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## Non-Participatory Poverty

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# Non-Participatory Poverty

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Abstract:

In a capitalistic market society, all individuals should have an equal opportunity to participate, with varying extents, in consumerism. Democracy entitles one to political participation but people have come to value consumer participation as having more importance as shopping and the exchange of goods and services have become an important part of everyday living. Yet not everyone can participate in consumerism and they end up suffering, especially the children living in poverty. These children internalize the message that since they cannot participate in a society based on material consumption, they cannot belong. Poverty not only causes individuals to experience their lives differently, but also affects the development of one's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional identity. Many of the consequences of poverty have been scrutinized and studied to try to explain the experiences of such children. What has not been closely examined however is the relationship between the inability to participate in a consumer society and the bodily being, thoughts, actions, and feelings of impoverished children. I will discuss how these effects of poverty result in the inability of children to participate in society.

Poverty affects the entire aspects of an individual, and causes children to suffer in regards to their bodies, minds, actions, and mental states. Child poverty is not an isolated occurrence, but rather a social endemic. For children under the age of 18, “the poverty rate increased from 16.7 percent in 2002 to 17.6 percent in 2003” which corresponds to approximately 12.9 million children. (U.S Census) This means that almost thirteen million children wake up each day knowing that somehow, something sets them apart from their average peer counterparts. And that something is money. With their family living in poverty, these children cannot partake in the consumer culture which has come to dominate society. “These are incomes so low that these children and their families were not able to participate enough in community activities to be perceived, by both themselves and others, as regular members of society.” (Rainwater and Smeeding, 2003: 22) Therefore these children internalize the message that since they cannot partake in society, they cannot belong. While race, gender, and location contribute to individual differences, poverty is the common bond that these children share that mediates their everyday encounters. Poverty causes individuals to experience their lives differently and affects the development of one’s physical, cognitive, social, and emotional identity.

In a culture where experiences are defined by one’s income, poverty ensures that children cannot participate in ordinary social activities. A market economy necessitates having money to be able to partake and belong, as all goods and services are given a monetary value. “Without a requisite level of goods and services, individuals cannot act and participate as full members of their society, and it is this participation in social activities that confers utility...” (Rainwater and Smeeding, 2003: 10) Through lacking the economic means to purchase material sources and therefore be involved with the daily social activity, of exchanging goods and services, individuals cannot feel socially useful or active. As children do not have the capacity to earn their own incomes and are completely dependent at such a young age,

they have to rely upon adults to provide them with material goods. Therefore the social repercussions of poverty on children are even harsher, as these young kids have to depend upon others and society to care for them. When this does not happen, when children have to suffer from poverty, they internalize the message that society does not care about them, as their lack of economic means mediates their socialization causing them to become disconnected from experiencing normal life.

Social membership in a democratic society does not just refer to the political process but also to the everyday rights and privileges of all individuals. These freedoms of rights include not only the ability to be involved in politics and voting, but also the right of the consumer for access to and ability to partake in the consumption of goods. “In the context of consumerism, liberty is not an abstract right to participate in public discourse or free speech. It means expressing oneself and realizing personal pleasure in and through goods. Democracy does not mean equal rights under the law or common access to the political process but, more concretely, sharing with others in personal ownership and use of particular commodities.” (Cross, 2000: 3) As democracy entails political freedom, individuals feel that they should have rights in both the political and the economic sphere. Democracy and capitalism has come to be seen as similar in that individuals desire rights for the involvement in maintaining social order, and also for the ability to receive their own personal pleasure through the attainment of goods. Yet these two concepts are not synonymous, as not everyone has the ability to participate in consumerism. Unlike the ability to vote, which does not require any goods except for citizenship, individuals need money to be able to shop. Even though everyone should have the equal opportunities to participate in capitalism, not everyone can.

In most advanced countries, freedom has become associated with not only political participation but also that of consumer membership. Individuals have come to associate liberty, and hence personal pleasure, with their ability to purchase material goods. “In a country where personal freedom has been

so closely identified with the right to buy and sell, it has been difficult to constrain consumption.” (Cross, 2000: 112) Consumerism has come to dominate daily experiences as individuals regard their liberty as their ability to acquire even more material goods. Yet in a democratic society where all individuals should have freedom, liberty and justice, this does not happen as those concepts have become associated with consumerism. “...consumption is the key to understanding contemporary alienation as well as potential liberation.” (Williams, 2006, 12) Therefore consumerism is the key to comprehending not only freedom but also suppression. To understand how some individuals lack that liberty to participate in everyday social activities, the consumption of goods and services, poverty must be examined. Poverty deprives individuals the chance to partake in normal social activities, as they lack not only the liberation consumerism grants them and but also the involvement in a higher social order.

