

Lower Social Class Does Not (Always) Mean Greater Interdependence: Women in Poverty Have Fewer Social Resources Than Working-Class Women

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Abstract

Social resources (i.e., number and nature of relationships with family and friends) are an important, yet largely unrecognized, feature of the sociocultural contexts of social class that influence psychological functioning. To assess the nature and content of social resources, we conducted semistructured interviews with American women living in poverty ($n = 21$) and working-class ($n = 31$) contexts. In contrast to previous research, which demonstrates that lower social class contexts foster greater social connection and interdependence than middle-class or upper-class contexts, this study revealed that poverty constitutes a clear cutoff point at which reduced material resources no longer predict higher levels of social connection, but instead social isolation. Our interview data revealed that women in poverty had fewer connections to family and friends, experienced greater difficulty with trust, and reported more challenges involving relationships compared with working-class women. These findings extend psychological theories regarding how social class shapes psychological functioning and have important implications for understanding the maintenance and reproduction of poverty.

Keywords

social class, poverty, culture, self, inequality, relationships, social integration

An emerging body of literature in cultural psychology suggests that social class is a form of culture (D. Cohen, 2009; Fiske & Markus, 2012; Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014). In other words, social class involves ongoing participation in particular sociocultural contexts—socially and historically constructed environments that contain culture-specific ideas, practices, and institutions (Stephens & Townsend, 2013). The material and social conditions of the social class

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contexts that people inhabit are important because they afford culture-specific selves and patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting (Markus & Conner, 2013; Stephens, Markus, & Fryberg, 2012); for example, people in different social class contexts provide different answers to fundamental questions such as, “Who am I?” and “How should someone like me act?”

Social Class in Social and Cultural Psychology

Emerging social psychological theories of social class tend to assume a linear relationship between social class differences and the type of self that one is likely to become. Specifically, increased levels of rank in the social hierarchy and material resources associated with higher social class are thought to afford higher levels of independence and separation from others (cf. Kraus & Stephens, 2012; Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012; Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2011; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). Conversely, decreased levels of rank and material resources associated with lower social class are thought to afford higher levels of interdependence with and connection to others. These social psychological theories predict that, on average, individuals in working-class contexts (with relatively lower rank and fewer material resources) should be more relationally oriented and socially connected than individuals in middle-class or upper-class contexts. Extending this logic, individuals in poverty should be even more relationally oriented than those in working-class contexts.

Indeed, the cultural and social psychology literature supports the assumption of a linear relationship between social class and the self. A growing *cultural psychology* literature on social class reveals that individuals in lower social class contexts tend to prioritize relationships and community over more individually oriented goals (Piff, Stancato, Martinez, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012); are more attentive and responsive to others' preferences (Stephens et al., 2007; Stephens et al., 2011); and exhibit more contextual, rather than dispositional, patterns of attribution (Grossmann & Varnum, 2011; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009). Dovetailing with this literature, the *social psychology* literature on power and status reveals that individuals assigned to a high power role or asked to imagine having power in a single situation view themselves as more independent from others and also display behaviors that are often aligned with independent cultural norms (cf. Lee & Tiedens, 2001). Specifically, they show greater confidence, attend less to others and to the social context, are more emotionally expressive, and focus more on pursuing their own goals (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008; Guinote, 2008).

While these studies consistently suggest that rank and resources associated with social class will have a linear relationship with levels of independence or interdependence, we propose that the actual relationship is more nuanced. Many studies in psychology inadvertently include a restricted range of social class, comparing individuals from middle- or upper-class contexts with those from working-class contexts. Moreover, given the field's reliance on college student samples (Sears, 1986), individuals who lack the material resources to gain admission to an institution of higher education are necessarily undersampled (Carnevale & Rose, 2004; Stevens, 2009). Tellingly, research in fields such as sociology, which incorporate a broader range of social classes (i.e., from poverty to upper-class), points to a different conclusion: Lower social class may foster social isolation (e.g., Briggs, 2005; Massey & Denton, 1993; Rankin & Quane, 2000; Smith, 2010; Steele & Sherman, 1999; Wilson, 1987, 1996, 2009).

