Parent-Adolescent Socialization of Social Class in Low Income White Families:

Theory, Research, & Future Directions

** REMOVED FOR BLIND REVIEW**

Abstract

The role of social class in the U.S. has long been a focus of economics, history, and political science. Yet, little psychological theory or data is available to guide our understanding of what messages regarding social class are transmitted within and across generations and how those transmissions are most likely to occur. As a launching point for such work, we focus this initial consideration on parent-adolescent socialization of social class in low-income, White families of adolescents in particular. To this end, our goal was to raise potential hypotheses about the implicit and explicit ways that White low-income parents may shape adolescent views of class, as well as the meaning and implications of status socialization for adolescent health and well-being.

**Key Words:** Parent, Adolescent, Socialization, Social Status, Income, Inequality

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Current events have shed light on the discontent of the White working class and poor in the United

States. There remains some disagreement about if, as well as the extent to which, the White poor

factored significantly into the outcome of the 2017 presidential election; however, polling data suggest

that predominately White, less well educated, and working-class communities provided the biggest

share of votes for then candidate Donald Trump in both the primary and presidential election cycles.

For example, a recent Washington Post article featured Buchanan Valley, a largely White, U.S. born

(98.8%), coal mining community in Virginia, that gave now President Trump 69.7% of their votes in

the primary, a majority that jumped to 78.9% in the presidential election over candidate Hillary Clinton

(Davis, 2018).  Further examination of the demographic make-up of the voters behind those statistics

reveals a county with a median income of $30,000 (i.e., half the national average) that is experiencing

a dramatic level of out-migration (half the population since 1980), striking levels of disability (i.e., 1 in

4 adults receives social security disability benefits), and epidemic increases in opioid overdose and

death among those who remain (Davis, 2018).  With this context as a back-drop, campaign slogans

such as "Make America Great Again" may have been particularly compelling to areas of the country

like Buchanan County, VA – areas now more colloquially referred to by some as "Trump Country".

Indeed, print, television, and online media outlets generally convey images of those in Trump Country

as predominately White, blue-collar, and male.  The media has also captured images of hostility among

some in these regions toward other marginalized groups, including ethnic and racial minorities,

immigrants, and women.

The seemingly pronounced level of discontent among if not all, at least some, White poor and

working class may be interpreted by many as grossly misplaced, given that racial and ethnic minorities

in the U.S. are disproportionately affected by economic and social inequality, bias, and discrimination.

Although the history of such discontent has long been a focus of fields such as economics, history, and

political science, the developmental and clinical psychology literatures tell us surprisingly little about

children and families in the cultural context of this discontent, including what attitudes, behaviors, and

values may be transmitted within and across generations. Consistent with the aim of this Special Issue,

our goal with this manuscript is to begin to consider what messages that White poor and working-class

parents may be more likely to convey to their children within the context of such discontent, how those

messages may be conveyed, and their potential impact.  To do this, we start by defining parent-

adolescent socialization of class, as well as our decision to focus on this proposed process in families

of adolescents in particular.

**Operationalizing Parent-Adolescent Socialization of Social Class**

At its broadest-level, socialization is a term used to refer to social learning processes that evolve

from ongoing interaction between the individual and those who seek to influence that individual (e.g.,

Clausen, 1968; Harris, 1995; also see Kandel & Andrews, 1987 for a review). Socialization processes

may reflect explicit/intentional and/or implicit/unintentional messages communicated primarily via

basic principles of social learning, including imitation or modeling of a valued other and/or positive or

negative reinforcement of particular attitudes, behaviors, and values by those valued others (see Elder,

1968; Kandel & Andrews, 1987 for reviews).  Indeed, one of the primary mechanisms through which

educators, psychologists, and sociologists have posited that messages regarding class are transmitted in

families is via parenting practices and the impact of those practices on child and adolescent behavior

(e.g., Arnett, 1995; Calarco, 2014; Lareau, 2011).  The dearth of psychological research on

socialization of status in families in general or White poor in particular is perhaps surprising then,

given strides made in convincingly demonstrating that parents have the capacity to prepare their

children for the complex challenges of navigating other marginalized identities, most notably race and

ethnicity (see Stein et al. in this Special Issue). Thus, we turned to theory and data from a range of

psychological, as well as non-psychological, sources, with the aim of generating hypotheses regarding

the potential messages transmitted between parents and adolescents in this understudied context.

Factors that affected our decision to focus on adolescents in this initial work stems from the

recognition that constructs of class, inequality, and status may be relatively abstract for younger

children to comprehend, necessitating more nuanced and complex cognitive processes that come on

board later in development. Adolescence is also a period when increased autonomy from parents

paired with increased time spent with peers and dating partners exacerbates the opportunity for social

comparison and awareness of differences attributable to class (e.g., neighborhood, size of a home or

wardrobe, number of cars owned by a family). Finally, knowledge is a function of social learning that

increases with age, by definition affording adolescents more experience to construe interpretations

regarding occupation, ownership, and residence as they relate to social class and status.  Adolescence

may then be the optimal time to begin to think in a more nuanced way about what messages low

income White parents are conveying, whether directly or indirectly, about a family's socioeconomic

standing, as well as the implications of those messages for their adolescent children.