Research on child poverty demonstrates that these children suffer from many consequences, yet not many scholars explain how this occurs and why a lack of money disadvantages children so greatly. Most scholars would agree that a low family income influences the experiences of children, often in negative ways, yet research does not demonstrate how this occurs. “Family income has effects on children’s larger attainments that are independent of family education and occupational prestige. *Why* such effects occur is much less clear than *that* they occur.” (Huston, 1991: 12) The costs and repercussions of poverty have been studied, not the mechanisms such as how the lack of money completely mediates the experiences of children. The presence or absence of material conditions, which directly relates to the amount of money one has, determines not only one’s present condition, but also one’s future. “Theories of the effect of parental income on children’s outcomes contend that income is important because it is synonymous with command over resources. They therefore hold that parent’s command over resources helps children either by increasing the quality and quantity of the goods and services that parents purchase for their children, or by reducing parental stress.” (Mayer, 1997: 66)

Children growing up in poverty lack access to material resources: food, shelter, enriched educational experiences, and also a safe nurturing environment. Economic resources directly purchase material goods and a lack of money then has a negative influence on childhood experiences.

The physical consequences of poverty pertain to the lack of health, dental, or vision care, in addition to the absence of an abundance of food and proper nutrients. The market of food allows those with the money to make healthy choices, and if others cannot afford it, they must either purchase what they can, or go hungry. The cognitive development of impoverished children sets them further behind because they lack the educational resources available to their more affluent counterparts. Adolescents in poverty are more likely to drop out of school (Crowder and South, 2003: 659); in part some of their struggles might be do to the fact that they have internalized feelings of hopelessness and already feel excluded from society, in addition to the fact that they cannot afford to keep up in the consumption of education. Economically disadvantaged children tend to be more likely to participate in high-risk behaviors as well and have higher rates of depression and feelings of hopelessness (Kaiser and Delaney, 1996: 67) These consequences of poverty are all linked to children's social exclusion due to the fact that they lack the necessary money to purchase understandings and circumstances that should be available for all children.

Poverty affects children in a wide variety of ways as one's complete existence is transformed by poverty, which impedes not only the development of children, but also their future. "Economic insecurity, arising from low or irregular income, is inimical to human growth and development." (Garfinkel, Hichschild and McLanahan, 1996: 36) Poverty restricts the development of children and impedes their ability to reach their full potential. The adverse conditions of poverty leave children at higher risks. "Child poverty stalks its survivors down every avenue of their lives. It places them at greater risk of hunger, homelessness, sickness, physical or mental disability, violence, educational

failure, teen parenthood, and family stress, and deprives them of positive early childhood experiences and the adolescent stimulation and creative outlets...” (Sherman, 1994: xvii) Poor children are more likely to go hungry, have inadequate housing, higher rates of physical illness, cognitive disabilities and are at higher risks for depression and low self confidence. Throughout this paper, I will examine each of those consequences in greater details, describing not only how they are connected, what that means to a child, but also how those repercussions result from a deficiency of economic means. The costs of poverty are closely linked together and all result from the lack of money to purchase materials that would allow children to become active members of society.

The physical consequences of poverty have been the most studied and commonly understood, as the majority of people are at least aware that poverty influences one’s physical body in regards to food, nutrition, and also the physical location in which one resides. “The lower health status of poor children is related not only to the lack of access to personal health services but also to demographic and psychological factors, to lack of funds to purchase goods and services, to time constraints, and unhealthy life-styles and nonparticipation in health-promoting activities.” (Klerman, 1991: 142) The part of one’s physical body most affected by poverty, is one’s health. Without the economic means to purchase health insurance, pay for medication, or eat nutritious food, children are more likely to become sick or suffer from other illnesses. Hunger and malnutrition directly relate to the health of an individual in negative and harmful similar to one’s demographic location which hampers one’s health in regards to substandard living conditions. “...parents who are poor have greater difficulty meeting the basic nutritional, health, housing, and clothing needs of their children.” (Kaiser and Delaney, 1996: 73) Health care, food, and housing all are commodities that must be bought. If an individual lacks the money to purchase such material assets, then they have to go without, and in doing so suffer physically.

In a society that does not guarantee access to health care for all children, such individuals often have to go without routine treatments and check-ups. Many employers, especially for those minimum wage and part-time jobs, do not provide affordable health insurance for their workers. When that happens, the state sometimes tries to step in and help out, but often too many families fall through the cracks of legislature rules of medical insurance and are left struggling on their own. “Poverty influences child health directly by making it harder for families to afford health services (from doctors, dentists, optometrists, psychologists, and others) as well as health supplies (ranging from dental sealants to prescription drugs to first aid supplies)...” (Sherman, 1994: 42) Children who lack health insurance often cannot afford to see the dentist, eye doctor, and other medical specialists. Even if they do see a doctor, often the family cannot afford the glasses, medicine, or other medical supplies. As health care has become privatized, it no longer is available to all individuals, and must be purchased if one can reap the benefits. “Persistently poor families also have less access to quality health care than do other families, and their children suffer disproportionate rates of hearing loss and poor vision, which can affect school performance and subsequent behavior.” (McLeod and Shanahan, 1993: 216) Lacking sufficient funds to ensure for a healthy body, children often suffer from more illnesses or chronic conditions that money could help improve. One’s health depends on the ability to purchase the necessary materials and goods.