The Current Research

Given this apparent contradiction, the following question emerges: At what point do fewer material resources and lower rank promote social isolation as opposed to social integration? To gain traction on this question, we conducted a series of in-depth, semistructured interviews with women in poverty—who have not yet been studied in the cultural psychological literature—and

compared them with women in working-class contexts. We sought to identify and characterize the nature and content of social relationships among individuals in these distinct social class contexts. In doing so, we challenged the assumption in psychological literature that interdependence necessarily decreases as material resources and rank increase.

We focused broadly on indicators of social integration (Fothergill et al., 2010) and the meanings that people ascribe to their social relationships. First, we used closed-ended survey questions to measure social integration. Specifically, we assessed how attached our participants were to society by considering the number of informal ties (i.e., connections to family and friends) available to them (see reviews by Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; S. Cohen, 2004). As an additional measure of social integration, we also considered participants' implicit orientation to these social relationships. Second, to probe the meaning and quality of their relationships, we asked participants open-ended interview questions and analyzed the descriptions of their relationships. Specifically, we measured (a) their levels of interdependence as indicated by the extent to which participants both trusted in others and felt that trust was a relevant concept in their social lives, and (b) the extent to which they viewed relationships as involving support as opposed to challenges. To refer to these diverse indicators of social integration and relationship meaning and quality, we use the term *social resources*.

We propose that the association between social class and social resources is not a simple linear relationship, whereby fewer material resources and lower rank necessarily contribute to greater social connection. Instead, we suggest that the circumstances of poverty constitute a critical point at which reduced material resources no longer foster social integration and interdependence with others, but rather promote a state of social isolation. Extending previous cultural psychological research on social class, we provide an in-depth analysis of social resources in the context of poverty. The current study seeks to unpack the contradictions of prior research by examining the nature, content, and meaning of social resources for individuals in poverty compared with those who have greater material resources and rank in society—namely, individuals in working-class contexts.

We conducted our interviews at participants' residences or in public locations (e.g., a coffee shop) of their choosing. Because individuals in lower social classes may have limited exposure to typical research methods or settings (e.g., surveys or lab studies; cf. Cannon, Higginbotham, & Leung, 1988; Huang & Coker, 2008) and because they may also have difficulty (e.g., due to limited transportation) and concerns about going to a university campus to participate in a study, conducting interviews at locations favorable to our participants made the study more accessible and less intimidating.

Building on the insights of distinct social class literatures from both psychology and sociology (Allan, 1977; Lamont, 2000; Markus, Ryff, Curhan, & Palmersheim, 2004; Wilson, 1996), we hypothesize that women in poverty will have fewer social resources than women in working-class contexts. First, they will have lower levels of social integration than women in working-class contexts, characterized by fewer informal social connections to family and friends. Second, we hypothesized that women in poverty will also experience lower levels of trust in others, perceive their relationships to be less effective, and view their relationships as involving more challenges compared with women in working-class contexts.

Method

Participants

We recruited participants for an interview study about their "life experiences." All interviews were conducted in northern California, and each participant was paid \$20. We intentionally recruited two social class groups with very different levels of material resources and ranks in the social class hierarchy (see Table 1 for detailed demographic information about the two samples).

Given the difficulty of recruiting individuals in poverty, we recruited participants in the poverty sample ($n = 21$) first and participants in the working-class sample ($n = 31$) second in an effort to

Table 1. Demographics of Women in Poverty ($n = 21$) and Working-Class ($n = 31$) Contexts.

Variable	Poverty	Working-class ^b
Typical yearly household income ^a	$M = 1.43$ (0.75)	$M = 5.10$ (1.47)
Number of children	$M = 2.47$ (1.12)	$M = 2.03$ (1.02)
Age	$M = 34.95$ (9.50)	$M = 44.68$ (10.72)
Born in the United States	100%	94%
Marital status	14% married and living with spouse 10% married and not living with spouse 38% never married 24% divorced 14% other	66% married and living with spouse 0% married and not living with spouse 6% never married 22% divorced 3% other
Educational attainment	43% high school degree or less 57% some college (1-2 years)	25% high school degree or less 69% some college (1-2 years)
Race or ethnicity	43% White 29% Black 10% Native 0% Asian 5% Latino 14% other	84% White 3% Black 0% Native 3% Asian 0% Latino 6% other

Note. Standard deviations reported in parentheses.

^aHousehold income reported on a categorical 8-point scale: (1) <\$9,999, (2) \$10,000-\$19,999, (3) \$20,000-\$29,999, (4) \$30,000-\$49,999, (5) \$50,000-\$74,999, (6) \$75,000-\$99,999, (7) \$100,000-\$200,000, (8) >\$200,000.

