Privilege and power
  - Poverty is conceptualized as unequal access to resources and greater demands as in gradient approaches, and these differences are attributed to unequal opportunity to advance due to the privileged status of some groups

# The Social Class Worldview Model

# Social Class Worldview Model (Liu, 2011)

- SCWM attempts to take a sociological concept of class and apply it on an individual level
- The term “social class” implies a socialization process
- Social class has a distinct set of rules and cultural norms
- One’s social class worldview is a series of “lenses” through which one’s social class and expectations are understood, including their place in a larger economic hierarchy
- Made up of three interrelated components: Economic culture, worldview, and classism

# Economic Cultures (ECs & Ecs)

- Individuals exists within larger (EC) and smaller (Ec) economic cultures
- What constitutes a certain class varies by the EC/Ec
- The emphasis placed on factors that demonstrate wealth varies
- Most demands of the Ecs fall into three categories of capital
  - Social capital
  - Human capital
  - Cultural capital



# The Worldview

- “A collection of lenses...through which the capital demands and expectations are understood.”
- Worldview is shaped by
  - socialization messages and classism
  - social class consciousness
- Socializing messages help shape our attitudes and behaviors through three lenses
  - Possessions
  - Class congruent behaviors
  - How we spend our leisure time

# The Worldview Lenses

- Material Lens
  - Tendency to see themselves, others, the world, and relationships as materially laden
  - Will judge relationships and people based on possessions and will look for material symbols
  - Increase talk about material things
  - Tend to be high self-monitoring and sensitive to self-presentation
- Social-Class Based Behaviors
  - Focus on etiquette, language use, accents, and physical fitness
  - Tend to be critical and evaluative of other's behaviors
- Lifestyle
  - Focus on how you spend your time

# The Worldview Lenses

- What is the person's primary lens and what are the auxiliary lenses?
- How flexible are the lenses? Can the person modify the primary way they view social class?
- How might the individual's primary lens be helpful or cause distress when the Ec is changed?

# Socialization Process of Classism

- Classism
  - Series of beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and institutional practices that serve to legitimize and maintain class based power differentials that benefit the upper and middle class at the expense of the poor.
  - A form of relational prejudice based one's own social class worldview.
- Types
  - Downward
  - Upward
  - Lateral
  - Internalized

# Consciousness of Social Class

No Social Class  
Consciousness

- Unawareness
- Status Position Salience
- Questioning

# Consciousness

Social Class Self-  
Consciousness

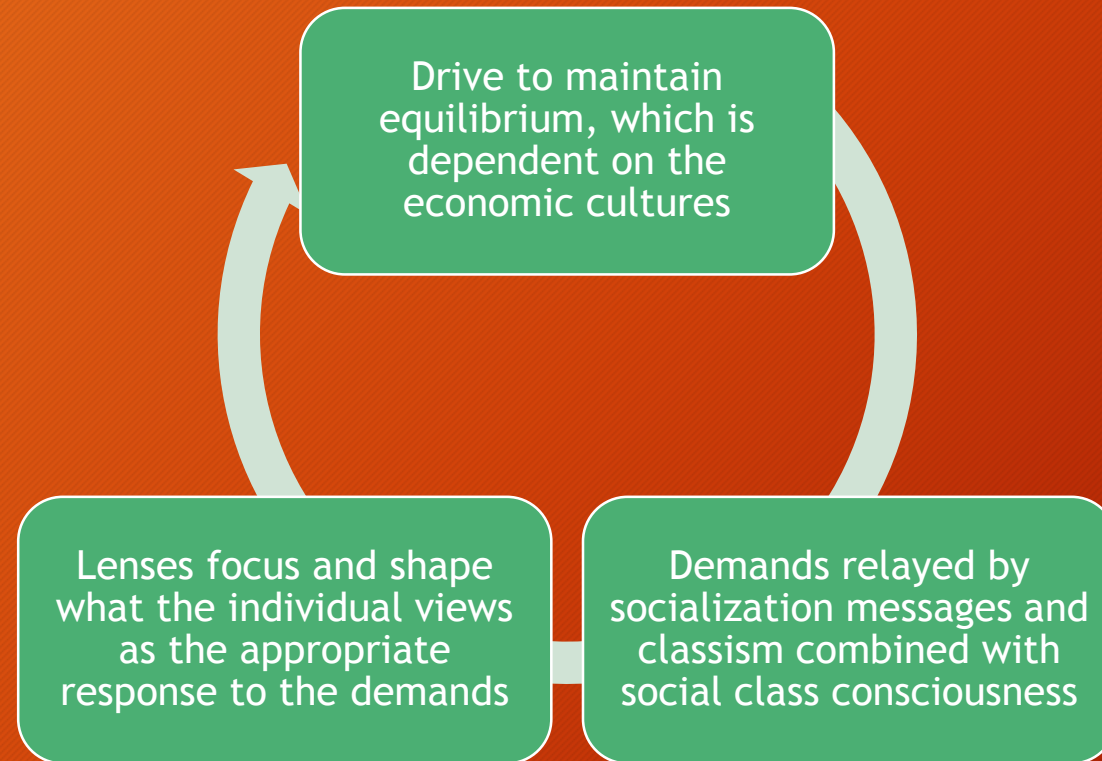
- Exploration and Justification
- Despair
- The World is Just
- Intellectualized Anger and Frustration