In addition to purchasing health care, money also buys food. Food is one of the crucial basic needs necessary for survival. Sadly food is not free, and in order to eat, one must have the funds or available means to do so. Families in poverty often lack sufficient funds to purchase a balanced and nutritious diet, and sometimes even have to go without food completely. One-third of children in poverty suffers from hunger and often cannot satiate that basic need. (Sherman, 1994: 15) In addition to craving food which is not always available, children in poverty do not receive proper nutrients. “Not



surprisingly, low-income children are less likely than affluent children (those above 3 times the poverty line) to receive the recommended dietary allowance (RDA) of 12 out of 16 nutrients, according to a federal survey of one- to five-year olds.” (Sherman, 1994: 14) A diet lacking sufficient nutrients hampers the physical and cognitive development of children as their bodies cannot grow and develop well.

An insufficient diet is especially harmful when infants and very young children are impoverished and spend their early years, which are crucial for development, undernourished and suffering from malnutrition. “Direct effects on infant motor development are a consistent consequence of undernourishment... poorly nourished children are at increased risk for both mental and physical illnesses as well as diminished cognitive performance.” (Kaiser and Delaney, 1996: 75) Hunger and malnutrition not only hampers physical development, but also that of the mind. When infants or even young children experience hunger and are not able to fulfill that desire, they do not understand why, and feel unloved and rejected. Hunger teaches children at an early age that their needs are not important enough to be met. When children suffer from hunger, they are not only more susceptible for illnesses, but also experience exhaustion and have trouble being able to concentrate and learn in school, setting them even further behind from their economically secure peers. Hunger and malnutrition harm children physically, in regards to growth and health, but also emotionally, by wondering why they cannot eat when they desire to do so, and cognitively, as their brains struggle to work without nutrient fuel.

Shelter is another basic need that must be met to ensure survival and reduce worries. Yet too many children lack a safe and protected place to live and must grow up in a physical environment that is less than satisfactory, if their family even has a stable living arrangement of their own. Many children do not have a place they can call home and return to every night. “Children now make up an estimated 30 percent of all homeless persons seeing shelter.... Millions of other poor children live in fear of

homelessness or do not have safe, healthy, or decent homes.” (Sherman, 1994: 18-19) About one out of three homeless people are children who lack a shelter, protection from the elements, and their own safe little corner that they can claim for themselves, asserting not only their individual beings, but their rights to belong. Even impoverished children, who do have shelter often have to live in cramped conditions, or take up transitory residence. Poor children are more likely to live in crowded cold, damp houses which can lead to allergies and asthma, live with cockroaches, rats, and mice, and have peeling paint or falling plaster. (Sherman, 1994: 20-21) Impoverished children, who do have housing, do not have ideal nurturing places that allow them to develop healthily. When children are deprived of their own physical place, they must feel excluded from society and lack a stable identity grounded in a secure physical location.

Unable to afford a place of their own, poor families often do not set up permanent residence but rather move from one impoverished neighborhood to the next. With each subsequent move, children are uprooted from not only a place they briefly called home, but also their school and friends.

“Socioeconomic hardship may lead to frequent changes in day-care and living arrangements that are associated with changes in the peer group to which the child is exposed.” (McLeod and Shanahan, 1993: 650) Children have to adjust to a new neighborhood, a new school, and make new friends. Without access to transportation or communication with their old neighborhood, such children lose contact with their peers and cannot sustain lasting relationships. Friendships become more superficial when children know that they will have to move again, causing such children to not be able to develop an extensive peer or social support system. While this is the case for all children who move often, impoverished children move at much higher rates than those from economically secure families. “Children in poverty move about twice as often as nonpoor children... Each time a family moves have been estimated to diminish a child’s chances of finishing high school by more than 2 percentage points, holding other

factors equal.” (Sherman, 1994: 19) Impoverished children move more often because these families cannot afford to purchase their own home, so many of these children become almost transitory, moving around and rarely settling down to secure their own physical space in this world. This not only contributes to feelings of instability, but also has a negative impact on children’s education, similar to how a lack of health care and proper nutrition impedes educational learning.

Poverty influences the social context of adolescent cognitive and educational outcomes by not only affecting impoverished children’s years in school, but also their futures after school. “The physical consequences of poverty directly impact one’s cognitive development in regards to insufficient nutrition, increased illness, unsatisfactory housing, and the emotional connotations associated with those physical opportunities at home, family distress leading to emotional and behavioral problems, lack of appropriate schooling, and other disadvantages can be seen in every area of poor children’s learning and education.” (Sherman, 1994: 78) The ability for children to participate in their education depends upon a variety of factors, their physical lives and location as just one. Learning requires material resources, both at school and at home; therefore education is also seen as a material that can be consumed. Families end up purchasing education by default as one needs to buy the resources for their children to obtain educational success. Impoverished children are at higher risks for academic underachievement, grade retention, or dropping out because they are not able to fully take advantage of their education, as they lack the resources to do so. “In comparison to young people from wealthier neighborhoods, those from areas with high levels of poverty and distress tend to have lower test scores and grades, reduced cognitive abilities and higher retention rates, a higher risk of dropping out of school, a lower likelihood of post-secondary education, and ultimately complete fewer years of schooling.” (Krowder and South, 2003: 660) Poverty influences the development of one’s cognitive identity which in turn influences

one's educational, or lack thereof, experiences. When children cannot even participate in school because they lack the material and social resources to do so, they become disconnected from their learning.