^bPercentages for the working-class sample do not add up to 100 because one participant did not provide demographic information.

match the demographics of the working-class sample to the poverty sample. For example, as the vast majority of poverty-level individuals we recruited at homeless shelters were *women with children*, we focused the study on women and recruited exclusively women with children for the working-class sample. After obtaining permission from two homeless shelters in the area, the researchers went to the shelters to recruit and interview the poverty sample. To be included in the study, the women had to (a) be receiving public assistance and (b) have less than a 4-year college degree.

We placed fliers at youth centers in low-income neighborhoods to recruit working-class women. To ensure that the working-class sample was consistent with social class categories utilized in previous cultural psychological research¹ (e.g., Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007), potential participants were screened by phone prior to an in-person interview. We included individuals in the working-class sample only if they (a) had less than a 4-year college degree and (b) were not currently receiving public assistance.

As would be expected based on our recruitment criteria, the samples differed substantially in response to the question "How much was your household income during the past year?" Using an 8-point categorical income scale, women in poverty reported significantly lower household incomes than working-class women, $t(48) = -10.48, p = .000$.² (See Table 1 for full results.)

Procedure

The interviewer informed participants that the purpose of the study was to learn more about their life experiences and their relationships with family and friends. The interviews typically lasted

30 min and consisted of a series of closed-ended and open-ended questions that sought to broadly tap into participants' levels of social integration and the meaning they ascribed to their relationships. The interviewers first asked participants about their social networks—that is, the quantity and nature of their relationships with family and friends. They then asked them open-ended questions about trust and life challenges to indirectly assess the meanings that participants assigned to those relationships. At the end, participants provided demographic information (see Table 1). All interviews were recorded with permission and subsequently transcribed.

Social integration. To provide a simple measure of social integration, participants were asked open-ended questions about the number of relationships they had with family and friends: “Which family members are you in contact with on a regular basis?”³ and “Can you name your closest friends?” Their responses to these questions were totaled to determine the number of family and friends that participants had nominated as informal social ties.

Implicit relationship orientation. To measure participants' orientation toward their relationships (see DeAndrea, Shaw, & Levine, 2010; Na & Choi, 2009), we used Pennebaker, Booth, & Francis' (2007) Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) to assess the content of participants' responses to the open-ended questions about trust and life challenges. The LIWC program provides a series of pre-established conceptual categories and computes the percentage of words that fall within a given category out of the total words in the text. Given our focus on informal social integration, we focused on the categories of “friends” and “family.”⁴

Quality of relationships. To examine the quality of participants' relationships, often referred to as quality of social support (see S. Matthews, Stansfeld, & Power, 1999), researchers asked questions about the effectiveness of relationships with family and friends. In two separate vignettes, participants were asked to imagine that they went to their closest family member (and closest friend) with a problem. They were asked, “Would this person's response make you feel better?” and to provide their response on a scale from 1 (*It would make me feel much worse*) to 9 (*It would make me feel much better*).

Meaning of relationships. Finally, to probe the meaning participants attached to these relationships, we asked two open-ended questions. These questions were designed to elicit participants' general perceptions of their relationships, focusing on levels of trust and the presence of challenges related to social relationships.

First, to assess the degree to which participants felt that they could trust others, we asked them, “What does it mean to trust someone?” Second, to assess how participants viewed the role of relationships in their lives more broadly, we asked, “Can you elaborate on some of the challenges that you have faced in your life?” and coded these responses for whether or not participants considered their relationships challenging.

Coding procedures. We developed separate coding schemes to capture the prevalent themes that emerged in response to the two open-ended questions pertaining to (a) trust and (b) life challenges. Two research assistants, unaware of the study's hypotheses and participants' social class backgrounds, read the responses and identified the most common themes that emerged in response to each question.

For the question about trust, we were interested in whether participants could define trust, how they defined trust, and whether they mentioned trust as something that they found difficult. The final coding categories included the following: showing care, love, or support; showing respect, or being reliable or loyal; trusting people is difficult; and I don't know what trust means (M Kappa = .95; Kappa range for all codes included in coding scheme = 0.88-1.0).

Table 2. Social Resources Among Women in Poverty and Working-Class Contexts.