Thus, our goal is to begin to consider how the experience of low social class or status may be

transmitted between parents and their adolescent children in White poor families in the U.S. To this

end, we turn first to available psychological theory to guide our discussion of parent-adolescent

socialization of social class.  Then, we turn to the ecological context of low income and working class

White families in particular, including offering hypotheses about the attitudes, behaviors, and values

that may be fostered within such contexts and, in turn, the messages that may be transmitted from

parents to their adolescent children. Finally, given the relative lack of psychological literature available

to inform and guide our consideration of socialization of social class in White poor families in the U.S,

we conclude by posing potential hypotheses regarding how the psychological experience of White,

low-income parents in the U.S. may shape the types of messages that they share explicitly or implicitly

with their adolescent children.  Before proceeding to this next section, we acknowledge that references

to the White poor and working class suggests a homogeneous group of communities and families,

which is not accurate.  Thus, the next sections should be interpreted as themes that may be more likely

to characterize and shape parent-adolescent socialization of status in White poor and working class

families in particular and on average; however, as we discuss later, investigation of variability *within*

these families and communities will also be critical to advancement in this work.

**An Ecological Systems and Family Stress Framework**

Study of the socialization of adolescents, consistent with the developmental literature broadly, has

been framed by ecological theory, which highlights the transactional influences on adolescents within

the broader environmental contexts of parents, community, and society (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Ecological family systems theory (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2002) builds upon the formative

hypotheses inherent within this ecological framework by highlighting the direct role of parents in their

interactions with adolescents (and vice versa), as well as the more indirect role of parents who also

serve as a filter through which adolescents receive, translate, and navigate the contextual forces in the

broader environment.  To this point, in the case of the study of socialization of adolescents, theory and

research has traditionally focused on modeling of and reinforcement by parents in particular, as well as

the related parenting constructs of parent-adolescent relationship quality and parental

monitoring/knowledge of adolescent selection of and activities with those peers (see Elder, 1968;

Kandel & Andrews, 1987; McKee, Jones, Forehand, & Cuellar, 2016 for reviews).

Building upon ecological family systems theory then, various conceptual models highlight the

central role of parental verbal and nonverbal messages in the socialization of a broad range of

adolescent attitudes (e.g., racial bias), behaviors (e.g., technology use), and values (e.g., religiosity),

which in turn impact adolescent cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes (e.g., Ary, Tildesley, Hops,

& Andrews, 1993; Barnes & Olson, 1985; Dishion & McMahon, 1998).  With the family as a central

ecological context in which youth are socialized in mind, family stress theory is also relevant to our

discussion of low income White families (e.g., McCubbin, Needle, & Wilson, 1985; Olson, 2000;

Patterson & McCubbin, 1987).  That is, family stress theory posits that financial hardship impacts

adolescent well-being directly (e.g., conflict about finances), as well as indirectly (e.g., parental stress

and depression, compromised parenting, parent-child conflict) via increased levels of psychosocial

stress. Particularly relevant to the focus of this review, Conger and colleagues' (Conger & Conger,

2002; Conger & Elder, 1994; Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994) seminal research on the

family stress theory was in fact conducted with White, mid-western, and rural families in the 1980s.

At that time in particular, declines in agriculture closed thousands of businesses, including farms.

Iowa, where this research was conducted, was particularly hard hit, given that the bulk of the economy

was based on agriculture alone, leading to devastating economic hardship for families.

Extending this formative work, a social causation hypothesis posits that the stress associated with

a low social position in particular (i.e., not simply lack of access to resources, but less access relative to

others) contributes to the development and/or exacerbation of psychosocial maladjustment in

adolescents (Reiss, 2013).  Although not mutually exclusive, the social selection hypothesis also

extends these theoretical perspectives by suggesting that parents who are genetically and/or

biologically predisposed to mental health issues drift down to lower social positions as well and, in

turn, create a cycle of disadvantage within and across generations (Reiss, 2013).  Yet, the

aforementioned theories could be and have been generalized to a range of low income families,

including ethnic and racial minority families as well (e.g., Anton, Jones, & Youngstrom, 2015; Cuellar,

Jones, & Sterrett, 2015; Sterrett, Jones, & Kincaid, 2009).  Application of these theories to better

understand the current context of low income and working class White families in particular and, in

turn, the messages transmitted between parents and adolescents, requires attention to the unique

economic, historical, and sociopolitical context of White poor in the U.S. in particular. As such, we

turn now to the economic, social, and political forces contextualizing the attitudes, behaviors, and values of the White poor and how such forces may shape the messages conveyed to adolescents.

**Marginalization among White Low-Income Families**

Unrest among White poor and working class in the U.S. can be traced back to colonization. For example, Isenberg (2017) recounts how the British aristocracy essentially recruited White poor individuals to test the potentially dangerous and often deadly transatlantic voyages to colonize the New World. This sense of the White poor as disposable continues to be echoed in slurs such as White and trailer "trash" (Isenberg, 2017; Payne, 2017; Vance, 2016) - the latter perhaps conjuring an image of White rural poor in particular. It is true that regions of the U.S., including Appalachia, such as West Virginia (94%), are predominately White poor; however, here has been far less attention to the White poor in U.S. cities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).  For example, poverty and instability in coal mining led to the out-migration of White families from Appalachia to industrialized cities in the north, west, and mid-west (i.e., the "hillbilly highway").  Well-documented discrimination in hiring, housing, and lending failed to yield the promise of social mobility or realization of the "American dream" for many of the White poor who migrated to urban areas of the U.S. as well (Isenberg, 2017; Vance, 2016).

