A Framework for Understanding Poverty
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Mission Statement

To positively impact the education and lives of individuals living in poverty around the world
This is a class on **Economic Diversity**, not culture, race, or nationality. This is a session on *economic class* and how it affects the decisions we make in our lives.
Poverty

Poverty means you do not have the essentials you need in life. You do not have the ability to provide the material needs or comforts in life. You do not have the money to purchase goods and services. There is not $350 available per person in the home.

There are 37 million people living in poverty in America today. Youth in America are the poorest among us. Child poverty is spreading fastest in the suburbs.

There are over 600,000 (14%) people living in poverty in the State of South Carolina. Many of these people are children.

Because of lower paying jobs more two parent families are sinking into poverty.

Nationwide, childhood poverty is spreading fastest in the suburbs.
How does the neighborhood look?

- Grocery stores?
- Liquor stores?
- Check cashing businesses?
- Available transportation?
- Good childcare?
- Churches
- Updated, uncrowded schools?
- Police riding by?
Poverty

Poverty is caused by many things:

- Poor education
- Obsolete skills
- Death
- Divorce
- Desertion
- Alcohol & drug use
- Illness
- Loss of job
- Mental illness
- National disaster
- Economic downturn
Statistics tell us that the average American is two paychecks or one major illness away from poverty.

There are two types of poverty:

- Generational poverty
- Situational poverty
There is a big difference in *Generational* and *Situational* poverty. The biggest difference is not in money but in resources.

In *Situational poverty* the attitude is one of pride and refusal to accept charity.

In *Situational poverty* individual often bring with them more resources such as education, skills, experience, the use of formal register.

In *Situational poverty* people do not understand the culture of poverty.

*Situational Poverty* is the lack of resources due to a particular event.

- Death
- Chronic illness
- Divorce
- Alcoholism
Generational Poverty

*Generational poverty* is defined as having been in poverty for at least two generations.

*Generational poverty* has its own culture, hidden rules and belief systems.

Attitude is a big issue here. Often the attitude is that society owes me a living.

Key to successfully working with people from poverty is to develop a relationship with them. Relationships are very, very important.
Characteristic of Generational Poverty

- Very noisy, everyone talking, TV always on
- Being able to entertain, tell stories have a good sense of humor highly valued.
- Entertainment brings respite from a hard life.
- Relationships are very important.
- Matriarchal structure.
- Oral history very important—casual register.
- Abstract not valued. Conversation about people and relationships. A job is about making enough money to survive.
- Identity of man seen through lover/fighter role.
- Women is in the rescue/martyr role.
- Touch is often used to communicate.
- Ownership of people. People are seen as possessions. There is fear about leaving the culture.
- Discipline is penance and forgiveness not change.
- Belief in fate.
- Polarized opinions. Everything is all one way or the other. I quit, I can’t do it.
- Mating Dance
- Time is always in the present. The future exist only as a word. Time is flexible not measured.
- Sense of humor.
- Live in the moment. Does not think of future ramifications.
- Quite often there is a lack of organization.
Characteristic of Generational Poverty Continued

- Money is temporary. If you have it you share it.

- Discipline is about penance and forgiveness, NOT ABOUT CHANGE.

- Mother is the most powerful figure. She controls the resources and is “keeper of the soul”.

- Father’s job is to work hard, physically protect family and be a good lover. This requires he be absent from the home on occasion. In middle class Father is the provider.

- Fighting and physical violence are part of poverty. You need to physically protect yourself. Ex. gangs

- Middle class uses space to solve issues.

- Not an option in poverty. Need to protect your turf.
There are **two ways** a person can escape poverty, through *education* and *relationships*.

- **Relationships:** It is primarily through role models that a person learns how to live life emotionally.

- When a person escapes from poverty into middle class he or she will 9 out of 10 times say a relationship was responsible. (teacher, pastor)

- A good role model may be a mentor, a good parent, brother, sister, a teacher, a pastor.

- Dr. James Comer tells us that no significant learning can take place without a significant relationship.
Education

- An education is the key to getting out of and staying out of poverty.
- In poverty education means leaving.
- Relationships are the most valued possession in poverty.
- Education is an abstract word and people in poverty generally live in the reality of the present.
Hidden Rules of Class

- All classes have hidden rules or cues
- There are unspoken cues and habits of a group.
- We do not know about these cues till we break them.
- To move successfully into the middle class from poverty we must understand the rules of the middle class.
Hidden Rules of Class

How well could you survive?

Could you survive in poverty? Check each item that applies.

- find the best rummage sale
- locate grocery stores’ garbage bins that have thrown-away food
- bail someone out of jail
- physically fight and defend myself
- get a gun, even if I have a police record
- keep my clothes from being stolen at the Laundromat
- sniff out problems in a used car
- live without a checking account
- manage without electricity and a phone
- entertain friends with just my personality and stories
- get by when I don’t have money to pay the bills
- move in half a day
- get and use food stamps
- find free medical clinics
- get around without a car or truck
- use a knife as scissors
Hidden Rules of Class

How well could you survive?

Could you survive in middle class? *Check each item that applies.*

- get my children into Little League, piano lessons, and soccer
- set a table properly
- find stores that sell the clothing brands my family wears
- order comfortably in a nice restaurant
- use a credit card, checking account, and/or savings account
- evaluate insurance: life, disability, 80/20 medical, homeowners, and personal property
- talk to my children about going to college
- get the best interest rate on my car loan
- explain the differences among the principal, interest, and escrow statements on my house payment
- help my children with homework and not hesitate to make a call if I need more information
- decorate the house for each holiday
- get a card at the public library
- use most of the tools in the family’s garage
- repair items in my house almost immediately after they break or call a repair service
Hidden Rules of Class

How well could you survive?