	Poverty		Working-class		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Which family members are you in contact with on a regular basis?	3.05	2.06	5.97	3.49	3.36	48	.002
Can you name your closest friends?	1.52	1.40	3.55	2.41	3.47	50	.001
Reference family in narrative	0.85	0.93	1.88	1.83	2.21	43	.03
Reference friends in narrative	0.11	0.24	0.51	0.71	2.33	43	.03

For the questions about life challenges, we examined the types of obstacles participants mentioned, namely, whether participants mentioned relationships as a life challenge. The final coding scheme included the following: family-related, substance abuse, education, death, health, work, physical or emotional abuse, and I have experienced social isolation or loneliness (M Kappa = .89; Kappa range for all codes included in coding scheme = 0.72-1.0).

We included these themes in the final coding scheme because they occurred in at least 5% of the responses. The research assistants then used the coding scheme to assess whether each of the themes was present or absent from participants' responses.

Results

As a first step in our analyses, we ran a series of ANCOVAs for each of our primary dependent measures. These analyses included participants' race/ethnicity (White vs. racial-ethnic minority) as a covariate due to the potential influence of race on the dependent measures. We found that participants' race/ethnicity was not a significant covariate, and including it did not change the pattern or significance of our results. Therefore, we report *t*-tests in the following analyses.

Social Integration

We first mapped out participants' connections to family and friends (see Table 2 for full results). To assess the number of connections participants had to others, we first summed the number of close friends and then summed the number of family members that participants named, and analyzed the results using independent samples *t*-tests. In the case of family, women in poverty reported far fewer connections with family compared with working-class women. As for friends, women in poverty again reported significantly fewer close friends compared with working-class women. Overall, as hypothesized, these results indicate that compared with working-class women, women in poverty were less socially connected to both family and close friends.

Implicit Relationship Orientation

We supplemented the self-reported connections to family and friends with a linguistic analysis of participants' open-ended responses to the two questions pertaining to trust and life challenges. Specifically, we examined the percentage of "family" and "friends" related words (out of total words) that participants used in their answers to the two questions. As hypothesized, and consistent with the self-report data described above, a series of independent samples *t*-tests revealed that women in poverty were less likely than working-class women to use both "family" and "friends" related words (see Table 2).

Quality of Relationships

As hypothesized, for the scenario about perceived effectiveness of bringing a problem to one's closest family member, an independent samples *t*-test revealed that women in poverty reported deriving less comfort from their family member's response to their personal problem ($M = 6.57$, $SD = 1.91$) than working-class women ($M = 7.53$, $SD = 1.57$), $t(50) = -1.99$, $p = .05$. In terms of perceived efficacy of one's closest friend, an independent samples *t*-test revealed that women in poverty ($M = 7.60$, $SD = 1.64$) and working-class women ($M = 7.24$, $SD = 2.16$) reported deriving comparable amounts of comfort, $t(49) = 0.63$, $p = .53$.

Meaning of Relationships

Trust. To probe the meanings of participants' relationships, we examined their views of trust. Chi-square analyses revealed that both women in poverty and working-class women viewed trust as showing care, love, or support; being reliable or loyal; and showing respect (see Table 3). However, supporting our hypothesis that women in poverty would experience relationships as less trustworthy, we found that the women in poverty (30%) were more likely than working-class women (0%) to report that they did not know what it means to trust someone. For example, revealing the sentiment that trust is difficult to define, one woman in poverty said, "It's hard to explain. I don't know. It could be put into words, but to me, because I've never had trust, it's more of a feeling. It's hard to answer." Women in poverty (30%) were also significantly more likely than working-class women (4%) to say that trusting people is difficult. For example, one woman described trust as "a really fragile thing" and explained that "I've got lots of trust issues. Once trust is broken, it's not easily mended."

Table 3. Meaning of Trust Among Women in Poverty and Working-Class Contexts.

Coding category	Sample responses	Poverty (%)	Working-class (%)	χ^2
I do not know what trust is	"I don't know how to describe it."	30	0	9.29**
Trusting people is difficult	"It's hard for me to trust people."	30	4	6.27*
Being reliable or loyal	"To be able to rely on someone."	40	56	1.11
Showing care, love, or support	"I would trust they would support me."	40	19	2.65
Showing respect	"To know you will be respected."	10	4	0.76

Note. For each category, a chi-square test ($df = 1$, $N = 47$) was used to test the significance of the difference between the two groups. The reduced sample size is due to some participants electing to not answer this question.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Life challenges. Finally, we examined how participants understood their life challenges and whether they perceived relationships as challenges. Chi-square analyses revealed that both women in poverty and working-class contexts reported a number of challenges in common (e.g., work, education, and death; see Table 4).