More recently, two recessions, the housing market crisis, and loss of jobs in the service sector (e.g., sales, mechanics, laborers) and industry (e.g., manufacturing, utilities, trading) have increased the number of White poor in the U.S. As a result, although racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by poverty, as noted earlier, the total number of White poor (19 million) surpasses African American/Black (11 million) and Hispanic (14 million) poor in the U.S. today (National Center for Child Poverty, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2015b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Moreover, estimates suggest that at least one-third of the 13 million youth living in poverty are White, representing a sizeable proportion of families benefiting from programs such as Medicaid and food stamps (e.g., National Center for Child Poverty, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2015b).  The question

that may be unique to low income and working class White families then is not necessarily the experience of a lack of access to resources, but perceived gains toward (or the promise of gains toward) and then the relinquishing of, loss, and/or never realized promise of access to those resources. To this point, the bulk of psychological research on families in general has relied on measures of socioeconomic status (i.e., combination of income, parental education, and employment/job status), federal poverty levels (e.g., for household of 4 adults and/or children the FPL in 2015 was $24,250), or a specific type of financial assistance (e.g., income support, subsidized housing, free school lunches) or degree of hardship (e.g., difficulty paying bills) (see Jones et al., 2016 for a review). Yet, theory suggests and research confirms that an understanding of the meaning and impact of social class and perceived inequality must move beyond such measures to capture power or in the case of low-income and/or working-class individuals the powerlessness inherent in a real and/or perceived lack of access to, as well as loss of, resources (Bullock & Limbert, 2003; Isenberg, 2017; Lott, 2012).

Theories regarding why such subjective social status is so powerful are plentiful, but themes include that it captures nuances untapped by objective markers of income alone (e.g., quality of education, job prestige, wealth), as well as the experience of social inequality (e.g., discrimination, stigma, disrespect) and the absence of hope regarding current (e.g., worth, value, competence) or future (e.g., social and economic mobility) prospects and worth (e.g., Jackman & Jackman, 1973; Marmot, 2004; Östberg & Modin, 2008; Rothwell & Han, 2010; Sherraden, 1991). As such, we agree that in the study of White families our focus should at this point in the literature remain broadly on  both  the "low income" and "working class", given the common experience of insufficient purchasing power and financial agency (i.e., living paycheck to paycheck, little or no accumulation of savings), little or no opportunity for advancement, employment instability (e.g., shift-work, layoffs), no or inadequate health insurance or other benefits (e.g., 80% of low wage workers get no paid sick days), and potentially inadequate and even dangerous working conditions (see Lott, 2012 for a review). Building

upon such a rationale, we turn now to the attitudes, behaviors, and values that may be more likely to be fostered within the context of White low-income and working-class communities and families.

**Attitudes, Behaviors, & Values of White Poor & Working-Class Communities and Families**

As noted by Vance (2016), a focus on the causal role of economic insecurity can only partly explain the "crisis" of the White poor in the U.S. (i.e., "If they only had better access to jobs, other parts of their lives would improve as well"; p. 5). Instead, a fuller understanding hinges on examining the complex and deeply entrenched culture of poverty that has evolved within the context of economic insecurity in low income White communities and, in turn, the families in those communities. To this end, we turn now to the goal of attempting to elucidate the attitudes, values, and behaviors inherent within such complexities as a context for informing the types of messages that parents may convey to their adolescent children in this context. Of note, the following are intended as broad themes that are actually likely interrelated, but we separate them here for relative ease of discussion.

*Social Isolation & Threat*

A discussion of the sense of social isolation among the White poor can be grounded in our earlier mention of the "hillbilly highway" and the out-migration of White poor from rural areas of Appalachia to urban areas for industry and manufacturing jobs as an example. That is, renewed promises of the "American Dream" and tales of "rags to riches" that went unrealized for Whites who had moved from rural to urban areas for work were also at times met with stigma, suspicion, and bias by middle- and high-income Whites already established in those areas (Isenberg, 2017; Vance, 2016). Social psychologists refer to this phenomenon whereby the most negative views of lower income Whites seem to come from their higher income counterparts as the "in-group distancing effect" (Berube & Berube, 1997; Kuntsman, Plant, & Deska, 2016). In essence, in-group distancing suggests that higher income Whites are motivated to protect their privilege in a class-based society, which in turn perpetuates derogation, prejudice, and stereotypes to protect social norms.