Could you survive in wealth? Check each item that applies.

__ can read a menu in French, English, and another language
__ have several favorite restaurants in different countries around the world
__ know how to hire a professional decorator to help “dress up” my home for the holidays
__ can name my preferred financial advisor, lawyer, designer, hairdresser and domestic-employment service
__ have at least two homes that are staffed and maintained
__ know how to ensure confidentiality and loyalty with domestic staff
__ use two or three “screens” that keep people whom I don’t wish to see away from me
__ fly in my own plane or the company plane
__ know how to enroll my children in the preferred private schools
__ am on the board of at least two charities
__ know the hidden rules of the Junior League
__ support or buy the work of a particular artist
__ know how to read a corporate balance sheet and analyze my own financial statements
__ know how to host parties that “key” people attend
Hidden Rules of Class

- Hidden Rules of class are the unspoken cues and habits of a group.
- Definite, distinct cues exist in the different classes.
- Refrigerator story
- In poverty money is used for entertainment and sharing, in middle class it is us the criteria for decision making, in wealth it assist in connecting with people of financial, social and political influence.
- How we see the world is often dictated by our economic class. In WEALTH the world is international. In MIDDLE CLASS the world is the United States. In POVERTY the world is your neighborhood.
If you fall mostly in the middle class, the assumption is that everyone knows these things. However, if you did not know many of the items for the other classes, the exercise points out how many of the hidden rules are taken for granted by a particular class, which assumes they are a given for everyone. They aren’t.
CASSEROLE...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>POVERTY</th>
<th>MIDDLE CLASS</th>
<th>WEALTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POSSESSIONS</strong></td>
<td>People.</td>
<td>Things.</td>
<td>“One of a kind” objects, legacies, pedigrees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONEY</strong></td>
<td>To be used, spent.</td>
<td>To be managed.</td>
<td>To be conserved, invested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONALITY</strong></td>
<td>Is for entertainment. Sense of humor is highly valued.</td>
<td>Is for acquisition and stability. Achievement is highly valued.</td>
<td>Is for connections. Financial, political, social connections are highly valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL EMPHASIS</strong></td>
<td>Social inclusion of the people they like.</td>
<td>Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency.</td>
<td>Emphasis is on social exclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOOD</strong></td>
<td>Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important.</td>
<td>Key question: Did you like it? Quality important.</td>
<td>Key question: Was it presented well? Presentation important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAMILY STRUCTURE</strong></td>
<td>Tends to be matriarchal.</td>
<td>Tends to be patriarchal.</td>
<td>Depends on who has/controls money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLOTHING</strong></td>
<td>Clothing valued for individual style and expression of personality.</td>
<td>Clothing valued for its quality and acceptance into the norms of middle class. <em>Label important.</em></td>
<td>Clothing valued for its artistic sense and expression. <em>Designer important.</em></td>
</tr>
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### Hidden Rules of Economic Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td><em>Present most important.</em> Decisions made for moment based on feelings or survival.*</td>
<td><em>Future most important.</em> Decisions made against future ramifications.*</td>
<td><em>Traditions and past history most important.</em> Decisions made partially on basis of tradition decorum.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDUCATION</strong></td>
<td>Valued and revered as abstract but not as reality. Education is about facts.</td>
<td>Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money.</td>
<td>Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LANGUAGE</strong></td>
<td>Casual register. Language is about survival.</td>
<td>Format register. Language is about negotiation.</td>
<td>Formal register. Language is about connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WORLD VIEW</strong></td>
<td>Sees world in terms of local setting.</td>
<td>Sees world in terms of national setting.</td>
<td>Sees world in terms of an international view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love</strong></td>
<td>Love and acceptance conditional, based on whether individual is liked.</td>
<td>Love and acceptance conditional, based largely on achievement.</td>
<td>Love and acceptance conditional, related to social standing and connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DRIVING FORCES</strong></td>
<td>Survival, relationships, entertainment.</td>
<td>Work and achievement.</td>
<td>Financial, political, social connections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resources
Resources

Poverty is the extent to which a person does not have resources.

FINANCIAL
Having the money to purchase goods and services.

EMOTIONAL
Being able to choose and control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior. This is an internal resource and shows itself through stamina, perseverance, and choices.

MENTAL
Having the mental ability and acquired skills to deal with daily life. (reading, writing)

SPIRITUAL
Believing in a divine purpose and guidance.

PHYSICAL
Having physical health and mobility.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS
Having friends, family, and backup resources available to access in times of need. These are external resources.

RELATIONSHIPS/ROLE MODELS
Having frequent access to adult(s) who are appropriate, who are nurturing to the child, and who do not engage in self-destructive behavior.

KNOWLEDGE OF HIDDEN RULES
Knowing the unspoken cues and habits of a group.
Resources

- Resources give people more choices.
- Choices give us more freedom
- Each resource plays a vital role in the success of a person
- Emotional resources provide the stamina to withstand difficult situations. It is the most important resource of all.
A Future Story

If an individual cannot plan, he or she cannot predict.
If an individual cannot predict, he or she cannot identify cause and effect.
If an individual cannot identify cause and effect, he or she cannot identify consequences.
If an individual cannot identify consequences, he or she cannot control impulsivity.
If an individual cannot control impulsivity, he or she is inclined toward criminal behavior.
What can we do?

- Dialogue
- Sharing of resources
- Respect
- Being vocal to politicians
- Be an advocate for change
- Support neighborhood initiatives
- Be a supporter of educational issues
- Mentor