However, as predicted, women in poverty (14%) were more likely than working-class women (0%) to report that they felt socially isolated and alone. For example, one woman in poverty said that it was hard to deal with the "feeling of isolation" from her family and having "no support network." Given the reduced social connection experienced by women in poverty, we expected that they would view relationships as a major source of challenge in their lives. Consistent with

Table 4. Challenges Faced by Women in Poverty and Working-Class Contexts.

Coding category	Sample responses	Poverty (%)	Working-class (%)	χ^2
Family-related	"I grew up in a single parent household."	100	81	3.08 [†]
I have felt isolated or alone	"The feeling of complete isolation."	14	0	3.91 [*]
Substance abuse or addiction	"My mom had a drug problem growing up."	21	23	0.01
Death	"My boyfriend committed suicide."	21	12	0.70
Physical/emotional abuse	"I was abused as a child."	14	15	0.01
Education	"It was difficult to pay for my education."	29	12	1.83
Finances	"Growing up in a family that was poor."	7	23	1.60
Health (mental or physical)	"I survived a major injury from a car crash."	7	19	1.04
Work	"Losing my job was a major challenge."	36	39	0.03

Note. For each category, a chi-square test ($df = 1, N = 40$) was used to test the significance of the difference between the two groups. The reduced sample size is due to some participants electing to not answer this question.

[†] $p < .10$. ^{*} $p < .05$.

this prediction, chi-square analyses revealed that women in poverty were marginally more likely to identify family as a source of life challenges (100%) compared with working-class women (81%). For example, one woman in poverty described her feeling that her family did not function as source of support:

Having a mother that's not there emotionally is really hard. Having parents, even though they did their best with what they had, but not discussing things with us, and really engaging like I see some families doing, that's a handicap.

Discussion

At what point are fewer material resources and lower rank in the social hierarchy associated with social isolation as opposed to social connection? By conducting in-depth, semistructured interviews with women in poverty and working-class contexts, we provide an initial answer to this question. Specifically, the interview data suggest that contexts of poverty are characterized by reduced social connections, more problematic family relationships, and less trust in others compared with working-class contexts. Consistent with our hypotheses, and in conjunction with prior research, our results suggest that the relationship between social class and social resources is not a simple linear relationship, whereby fewer material resources and lower status are necessarily linked with greater social connections with others. Instead, our research suggests that there is a cutoff point—in this case, poverty—at which having reduced material resources is no longer associated with greater social connection, but rather with social isolation. The experience of poverty is linked not only with reduced financial resources but also with reduced social resources.

Identifying the nature and content of social resources in a given social class context is important for understanding which types of cultural norms are likely to develop and guide behavior. For example, the working-class women not only had more social resources but also had other key experiential differences (for example, more of them lived with partners), which could have further expanded their access to social resources. These social resources are important, in part, because they provide the necessary ingredients of interdependence with others. Enacting interdependence—in particular, connecting to and relying on others in times of need—is only possible if one's sociocultural context affords opportunities for reliable social connections and if social others are seen as supportive and trustworthy. The current study suggests that interdependence may be common among working-class Americans, in part, because people in these sociocultural

contexts have a relatively effective network of family and friends to rely on in difficult times. However, individuals in poverty who have quite limited material and social resources may find interdependence largely out of reach.

In addition to demonstrating that low material resources and social status do not necessarily correspond to greater social connection, this study also reveals that the sociocultural contexts of social class comprise much more than material resources or rank in the social hierarchy. Some emerging social psychological theories of social class assume that material resources and rank are the primary or foundational features of social class that shape one's access to social resources (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; Kraus et al., 2012; Kraus, Tan, & Tannenbaum, 2013). Our results, however, suggest that social resources constitute another important, yet largely unrecognized dimension of the social class contexts that afford culture-specific norms for behavior. Our study gives voice to women in poverty, a group that has been largely excluded from the emerging cultural psychology of social class. In doing so, our data suggest the critical importance of attending to social resources alongside material resources and rank to more fully understand the pathways through which the sociocultural contexts influence psychological functioning.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study represents an initial step toward understanding the role that social resources play in two distinct social class contexts. Yet, this study also raises some important questions. For example, in the context of poverty, why do women have such limited social resources to draw upon in times of need? As our data are correlational, it is unclear whether a lack of social resources is a root cause of poverty or instead a consequence of the experience of downward social mobility. These types of causal questions should be examined more directly with future experimental and longitudinal research. Moreover, our study is also limited by the fact that we focused on relationships with friends and family, as well as the nature and meaning of those relationships. Future research might also consider other indicators of social integration, such as community engagement (e.g., involvement in religious organizations) or other types of political or civic engagement (see Fothergill et al., 2010). Finally, although our data in conjunction with previous research suggest that material and social resources do not always go hand in hand, future research should sample from the full spectrum of social class to more thoroughly document the nature of this relationship.