In support of this hypothesis, Kuntsman and colleagues (2016) used an experimental laboratory paradigm to demonstrate that White undergraduate students perceived low-SES Whites (e.g., White janitor, garbage collector) as greater status threats (e.g., "Poor White people in America threaten the general status of White Americans", "The prestige of middle- and upper-class White people is threatened by poor White people) than low-SES Blacks.  In turn, perceptions of threat predicted higher levels of discomfort in anticipated social situations with low-SES White than Black targets (e.g., "Having a low income White person marry into one's family", "Going to a restaurant that is frequented mostly by poor White people"). Finally, threatened status led Whites who more strongly identified with their racial in-group to put a greater physical distance (i.e., space between 2 chairs at a laboratory conference table) between themselves and a low-SES White relative to Black partner. In summarizing these findings, the authors noted: "As a socially accepted target of prejudice, few groups in contemporary society elicit antipathy like poor White people" (p. 230).

In the context of such bias and perhaps even more so in the context of antipathy, it may follow then that lower income and working class White communities and families in those communities not only experience, but may tend to foster geographic isolation (Vance, 2016).  Yet, the rise in and ubiquity of technology, including the media, has penetrated such isolation by perpetuating stereotypes of White poor as "other" and, in turn, "less than."  Indeed, technology plays an increasingly focal role in adolescents' navigation of both their present circumstances and prospects of the future (see Pew Research Center, 2015a for a review).  For example, a national survey indicated that almost all (92%) adolescents go online at least daily and one-quarter (24%) of those use social media "almost constantly."  Furthermore, the American Time Use Survey (2017) reports that adolescents spend approximately five hours a day engaging in leisurely activities with nearly three hours of that time spent watching television. Consequently, implicit and explicit messages framed in media contribute to attitudes, behaviors, and values of the White poor and, in turn, the messages received by parents and

adolescents regarding what it means to be White poor. Media framing, similar to the process of

socialization, is the conscious selection of specific aspects of a perceived reality in order to promote

certain judgments of a target item (Owen, 2016). Advertisements, television shows, movies, and other

media outlets act as socialization agents by portraying fictional and non-fictional accounts of everyday

life, while framing constructs such as sexuality and race, as well as class (Peterson & Peters, 1983).

While messages regarding class and status may vary based on the target audience, studies have

found unequal representation, stereotyping, and pervasive frames of White working class and poor

throughout a range of media (Bullock, Fraser Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Streib, Ayala, & Wixted,

2017).  To provide some examples, movies such as *Forest Gump*, *Dumb and Dumber*, and *Pulp

Fiction* frame working class or poor individuals as ignorant and/or immoral "white trash" (Sweeney,

2001). In terms of children's television and film, there tends to be an underrepresentation (20%) of

poor and working-class characters in films such as *Aladdin*, *Ratatouille*, and *Beauty and the Beast*,

which also convey messages that working-class individuals are complacent or even satisfied with

hardship or that hardship can be overcome if only the characters work hard enough or have enough

luck (Streib et al., 2017).  As servants clean the house of the wealthy Beast in Beauty and the Beast, for

example, they happily dance and sing "Life is so unnerving for a servant who's not serving. He's not

whole without a soul to wait upon" (Streib et al., 2017).

Perhaps the most explicit example of such messages, however, is reality television.  A focus on

rural, low-income Whites in particular is apparent in shows such as *Redneck Island*, *Buckwild*, and

*Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* which essentially pitch social issues, including rural poverty, geographic

isolation, and lack of education, as a target of humor and mockery. For example, *Here Comes Honey

Boo Boo*, features the day-to-day lives of a family who lives in squalor (i.e., "white trash") with limited

resources who must scavenge to make ends meet (e.g., eat "road kill", "dumpster dive"), but are

depicted as satisfied with their circumstances (Owen, 2016). Similar messages have been noted in day-

and prime-time television with lower class individuals more likely to be represented in talk-shows featuring individual and family dysfunction (e.g., *Jerry Springer Show*), as well as reality-based crime shows (Bullock et al., 2001). Yet, more positive cultural attributes, including resourcefulness, sense of community, and grit are easily lost in the emphasis on the "otherness" of "white trash".

It is unfortunate, but such bias and stereotyping toward low income Whites has been linked to subsequent prejudice as well, particularly in the context of economic insecurity (Payne, 2017). Indeed, the shifting demographics of the U.S. may be perceived by Whites as an added threat - this time to the privilege associated with racial majority status (see Fiske, Dupree, Nicolas, & Swencionis, 2016; Murrar, Gavac, & Brauer, 2017; Molina, Tropp, & Goode, 2016 for reviews). In a particularly eloquent experimental example of this phenomenon, Krosch and Amodio (2014) demonstrated that relatively "poor" White participants (i.e., told they could have received $100 but only received $10) rated images of biracial individuals as having darker skin and looking more stereotypically Black than the relatively "rich" White participants (i.e., told they received the full $10 out of $10 possible). In essence, these findings echo the notion that it is not just being poor that matters, as this study had nothing to do with the participants' actual economic status. Rather, simply feeling relatively disadvantaged, even when in the context of a contrived, experimental manipulation, was enough to foster perceived differences or an "us and them" mentality (Payne, 2017).