# Consciousness

Social Class  
Consciousness

- Reinvestment
- Engagement
- Equilibration

# How The Worldview Operates





# Social Class Rules and Norms

	LOW SES	MIDDLE CLASS	WEALTH
<b>POSSESSIONS</b>	People.	Things.	One-of-a-kind objects, legacies, pedigrees.
<b>MONEY</b>	To be used, spent.	To be managed.	To be conserved, invested.
<b>PERSONALITY</b>	Is for entertainment. Sense of humor is highly valued.	Is for acquisition and stability. Achievement is highly valued.	Is for connections. Financial, political, social connections are highly valued.
<b>SOCIAL EMPHASIS</b>	Social inclusion of the people they like.	Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency.	Emphasis is on social exclusion.
<b>FOOD</b>	Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important.	Key question: Did you like it? Quality important.	Key question: Was it presented well? Presentation important.
<b>CLOTHING</b>	Clothing valued for individual style and expression of personality.	Clothing valued for its quality and acceptance into the norms of middle class. Label important.	Clothing valued for its artistic sense and expression. Designer important.

# Social Class Rules and Norms

	LOW SES	MIDDLE CLASS	WEALTH
<b>TIME</b>	Present most important. Decisions made for moment based on feelings or survival.	Future most important. Decisions made against future ramifications.	Traditions and past history most important. Decisions made partially on basis of tradition decorum.
<b>EDUCATION</b>	Valued and revered as abstract but not as reality. Education is about facts.	Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money.	Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections.
<b>DESTINY</b>	Believes in fate. Cannot do much to mitigate chance.	Believes in choice. Can change future with good choices now.	Noblesse oblige.
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	Casual register. Language is about survival.	Formal register. Language is about negotiation.	Formal register. Language is about connection.
<b>FAMILY STRUCTURE</b>	Tends to be matriarchal.	Tends to be patriarchal.	Depends on who has/controls money.

# Social Class Rules and Norms

	<b>LOW SES</b>	<b>MIDDLE CLASS</b>	<b>WEALTH</b>
<b>WORLD VIEW</b>	Sees world in terms of local setting.	Sees world in terms of national setting.	Sees world in terms of an international view.
<b>LOVE</b>	Love and acceptance conditional, based on whether individual is liked.	Love and acceptance conditional, based largely on achievement.	Love and acceptance conditional, related to social standing and connections.
<b>DRIVING FORCES</b>	Survival, relationships, entertainment.	Work and achievement.	Financial, political, social connections.

# Students From Low SES Backgrounds

# Assumption: Poverty is a “minority” problem

- Around 75% of the US population will spend at least one year below 150% of the official poverty line.
- Around 12% of the US population was considered to be below the poverty line in 2017.
- 9% of people who identify as White-Non-Hispanic were below the poverty line.
- 21% of people who identify as Black reported incomes below the poverty line in 2017
- 18% of people who identify as Hispanic reported incomes below

# Assumption: Welfare keeps people in poverty by promoting laziness.

- Strong safety net programs, specifically cash assistance, has been shown to have the strongest direct impact on breaking the cycle of poverty.
- Cash assistance programs that target economic instability in families have demonstrated a positive impact on children's school achievement.
- The 1996 welfare reform made it notably more difficult for people receiving public assistance to obtain an education.
- Approximately two third of Americans will utilize some type of safety net program between the ages of 25 and 65.