Public education has the intent to be the great equalizer, where all children are given the opportunity to learn and succeed simply if they desire. But this is not the real case as children do not begin school from the same starting point. Impoverished children start kindergarten further behind economically stable children, as their homes lack the material resources conducive to one's cognitive development. This disadvantage follows them throughout their educational careers, causing them to have lower projections of intelligence. "Children who are born in poverty tend to vocalize less, have smaller vocabularies throughout the preschool years, show developmental lags in the use of complex syntactic structure, and show language-related reading difficulties more frequently than middle-class children." (Kaiser and Delaney, 1996: 75) Impoverished children do not grow up with the same social capital that teaches them how to properly talk and use language, perhaps because their parents might not have as refined speech, or because they have fewer positive adult interactions. This translates to lower IQ scores, of about nine points less than children from families who never were poor, and other intelligence measures. (Sherman, 1994: 78) Children in poverty enter school less prepared than their economically stable peers and with each passing year fall further behind their classmates and more likely to fail in school.

When children lack resources at home, such as books, writing utensils, early childhood learning games, parental involvement, or even a quiet place to do homework, they struggle to be able to keep up with their more well off peers and actively participate with their learning. This causes them to be more likely to drop out of school. "Poorer youths are twice as likely as their middle-income peers, and almost 11 times more likely than wealthy youths, to drop out of high school." (Sherman, 1994: 81) Poverty sets children up for academic failure by depriving them of not only learning materials, but also social

materials. Adolescents are more willing to leave school for if they cannot even participate they have few reasons to continue learning. "...children who had spent one to three years of their adolescence in a family below the poverty line were about 60 percent less likely to graduate from high school than children who had never been poor. Children who had spent four years of their adolescence living in a family below the poverty line were about 75 percent less likely to graduate from high school.

(Teachman, Paasch, Day and Carver, 1997: 388) By spending even a portion of their adolescents in poverty, teenagers have much higher rates of drop-outs than their peers from economically advantaged families. With this many impoverished teenagers not even finishing high school, even fewer go on to complete a college education. In a time when educational attainment is the key for one's future success, impoverished children are left with little hope when they cannot keep up in the consumption of educational knowledge and social fashion.

Especially in a time when fashion has been so closely connected to consumerism and teenage identity, impoverished teens lack the money to purchase stylish and popular clothes. Therefore they not only are behind academically, but also socially. "Now teens judge one another more for the brands they wear and how much money they or their families have." (Quart, 2003: 14) As the blatant label of poverty stigmatizes them, children feel excluded from school in comparison to not only their peer's social dress but also academic knowledge. While brand names have come to represent identities, impoverished adolescents receive a stigmatized label that highlights their social exclusion and repression. "Shopping defines our individuality, our group affiliations, and even our national identity." (Williams, 2006: 185) Shopping and clothes allows one to construct and create an identity, to enable one to be labeled by their outfits, and helps solidify social groups. As impoverished adolescents cannot afford to shop and buy the latest brand names, they can only display one collective identity, that of poverty. Lacking the money and therefore freedom to make choices regarding clothes, these children cannot

escape their label of poverty. In school when children have to face their peers judging them on their labels and brand name clothes, or lack thereof, impoverished adolescents cannot easily befriend or belong to the same social group as those from economically successful families. This understanding of their social and educational exclusion often comes at a later age when children begin to comprehend the extent of their setbacks, their label of impoverished, and see few chances to ever belong in society.

Dropping out of school usually comes with the consequences of smaller economic benefits and less job security. By failing to complete high school and college, impoverished adolescents seem to be securing their futures in poverty, as society gives them few opportunities to leave. “Adolescents who leave school before graduating enjoy fewer prospects for employment and earnings later in life, are more likely to become involved in criminal activity, and drug use, and face a variety of other potentially deleterious outcomes, including reduced productivity and increased psychological stress.” (Krowder and South, 2003: 660) Without a professional degree, high school drop-outs find themselves in minimum wage jobs, and after being excluded from education, they are left with few choices and chances to succeed. Sometimes crime and a life of delinquency seems more inherently rewarding than a life waking each day to monotony, exclusion, and poverty. Society almost encourages criminal activity for impoverished adolescent drop-outs by preventing them from being active social participants. If they already do not belong to main-stream society, these impoverished adolescents do not feel as if they should follow the social rules or obligations of a society that has rejected them and are more likely to become involved with delinquent acts due to their lack of future hope and involvement in gangs. This alternative form of a social faction through crime, actually allows those in poverty to belong and have their own support group. This will be further explained in regards to the emotional and behavioral consequences of poverty. The costs of dropping out of school include having impoverished adolescents face further social exclusion.