Moreover, the isolative tendencies of the White poor may leave relatively little opportunity for contact with ethnic and racial minorities. In turn, lack of contact provides little opportunity for familiarity with and appreciation of a personal connection with, empathy for, and recognition of individual differences within "out-groups". Outgroups in general then are more likely to be perceived as not only jockeying for a relatively small pot of resources, but also undeservedly and essentially cutting in line to take American (i.e., White working class) jobs (e.g., Mishra, 2015; Payne, 2017). With this lens in mind, federal, state, and local policies aimed at striving toward greater equality and

diversity in the workplace, such as affirmative action, are more likely to be interpreted by White poor

and working class as "reverse discrimination", "White discrimination", and/or "White victimhood"

(e.g., Fraser & Kick, 2000; Vance, 2016; Payne, 2017).  In turn, such policies may inadvertently

bolster bias and anger in the White poor, as well as exacerbate a sense of hopelessness.

*Hopelessness & Helplessness*

   At its most basic level, learned helplessness describes the premise that an individual can learn

through experience that escape or avoidance of aversive stimuli is unavoidable and, therefore, must be

endured. The earliest work on learned helplessness was conducted in the laboratory where it was

observed that animals exposed to repeated and random shock (i.e., inescapable) ultimately became

passive, even when later the experience of shock was indeed avoidable (Seligman 1972, 1975a).  This

sense of helplessness was so resilient, in fact, that it could not be reversed via treats, other rewards, or

modeling by other animals successfully avoiding the aversive stimuli.  Yet, it was only by changing the

animals' "expectations" regarding the likely results of their attempts to avoid the shock (e.g.,

repeatedly picking up the animals, moving their legs, replicating the action of moving away from the

shock) that the animals would re-engage in behaviors that avoided the aversive stimuli.

   Building upon this work, Seligman and colleagues established learned helplessness theory as it

relates to human behavior as well as the notion that depression may result from real or perceived

absence of control or agency over the likely outcome of a situation (e.g., Alloy & Abramson, 1982;

Klein, Fencil-Morse, Seligman, 1976). Indeed, findings from basic and applied research support this

hypothesis.  For example, longitudinal research shows a direct connection between the experience of

poverty and depression and related risk behaviors (e.g., suicidality), as well as the role of hope in

mediating this association (e.g., Hagemeister & Macke, 2008; Lorant et al. 2003; Najman et al. 2010).

        The experience of hopelessness, as well as the relation between hopelessness and negative

outcomes, however, is not homogenous and may vary by race, ethnicity, *and* class (Assari, Lankarani,

& Burgard, 2016). In non-clinical populations, for example, data suggests that working class Whites may be more pessimistic about their future than Latino immigrants or African Americans – a potentially surprising statistic given the well-documented stressors and struggles faced by the latter (Graham 2016; Graham, 2012). One explanation posited for these findings is that racial-ethnic minority populations, on average, have seen stable increases in markers of social status, including educational attainment, as compared to previous generations. Meanwhile, low-income Whites have, again on average, experienced stability or at worst a decline in education and income and, in turn, perceived (if not actual) status. Such trends perpetuate (or at least maintain) the same sense of inescapability among low income Whites in the U.S. as of that documented by Seligman and colleagues (1975b) in their early animal models. In the case of low income White in particular, however, the sense of futility seems to have extended beyond individuals to families and whole communities (Isenberg, 2017; Payne, 2017; Vance, 2016).

For example, over the last half century the U.S. has seen the relative gap in academic proficiency become significantly more pronounced between high- and low-income families, whereas the academic gap between Whites and Blacks has significantly decreased (Kuziemko, Norton, Saez, & Stantcheva, 2015; Porter 2015). One interpretation of such trends is that racial and ethnic minority families view higher education as an investment toward future gains, whereas the White poor may have little hope of a long-term payoff of schooling, particularly in the context of an acute scarcity of resources. For example, data suggests that middle-aged White men, particularly those without a college degree, are likely going to be the first generation in U.S. history that does not achieve greater affluence than their parents (Payne, 2017). Indeed, behavioral economics includes much discussion of this tendency to "discount" (i.e., favor short-term rewards at the expense of long-term, even greater rewards) in the context of a scarcity of resources, particularly when there is substantive promise of immediate reward.

**Live Fast, Die Young**

   Building upon the aforementioned discussion of education, other examples of discounting in the

White poor and working class abound, including foregoing preventative health care, valuing higher

pay over benefits or potential advancement, and spending versus savings/investments (see Adamkovič

& Martončik, 2017, for review).  In an eloquent example of this, Mani et al. (2013) demonstrated that

White Indiana sugarcane farmers had faster response times and more errors in the context of an

experimental task before the harvest (i.e., in the context of scarcity) versus after the harvest. Moreover,

farmers' perceived intensity of current financial constraint was negatively correlated with their

performance on the same cognitive measures, bolstering support for the scarcity hypothesis.

   In this context of scarcity decision-making, low-income White individuals, families, and

communities in the U.S. are also engaging in higher levels of health-risk behaviors – a trend that has

been referred to elsewhere as "live fast, die young" (Bolland, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2012; Payne, 2017).

Essentially, live fast, die young has been used to refer to an approach to life that favors short-term

reward at the expense of long-term progress, which not only perpetuates chronic poverty, but also

higher levels of risk taking behavior. The acute and long-term effects of learned helplessness on risk

behavior and compromised health outcomes for the White poor in the U.S. are in fact pronounced and

measurable. As stated by Payne (2017), "The wounds [in the White poor] seem to be largely self-

inflicted . . . They are dying from cirrhosis of the liver, suicide, and a cycle of chronic pain and

overdoses of opiates and painkillers" (p. 121).