# Assumption: People could get out of poverty if they just worked hard.

- Meritocracy, or the idea that people “get out what they put in”, is endorsed by the White, middle-class culture.
- The Council of Economic Advisors paper on the status on the war on poverty (2014) cites extensive research that shows that the movement out of poverty, especially deep poverty, is rare.
  - This is especially true for African-Americans born into a low SES background

Assumption: If people just moved out of poor neighborhoods, their lives would improve.

- The Moving to Opportunity program provided funding to over 400 families randomly chosen from low poverty neighborhoods in NYC.
- At 2.5 and 5 years follow up the children had lower school grades and rates of involvement in the high poverty neighborhoods.
- Just “changing neighborhoods” had no impact on family economic circumstances at 5 year follow up.



# Assumption: Education is the way out of poverty, and it is accessible to everyone.

- White families have greater wealth holdings to finance their children's education.
- Low SES families are at greater risk for economic instability, so they may not be able to purchase necessary school supplies or adequate nutrition.
- Children from low SES backgrounds typically receive poorer schooling and have access to fewer community resources.

# Low SES Students in Higher Education

- Children from a low SES background typically receive poorer schooling and have access to fewer community resources
- Students from a low SES background are less likely to attend college
- Students from a low SES background are overrepresented in two year and vocational schools
- In the top tier universities in the US 74% of those admitted are from the top SES quartile. Only 3% are from the bottom.

# Low SES Students in Higher Education

- Low SES students are less likely to graduate, make less money when they do graduate, and are less likely to pursue advanced degrees
- 56% of students from a high income family finish a 4 year degree within 6 years of starting, but only 26% of low income students do
- 36% of college students are food insecure, and a similar number lack stable house
- 6% of university students have gone an entire day without food in the past month
- Students from a low SES background are navigating at least two cultures

# Class Microaggressions in Higher Ed

- Citational Classism
- Institutionalized Classism
- Interpersonal Classism via discounting
- Class microaggressions mediate the relationship between SES and feelings of belongingness
- Negative psychosocial outcomes and retention were partially mediated by school belongingness, but also directly relate to experiences of classism
- Students from a low SES background are more likely to enroll in a four year school that does not have an explicit policy against discrimination based on SES, but they are retained and graduate at a higher rate from schools that DO have an explicit policy

Students From High SES Backgrounds

# High SES and Mental Health

- Affluence can have negative psychological consequences for youth
  - Heightened anxiety
  - Depressive symptoms
  - Delinquency
  - Higher rates of substance and alcohol use
- Affluent adolescents experience social-emotional vulnerabilities in gender-specific ways
  - Boys tend to have high levels of delinquent behaviors
  - Girls have high levels of internal distress

# Considerations in Affluent Communities

- Affluent communities may cultivate norms of competition among neighbors seeking “scarce” community resources, like slots in “elite” private schools
- Affluent communities might also breed competition for social prestige and community recognition
- Communities may provide little mutual support due to competitive norms
- Families with demanding careers are noted as potential constraints on affluent parents’ time and emotional investments in their children
- Pressures for achievement may also be high in affluent families, which may be linked to youth internal distress.

# Putting In Into Practice



# Knowledge

- Be able to identify different forms of classism
- Continue to engage in both formal and informal training around the culture of social class
- Increase your understanding of how social class can intersect with other identities
- Suggested readings:
  - Ruby Payne (1997) “A Framework For Understanding Poverty”
  - William Ming Liu (2011) “Social Class and Classism in the Helping Professions: Research, Theory, and Practice”

# Awareness

- Explore and challenge your own bias and assumptions around SES
- Be aware of potential institutionalized classism at your university
- Know the history of the institution you work in when it comes to students from a low SES background
- Explore your own economic culture, socializing messages, and lenses. What are these at your institution? Your department?
- In training, be aware that few training programs provide training on classism and social class as a diversity factor despite it being a salient part of students' experiences

# Skills

- Be prepared to explore issues of social class and classism with students
- Assess for SCWV
  - How are finances for your family?
  - Do they feel similar to most of the students here or different?
  - What is the (similarity/difference) like for you?
- Include considerations of SES minority stress, SES cultural norms, and SES identity development in conceptualizations of student's presenting concerns
- Provide services specifically targeted at students from a low SES background
  - E.g. #thathasafeelingtoo drop-in group
- Engage in advocacy and social justice work around social class inequities

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