Even for the children growing up in poverty who do not drop out, those who continue and receive a high school degree, do so in an educational setting inferior to other schools in higher socioeconomic class neighborhoods. While public education is intended to provide equal opportunities for learning, this often does not happen. Schools in poorer districts are more likely to lack the facilities or resources conducive to advanced learning such as being overcrowded, have insufficient technology, out-dated resources, fewer textbooks, and in general unable to allow children to develop to their full educational potential. “Nationwide, third-grade teachers in the poorest schools are 2 to 4 times more likely to report inadequate supplies of textbooks, workbooks, and audiovisual equipment, compared with teachers in schools with the least poverty.” (Sherman, 1994: 25) Even in a setting where all children should feel included and able to participate, children from poverty lack the same supplies and educational materials that their peers in higher economic classes can access. When children do not have textbooks of their own, it makes not only learning more difficult, but also harder to maintain individual motivational levels.

The learning that occurs outside the classroom is also harder to obtain for impoverished children. These children cannot afford to pay for the fees that would allow them to participate in activities such as field trips, team sports, clubs and other extracurricular activities. This educational inequality simply becomes perpetuated when poor adolescents have fewer opportunities to attend college due to not only their reduced cognitive capital, but also the difficulties financially. Impoverished children and adolescents feel their social exclusion when they cannot participate in their public education.

While impoverished children face unexpected inequalities in their general education at school, their home lives make it even more difficult for them to achieve educational attainment. When impoverished families lack a stable home environment, they have far fewer material resources available to their children. Even those families, who do have their own homes but still struggle to survive with

their meager incomes, often lack learning materials, activities, and resources that aid in children's cognitive developments. "Problems start with the inability of parents to afford stimulating toys, children's books, preschools, and good quality child care arrangements. The problems continue through the quality and quantity of schooling children receive, as well as the school supplies, eyeglasses, hearing aids, stimulating activities... and materials that encourage learning." (Sherman, 1994: 23) Today education is so closely linked to the ability to control material resources that are conducive to one's ability to learn. Computers, books, and school supplies have become almost necessary equipment to the participation in school. Home lives place children at an advantage or disadvantage in regards to their abilities to learn. The average child entering kindergarten has been read to for 1700 hours and had parents spend an average of \$500 to prepare their child for school. (Waiting on the World to Change) Impoverished families lack the money to purchase such books and supplies for their children, causing these children to be cognitively behind their peers prior to even entering school. This suffering lasts throughout their education, whether they decide to drop out of school, or graduate from high school, impoverished children have fewer chances of receiving the same quality of education that others receive.

Poverty perpetuates itself in large part due to the cognitive deficiencies impoverished children develop that hinders their ability to further their education. In today's competitive employment fields, those lacking degrees have few chances to earn high paying jobs. Without a sufficient income, these adults will not be able to escape poverty and more likely than not, end up raising their own children in impoverished households. These second-generation children also will grow up unable to participate as consuming social members and have the same physical and cognitive struggles. As the parents did not receive a degree themselves, they will lack the educational capital and skills to help their children with schoolwork and stress the importance of receiving a good education "There is a strong association between poverty and poor cognitive, social, and academic outcomes for children. Poor children are at



greater risk for conduct problems, depression, peer conflict, and low self-confidence.” (Kaiser and Delaney, 1996: 67) Poverty not only decreases the likelihood that a child will succeed academically, but also that the child will improve his or her socioeconomic status. The cycle of poverty continues as each subsequent generation is shunned from social participation through their inability to consume, harming their emotional well being.

Poverty influences the mental health of children and adolescents as they internalize their inferior place in society and struggle to try to live without access to the abundance of materials that children from economically secure families have. Impoverished children face increased levels of stress due to their reduced ability to purchase materials necessary for their survival and well beings. “Economic deprivation, in turn, has been linked to poor mental health through the chronic stress deprivation creates.” (McLeod and Shanahan, 1993: 352) When children have to worry about when they will eat their next meal, or spend the night, they can hardly focus on computing a math problem in school when their basic needs are not being met. In addition to the stress associated with insufficient economic resources, impoverished childrens’ mental health is also compromised by their social rejection. “Perhaps the presence of acute stressors (e.g. loss of work, loss of home, cut in pay, etc.) in the context of chronic disadvantage (e.g. insufficient money to pay bills, eat, dress, and play well) exponentially increases the effect of these stressors on adolescent mental health.” (Grant et al, 2005: 517) When children witness their parents constantly stressed or worried about how they can provide for their families, such children often experience their own negative emotions. Poverty harms the emotional and mental health of children through not only the stressful environment, but also as these children internalize their own rejection from society.