        Indeed, the opioid crisis in the U.S. today does not map perfectly onto the geographic lines of

the aforementioned "hillbilly highway"; however, there are notable parallels (Vance, 2016).  First,

most agree that the opioid crisis had its origins in Appalachia, including Kentucky and West Virginia,

which continue to have among the highest rates of overdose deaths today (Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention, 2016). The origins of the overuse of painkillers in Appalachia is attributed largely to

working class, mining communities racked by the injuries of hard and dangerous labor for generations

and mass over-prescription of a known addictive medication. Yet, as towns beyond Appalachia were hard hit by the epidemic as well, including urban areas in states along the hillbilly highway (e.g., Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan), the sense of hopelessness and foreshortened future must also be taken into consideration. That is, in communities where there is a collective sense of the "American Dream" being elusive, out-of-reach, and even stolen by others perceived as less deserving, a focus on short-term reward (i.e., drug high) may prevail.

Any short-term benefit gained from a focus on immediate (or at least the most immediate) reward, primarily as a strategy for coping with a lack of agency and loss of hope, however, only perpetuates subsequent social inequality.  For example, Nguyen and colleagues (2012) reported that anticipation of an earlier death (i.e., "What are your chances of living to age 35") predicted lower future socioeconomic status, after accounting for other established risk factors (e.g., family SES, individual demographics, and depression). Thus, finding a solution to issues like the opioid epidemic plaguing White poor and working class in particular may continue to seem out of reach due to the isolationist tendency of communities and their potential difficulty foreseeing a future for themselves in a multicultural country that they believe has left them behind. In turn, White poor parents may transmit similar messages to their adolescent children.

**Parent-Adolescent Socialization of Social Class in White Low Income & Working-Class Families**

Research to date convincingly demonstrates class differences in the types of practices that parents use to raise their children (e.g., Chin & Phillips, 2004; Lareau, 2011; McKee et al., 2007). For example, whereas middle- and high-income parents may rely on strategies that facilitate and reward behaviors that increasingly approximate negotiation, assertiveness, and entitlement, lower income and/or working-class parents are more likely to reinforce deference to authority (i.e., "children are meant to be seen and not heard"), as well as a "no excuses" approach to problem solving (i.e., grit, determination, self-reliance).  For example, lower income parents (regardless of race/ethnicity) are

more likely than their higher income counterparts to engage less with their child's schools and teachers (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000; Stormont, Herman, Reinke, David, & Goel, 2013).  While one interpretation of this could be that lower income parents must navigate more family stressors for such engagement to occur (e.g., childcare, transportation, shift coverage for parent-teacher night), another that is more consistent with the messages they are conveying to their children is that the lack of engagement is more of an explicit choice (i.e., deference to authority, constraint).

Yet, research suggests that teachers interpret low income parent disengagement as lack of interest in the child, the child's behavior, and/or the child's academic performance (e.g., McCoach et al., 2010; Stormont et al., 2013; Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011). Given that teacher perceptions of parents and parent involvement in school shape the quality of the relationships between teachers, parents, and students (e.g., Henderson & Berla, 1994; McCoach et al., 2010; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000), such assumptions can actually be quite detrimental, including for adolescent children who are at a particularly formative period of their education that includes decisions regarding classes or tracks, as well as college preparation and applications.  Using the educational context as an example then, it is plausible that adolescents raised in low income families and communities in general may learn, either by observing and modeling their parents own behavior (e.g., constraint with teachers at school events) and/or their parents' reinforcement (or lack of punishment) of behaviors that are, at least in part, adaptive in the context of inequality.  In the context of low income White families and communities, moreover, such day-to-day interactions and observations must also be viewed in the context of the aforementioned constructs of social isolation and threat, helplessness and hopelessness, and live fast, die young.  For example, modeling, emphasizing, and rewarding deference to authority may inadvertently reinforce or even exacerbate low income White adolescents' sense of helplessness in the present and, in turn, hopelessness regarding the possibility of better opportunities in the future.

Building upon this notion, we turn now to how messages regarding isolation and threat,

helplessness and hopelessness, and live fast, die young may, in turn, be implicitly or explicitly

communicated to adolescent children, as well as the implications of those messages for adolescent

health and well-being. As summarized in Figure 1 and detailed throughout this review, we posit that

the experience of inequality and perhaps in the case of White poor in particular the sense of loss of the

promise of equality, is in turn linked to a wide range of mental and physical health outcomes, including

for adolescents. We argue here that a critical next step in understanding this relationship is to move our

study beyond "if", as that has been clearly established, to "how" – *how* do parents socialize their

adolescents to think about class and, in turn, *how* do such messages translate into less optimal

adolescent and subsequent adult outcomes. Such work can indeed be considered a public health

imperative as we look for opportunities to intervene at a public policy, community, or individual

family level in order to bolster the health and well-being of adolescent children raised in these growing

low-income and working-class communities where both opportunities and resources that offer the

promise of something better are increasingly rare.

In the context of a sense of isolation, hopelessness, and an extreme present-focus, we posit that

low-income and working-class White parents may convey messages that while adaptive in the short-

term may undermine their adolescent children's capacity to survive let alone thrive.  Parents who teach

deference, obedience, and constraint are indeed teaching valuable skills that will have a place in all

adolescents' lives; however, when taught singularly likely make it more difficult for adolescents to

stand out or excel in academic and/or employment settings when skills such as assertiveness are

rewarded and necessary.  Similarly, White low-income and working-class parents' sense of learned

helplessness has the capacity to teach adolescent children that striving to succeed makes little sense as

their efforts will yield little movement on the social status ladder.  Although hopelessness may function

to manage seemingly uncontrollable stressors and, in turn, a relatively high degree of uncertainty

(Facione, Miaskowski, Dodd, & Paul, 2002; Keeley, Wright, & Condit, 2009; Lange & Piette, 2006;

Ramirez et al., 2002), Falicov (1998) highlights that it sets individuals up for distress rather than resilience. Within this context, adolescents may, in turn, directly and/or indirectly learn to think about themselves, the world, and the future with pessimism via parental messages and behaviors that convey a sense of a lack of control or possibility of impact.

While a no excuses approach may have eventual benefits for children (e.g., self-starter, grit, determination), such messages may inadvertently be discouraging adolescents from learning some of the very skills necessary to succeed in a range of contexts, including education, and subsequently decrease opportunity and compromise outcomes (e.g., Calacaro, 2011; 2014; Streib, 2011).  As noted by Vance (2016), "I've learned that the very traits that enabled my survival during childhood inhibit my success as an adult" (p. 246). It is precisely this perpetuation of inequality and its inherent helplessness, including explicit messages that asking for help is not okay, that has been linked to a drive or motivation to take advantage of the present given that one's actions are unlikely to impact the course of their future. Such messages are likely reinforced by a no excuses approach to problem solving taught by working class and low-income White parents to their adolescent children, as it discourages classroom engagement and, in turn, elicits less interest and perhaps more antipathy from the teacher than students from higher income families who are taught just the opposite.

In the context of this sense of a lack of opportunity, White low-income parents may convey, albeit likely inadvertently, a live fast, die young approach to their adolescent children or the sense that in the context of a limited amount of time in which they will have little or no control over their futures, a focus on the present is adaptive.  Adolescents in this live fast, die young context are observing and, in turn, more likely to model the behaviors of the adults around them, including and perhaps primarily the behavior of their parents (Fischoff et al., 2000; Jamieson & Romer, 2008; McDade et al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2012).  Moreover, current perspective on the psychology of poverty suggest that adolescents may be especially vulnerable to a live fast, die young approach given the potentially

parallel or even overlapping nature of the neuropsychological underpinnings. That is, during

adolescence the heightened nature of reward sensitivity essentially becomes unchecked by the

fledgling cognitive control system – a combination posited to result in the well-documented evidence

of delay discounting and risk-taking characteristic of this period (Steinberg et al. 2008). Such patterns

are strikingly similar to the characterizations by behavioral economists explaining how

neuropsychological processes linked to a scarcity of resources essentially yield the same outcomes.

Yet, the effects of such neurobiological patterns may also be exacerbated or attenuated. For

example, research on adolescents in general demonstrates the protective roles of agency, future

orientation, and goal-setting, including with such health-promoting outcomes as higher self-esteem,

life satisfaction, and resilience (e.g. McCabe & Barnett, 2000; Nurmi, 1989; Somers & Gizzi, 2001).

Yet, agency, future orientation, and goal setting may be particularly challenging in the context of the

aforementioned contexts of social threat and isolation that may characterize low income communities

who turning inward leave little or no opportunity for examples of alternatives or the role models

potentially critical to socioeconomic advancement. Without involvement of teachers within their

community or role models and mentors outside of it, adolescents from low income and working-class

families, in turn, may be more likely to face their own socioeconomic stagnation (e.g., limited

education, hourly wage employment) and the stigma that goes with it, increasing their vulnerability for

higher levels of risk behavior and emotional and physical health problems.

**Future Directions**

As we consider future directions in this line of theory and research in the field of psychology in

particular, we first must remind the reader that we have hypothesized themes or threads here that may

characterize socialization of class in some low income White families, but likely not all. Thus, an

important next step in this work is to consider *within-group* variability in the socialization of social

class messages among White poor and working class families and their adolescent children. Advances

in such work also necessitates attention to measure development.  That is, we are not aware of a measure of parent-adolescent socialization of social class.  Progress toward such a measure could likely be informed by measure development in the study of racial socialization and advances in measurement in that area (see Stein et al., in this Special Issue). Inherent within social status scale development will also likely be consideration of how constructs such as White privilege or perhaps the perception of the absence of White privilege may shape parental and, in turn, adolescent attitudes regarding pride for one's identity, diversity of social status, and perceptions of classism and discrimination. This work will also need to explore if and how racial/ethnic and status socialization messages interact with status socialization, as well as the role of parent or adolescent gender in the delivery or impact of such messages (Stevenson, Cameron, Herroro-Taylor, & Davis, 2002).