Impoverished lifestyles mediate parent-child interactions. “Economic hardship and social disadvantage clearly alter how a child is socialized....” (Dodge, Pettit, and Bates, 1994: 649) While

parents struggle trying to maintain economic social participation, they often become stressed and have to spend a great deal of their time and energy trying to maintain a job and feed their children. This in turn creates further difficulties for their children who not only lack material resources to excel, but also do not have parents who can take complete care of them to the extent that other economically secure parents can. “Evidence consistently indicates that parents who undergo economic loss transmit their distress to their children by becoming more rejecting and by using harsh discipline...(which are) in turn, are associated with poor goal orientation, low levels of self-adequacy and social competence, and high levels of moodiness and conduct problems among children.” (McLeod and Shanahan, 1993: 353) When parents struggle economically, or lack time to invest in their children, they often transmit some of their own problems and stress onto their interactions with their children through having less patience and using more strict punishments. Children in poverty not only feel rejected from society, for reasons mentioned earlier, but also from their own families, when their parents cannot meet their physical, cognitive, and therefore emotional needs.

As consumption has come to entail an individual’s personal freedom, children have come to understand that notion not only as their liberation, but also as their way of being loved. “Parents expressed their love with gifts of toys and amusement that encouraged the child to enjoy that brief period of freedom from the world of work and self-denial.” (Cross, 2000: 140) As material goods are necessary to satisfy the basic needs of all individuals, individuals now view an extra abundance of goods as a way of ensuring satisfaction and demonstrating love. “When parents’ affections are expressed primarily through purchases, it seems likely that children will develop fears that they are not loved if they don’t receive gifts, leading to the compulsive desires for more and more toys...” (Williams, 2006: 182) Parents give their children gifts and toys to allow their children a relaxed and therefore liberated childhood, which their children then view as demonstrations of love. But when parents lack the ability to

purchase such materials, their children then translate that as the lack of love. This social, educational, and familial rejection leads to impaired mental and emotional health in regards to children's internal feelings.

The social dismissal and inability to partake in the basic childhood realms of society causes impoverished children to internalize their rejection. The longer a child spends in poverty, the more likely he or she will suffer. "...the persistence of poverty is significantly and positively related to the presence of internalizing symptoms... Thus the length of time children spend in poverty has a significant effect on their feelings of... unhappiness, and anxiety independent of the effect of current economic deprivation." (McLeod and Shanahan, 1993: 357) The longer children remain in poverty and internalize the message of their social rejection, the more likely they are to suffer from depression and feelings of nervousness. Even when children can escape poverty, if that deprivation has been part of their lives for many years, they still will endure emotional hardships. "...poor children have a difficult time holding on to positive self-images. They view poverty as a deprivation and perceive messages in society highly critical of the poor... (and) internalize many of these negative messages." (Seccombe, 2000: 1104) Poverty causes children to have lower levels of self esteem as they realize that society does not care for or about the poor, and therefore come to see themselves as undeserving and unworthy to succeed or even live comfortably. When children grow up lacking the material resources to succeed and are therefore rejected from society, their schools, and also often their families, they internalize their dismissal and develop the same negative view of themselves that society holds.

Socialization and the conditions in which one is raised influence the psychological and emotional developments of children. Children form their mental states based upon interactions and experiences. When impoverished children lack the experiences that would encourage healthy development, such as unique and enriching incidents purchased by economic resources, they suffer in regards to their self-

view and internal identity. “Children’s mental health is affected by their families’ poverty histories. Poor children have more mental health problems than nonpoor children, whether we consider internalizing problems like depression or externalizing problems like antisocial behavior.” (McLeoad and Shanahan, 1996: 207) This internalization of their inferior social status causes children to suffer from, “depression and social withdrawal, to have peer relationship difficulties, to have low self-esteem, to have behavioral and conduct problems, and to do poorly in school.” (Seccombe, 2000: 1103) When impoverished children recognize their social rejection, they begin to even further separate themselves from the society that does not seem to care about them. This also connects to their lack of motivation in the academic setting and why more poor children tend to drop out of school. When children experience emotional distress and have internalized their subordinate social status, they are also more likely to develop behavioral problems linked to their low levels of self-confidence and agency.

The social or behavioral development of children is also hampered by poverty, causing children to engage in high-risk activities, self-destructive behavior, disruptive acts in school, and have more difficulties socializing with their peers and adults. Like the other consequences, as previously indicated, these problems arise out of the inability to participate as an active consuming member in society. “Poor children were twice as likely as wealthier children to have extreme behavior problems...” (Sherman, 1994: 90) The internalized anger and aggression of impoverished children make them more likely to struggle with such intense emotions and end up externalizing their inner conflicts because they cannot deal with their feelings of social rejection. “Children in the lowest socioeconomic class received teacher-rated externalizing problem scores that... were three times more likely than the rest of the sample to receive scores in the clinically significant range... The relation between social disadvantage and behavior problems appears to be a linear one ...” (McLeoad and Shanahan, 1993: 661) The fact that impoverished children are more likely to demonstrate difficulties externalizing their emotions through

aggression and anger, leading to higher rates of behavioral problems, indicates that socioeconomic status is closely connected to one's actions.