Beyond advances in measurement, we envision future psychological research that not only examines the potential risks associated socialization of social status in White poor families, which are the bulk of our focus in this paper, but also what types of messages are associated with resilience.  For example, we talked about implicit and explicit messages related to social isolation that may be characteristic of some White poor families and communities in the U.S. and how such messages may, in turn, fuel a sense of threat from "outgroup" members as well.   Yet, inherent within social isolation among the White poor may also be a loyalty to and focus on the health and well-being of one's family and community, which, if cultivated, may lead to a sense of civic-mindedness and service. Similarly, while a "no excuses" approach to the world may be maladaptive in a school context where assistance from and a relationship with teachers can propel advancement, there is also much discussion about the value of "grit" or the pursuit of a task in spite of obstacles relative to talent.  It will be important in future work then to determine if and how characteristics such as "no excuses" can be harnessed and channeled into characteristics associated with success such as passion and persistence.

Moreover, research is limited in how the dearth of hope evidenced in low-income White families is associated with levels of hope in adolescents. Yet, it seems reasonable to infer that the cognitive context of poverty would make it difficult for a struggling low-income parent to have genuine confidence and optimism in their child's future attainment, particularly given their generation's reduced social standing in comparison to previous generations (Graham, 2016) and resultant psychological impact of this comparison. Indeed, financial stress is shown to increase a focus on the present and a reliance on habit and routine, rather than a shift toward goal-oriented behaviors (Cueva et al., 2016; Haushofer & Fehr, 2014; Mather & Lighthall, 2012). In turn, such reliance on historically rooted behaviors and beliefs, even when faced with changing contexts, information, and demands, has the potential to pose a substantive deficit for low income and working class White adolescents as they plan their futures in an increasingly technological, rapidly evolving, and socially progressive future. Adolescents learn coping and learning strategies, however, from their parents and there is theory and data to suggest that parents can foster hope and future orientation in their adolescents by maintaining parental support, involvement, nurturance, confidence in child's abilities, and aspirations of child's future success (Massey, Gebhardt, & Garnefski, 2008). For example, it has long been established that learned helplessness can resolve with passage of time and an increased awareness of instances when individual behavior was effective toward achieving desirable outcomes (e.g., Altmaier & Happ, 1985; Orbach & Hadas, 1982; Thornton & Powell, 1974). It follows then that even relatively basic cognitive and behavioral strategies have the capacity to alter the socialization of social class in low income and working-class adolescents and their families. Indeed, such an approach is precisely the one advocated for by Seligman who conducted the seminal work on learned helplessness and depression (see Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009 for a review).

There have also been advances in interventions targeting vulnerability for bias. For example, researchers in China demonstrated that a brief (two 20-minute sessions) intervention encouraging

Asian preschool children (N = 95) to focus on individual characteristics of people in photos, rather than race, showed a significant reduction in implicit bias against Black individuals two months later (Qian et al., 2017). Similarly, promising findings have been demonstrated using technology to decrease isolation and increase contact between adults from different racial and ethnic groups, with results suggesting that virtual contact is as effective as face-to-face in reducing bias as well (see Lemmer & Wagner, 2015 for a review).  Although we are not aware of similar studies with White poor parents and adolescents; however, theories, methods, and outcomes should generalize. As such, policy recommendations could include using television and radio to bolster more positive messages regarding the White poor, as well as to strengthen opportunities for them to connect with other groups as well. Future directions may also include consideration of how White, low-income parents can buffer or filter the effects of media on youth.  For example, reality television has been linked to a range of psychosocial outcomes for adolescent girls, including self-esteem (Ferguson, Salmond, & Modi, 2013). If low income and working class White girls tend to be exposed to largely negative portrayals in the media, as discussed earlier, then better understanding of parental mediation of the media has the potential to optimize youth outcomes in this context  (Nathanson, 2002).

   Of course, conducting such work in the context of White low income and working-class families and communities, as with any other work, is not without obstacles.  For example, the cultivation of isolation which we have discussed in this paper make it far less likely that White low income and working-class families will seek out or participate in the aforementioned prevention and intervention suggestions (see Jones et al., 2016 for a review).  As such, these obstacles must be considered if substantive inroads are to be made, but we do not think progress is impossible and in fact critical if our adolescents from White poor and working-class families are to have a chance to flourish.  We look forward to this work.

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|---|---|
| Adolescent Outcomes | • Socioeconomic immobility<br>• Risk behavior<br>• Emotional & physical health problems |
| Parent-Adolescent Messages: How? | • "No excuses" problem solving<br>• Deference to authority |
| Parent-Adolescent Messages: What? | • Social threat & isolation<br>• Learned help/hopelessness<br>• "Live Fast, Die Young" |
| Family Stress | • Parent stress &/or depression<br>• Compromised parenting<br>• Parent-adolescent conflict |
| Perceived Social Class | • Parent sense economic hardship<br>• Parent perception of inequality<br>• Parent subjective social status |
| Family SES | • Parent education, income, employment<br>• Family at/below Federal Poverty Limit<br>• Family eligibility for benefits |

Figure 1. Preliminary ecological family stress framework for contextualizing parent-adolescent status socialization in White low-income and working class families in the U.S.