The behavior of impoverished children is directly linked to the physical environment in which they are raised. Children living in destitute conditions are more likely to be exposed to violence than in a wealthy suburban neighborhood. Growing up in poor neighborhoods, such children often realize this is the type of place where they will spend the rest of their lives and, "may despairingly conclude that... they have neither the resources nor the likelihood of achieving lasting or socially approved outcomes. For them, socially unacceptable and risky... alternatives may become highly attractive." (Bolland, 2003: 146) When children cannot foresee a promising economically successful future they give in to their failure. In ways similar to the reasons for dropping out of school, impoverished adolescents become delinquents and participate in high-risk behaviors. The socialization of children in impoverished and decrepit neighborhoods seems to breed aggressive and violent behaviors.

Growing up in neighborhoods that lack enriching cultural and social activities, impoverished children have few opportunities to participate in events that cultivate healthy development. Most forms of entertainment cost money whether it is sports equipment, traveling, or in regards to the amount of money lost when a parent could potentially be working. "Poverty affects opportunities for children and adults to play, exercise, and socialize in healthy ways, with consequences for building self-esteem, physical health and fitness, and alternatives to unhealthy habits such as smoking, heaving drinking, or other high-risk behaviors." (Sherman, 1994: 46) When children cannot be active participants in general activities or events, thus reasserting their social exclusion, they have few options left except for alternative behaviors which are considered high-risk. "...adolescents react to their uncertain futures by abandoning hope, leading them to engage in high levels of risk behavior." (Bolland, 2003: 145) Realizing that poverty isolates them from society, many adolescents recognize that their future holds

few promises for improvements. Poverty not only deprives adolescents from the ability to participate in mainstream forms of social entertainment, but also encourages them to engage in risky behaviors.

Poverty robs children and adolescents of the ability to dream by limiting their future options and forcing them to face their reality of exclusion from a young age. Impoverished adolescents often develop negative future expectations and have little faith in not only society, but also in their own ability to make things change. "...people in poverty (come) to believe that they were unable to take control over their lives and make things better for themselves." (Bolland, 2003: 145) When individuals are deprived of their basic needs that should be available for them, such as food, shelter, and education, they begin to doubt even their own abilities to succeed. As the mind seems to control the body, the consequences of poverty combine and exponentially grow. "...feelings of hopelessness are associated with virtually every domain of risk behavior, including violence, substance abuse, sexuality, and even accidental injury." (Bolland, 2003: 153) When adolescents lose hope for their future, they have little motivation or internal gratification and often seek external sources to fulfill their sense of belonging. That anger internalized from social exclusion becomes projected through violence or self destructive behaviors. Adolescents sometimes turn to drugs or alcohol to try to gain some sense of fulfillment and often bond over these activities due to their exclusion from main-stream society.

One's behavior is not only closely linked to one's mental state, but also one's cognitive development, and therefore one's physical body. As previously mentioned the physical deficits in regard to the body, the home, and the school, places impoverished children at higher disadvantages in regards to the academic success. This almost encourages children to drop out of school as they realize that they cannot keep up in a learning system based on material resources and social capital. Dropping out of school has several consequences of its own. "Dropping out of school is linked, in turn, to increased rates of juvenile delinquency, increased likelihood of teenage pregnancy, and intergeneration economic

dependency.” (Ramey and Campbell, 1991: 190) In addition to more likely involvement in high-risk behaviors, and perpetuating the cycle of poverty, impoverished adolescents who do not finish high school are more likely to have a baby. In a consumer society, a baby is the only object you can have and call your own for free. While a baby will cost money to maintain, the actual act of becoming pregnant costs nothing. A baby not only allows a teen mother to feel as if she is participating in consumerism, but also causes her to finally feel welcome and included. Through the birth of a child, a mother will often receive material gifts, or emotional attention, and be able to feel that she finally belongs as she has an object of hers, and that will therefore generate the necessity of purchasing more material objects. When poverty forces adolescents to feel rejected from their families, school, and society, a baby allows them to begin their own family and finally be included in something. All of these consequences of poverty are so closely linked and connected because they all stem from the same source, social rejection and the inability to participate, and hence belong, in a consumer society.

Not all children from poverty experience these exact consequences, some vary by degree in their sufferings, some may endure additional hardships, and some may not even have to tolerate such adversities. This paper does not tell the fate of all impoverished children. Some children are fortunate enough to escape their poverty, be able to attend college, earn a sufficient income and raise their own children in a higher socioeconomic class. When this happens, these individuals often have an extensive support system that tells them they are loved, worthwhile, and included in a greater cause beyond their survival. But unfortunately this does not happen to all impoverished children, and too many of them suffer and never can move beyond the original state in which they were born.

The effects of poverty can easily be lessened, if not even completely eliminated. To do this means one of several things that I will further explain. First the actual number of people in poverty must be reduced, which involves giving out economic resources to allow individuals to participate in the

consumption of material goods. And second society must include all of its members through increased programs and assistance that would allow everyone to be an active social participant. As the consequences of poverty have four main segments, the physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, so do the actions that can reduce poverty.

As children suffer in the physical regard, to their body and environment, those are areas that should be focused on for any improvements to be made. Universal health insurance needs to exist to ensure that all children receive the medical care that they need. “Except for the United States, all industrialized nations provide health insurance or health services and child allowances.” (Garfinkel, Hichschild and McLanahan, 1996: 36) When children have access to health care, their physical development will not lag as far behind economically advantaged individuals. Having access to nutritious and affordable food is also important to ensure a healthy and well balanced diet. Then there also must be affordable and safe housing for all children. I believe that can be achieved through providing more food stamps that are specified by food groups to ensure a nutritious diet and through sufficient housing subsidies. Once the health, nutrition, and environment, of impoverished children are improved then they will no longer develop such severe physical deficiencies.

To improve the cognitive development of children, the focus should mainly be on access to educational resources not only in the schools but also in the homes. Schools should have an equally high level of educational standards and resources across the nation. There should be small class sizes, have sufficient teachers and educational personal, adequate technology and resources, and the ability for all children to participate in extra-circular activities. The government should allocate more money for education and I believe that can be done that through a small increase in the taxes of the wealthy. As impoverished children begin school at a cognitive disadvantage, I think that books should be given to



children every time they see a doctor, dentist, or any other medical appointment, which they will have with universal health care access.

Children also should attend programs like Head Start, or other early intervention places including summer programs, that would allow for their cognitive development. Educational attainment is crucial in eliminating poverty, so children must feel as if they are able to participate in their learning. I believe that more youth apprenticeship programs should be started which would not only teach adolescents an important trade, but also encourage them to further their education. This would help eliminate the cycle of poverty, by ensuring that the next generation would have a more successful life as well. The minimum wage should be increased to ensure that they will not recede back into poverty. “Children who were never poor were much less likely to experience poverty in their early adult years than were children who grew up in long-term poverty.” (Corcoran and Chaudry, 1997: 50) If the government makes poverty prevention a main focus, it can be stopped in several generations and then will no longer be a continuous social issue. Until the discrepancies between the educational attainments of impoverished children and those from higher socioeconomic classes have been eliminated, poverty will continue as one’s cognitive development is connected to one’s future employment and lifestyle.

Many of the emotional and behavioral consequences of poverty stem from the physical and cognitive deficiencies impoverished children have. Once those physical and cognitive costs of poverty are eliminated, children and adolescents will no longer develop such high rates of depression or low self-esteem as they finally will feel welcomed in society and that they are worthy of such care and attention. Many of the behavioral problems will also be reduced by fixing the physical and cognitive issues. Adolescents will no longer be pushed into delinquent acts as they will be able to participate in mainstream society.

Most of these actions to help solve the negative effects of poverty focus on allowing such individuals to belong in society through economic resources that would enable the consumption of necessary material goods. Children from poverty do suffer, and the adversity they must face hinders their ability to live a lifestyle that should be available for all. “The consistent result is that poor children really do fare worse on average, even when they are compared with children of the same family structure, race....” (Sherman, 1994: x) Poverty often acts as a determinant factor on the lifestyle one will have. To help prevent the sufferings from poverty, there should be more assistance and relief programs to allow for impoverished children to not have their lives dictated by their lack of economic resources.

To enable impoverished children and adolescents to participate in society requires that they have the economic means to be able to do so. These children should no longer feel rejected or left out of the most typical daily experiences of an American, consumerism. “...shopping is the number one leisure-time activity for most American children.” (Williams, 2006: 137) Most children spend a significant amount of time and money shopping for clothes, for toys, for things that will grant them their liberation and satisfy their personal pleasure. Yet those children, who cannot do so, are being deprived of their freedom and ability to express a unique identity, not a stigmatized label of poverty. “Today, the social relations of consumption... perpetuate social inequalities and prevent the establishment of a more just social order.” (Williams, 2006: 189) In our society, it has come to be understood that while money may not directly purchase happiness, it most definitely can buy material objects that will then grant one pleasure and liberation. Until a democratic consumerism begins, when everyone has the right and ability to participate in the exchange of goods and services, then poverty will continue, and millions of children will grow up isolated and rejected, unable to be an active social member.

Poverty effects children in all aspects of their lives, and becomes instilled as part of their individual identity. The fact that many of the consequences of poverty are connected and feed off of

each other, demonstrates that the costs of poverty cannot be changed without eliminating it in the first place. “The existence of multiple, interacting risks for children has profound implications for our understanding of child poverty. If poverty triggers a deluge of problems for children- rather than just a few easily remedied problems- then attacking poverty directly by raising parents’ earnings and family incomes may be a necessary part of any cure.” (Sherman, 1994: 56) All of the basic costs of poverty result from the lack of economic resources which create consequences of its own. Therefore the only way to ever cure or fix the poverty problem requires increasing economic means, thus allowing those children to be active social members. In summation, children and adolescents in poverty suffer in regard to their physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development due to their social rejection and inability to participate in the consumer society.

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