Although the current study included participants who are typically overlooked in the social and cultural psychology literatures, our sample had some limitations. First, although it is true that our sample sizes were small (i.e., women in poverty, $n = 21$; women in working-class contexts, $n = 31$), they are generally consistent with sample sizes from other in-depth interview studies in the fields of psychology and sociology (cf. Rivera, 2012; Stephens, Hamedani, Markus, Bergsieker, & Eloul, 2009; Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). However, given that our study is among the first in social and cultural psychology to examine differences in social resources among women in poverty and the working class, the results should be replicated with larger sample sizes in both survey and lab studies. Nevertheless, the consistency of our findings with a large body of literature in sociology (e.g., Rankin & Quane, 2000; Wilson, 1987, 1996, 2009) suggests that our results are robust.

In addition, given the prevalence of certain racial or ethnic groups in poverty in U.S. society (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006), it was not possible to find a working-class sample that was fully matched demographically to the sample of women in poverty. Consequently, the poverty sample had more African Americans compared with the working-class sample. Although the sample sizes were too small to statistically compare African Americans and White participants in poverty, the data indicated that the African American participants in the poverty sample did not drive the differences found between the poverty and working-class samples. If anything, the African

American participants had slightly *more* social resources compared with their White counterparts (cf. Brannon, Markus, & Taylor, 2014; Stephens et al., 2009), rendering our results a conservative test of our hypotheses. Nevertheless, future research is needed to examine whether and how our findings might differ among different racial or ethnic groups and men.

Another open question is whether our findings would replicate in cultural contexts outside of the United States. Consider, for example, the case of interdependent national cultures (e.g., East Asian societies), in which people tend to have relatively greater access to structures, practices, and policies that help to ensure social connection. As a result, social isolation in interdependent national cultures may be less common overall compared with independent national cultures. However, given the larger societal expectation to be socially connected, the negative consequences of reduced social connection could be even more severe (e.g., the *hikikomori* phenomenon in Japan, in which adolescents withdraw from social life outside the home; Norasakkunkit & Uchida, 2011).

Implications and Conclusion

Our results have implications for understanding the causes and consequences of poverty in the United States. The limited social resources observed among women in poverty may play an important role in maintaining their poverty status. Even beyond the negative effects of reduced material resources, a lack of social relationships is a major obstacle that can hinder individuals' ability to cope with adversity. For example, if individuals encounter an unexpected challenge, such as losing a job, and lack the social connections (e.g., a job referral) necessary for finding a new job, their economic position may deteriorate more than it would have in the presence of greater social resources. A lack of social resources can also produce myriad downstream negative consequences, such as poor psychological well-being and physical health (Berkman et al., 2000; Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; K. A. Matthews, Gallo, & Taylor, 2010). These consequences can further contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of poverty by hindering individuals' ability to improve their standing in U.S. society.

Independence is widely considered the cultural ideal for how to be a person and relate to others in U.S. society (e.g., Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012). Yet, behaving according to these cultural norms is only possible and likely to be effective when coupled with the abundant material resources and high rank that are often necessary to exert influence over one's environment. Thus, individuals with relatively low levels of material resources and rank (i.e., people in poverty or working-class contexts) often have a greater need for interdependence with others. Such interdependence helps them to deal with the increased levels of uncertainty and risk, as well as the reduced levels of choice and control, that characterize lower social class environments. Interdependence can be effective for working-class individuals because they are embedded in contexts that provide access to social resources and that afford trust in others. However, women in poverty, whose contexts offer more limited social resources, may not have the option of relying on others in times of need.

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Notes

1. Level of educational attainment is typically used as a proxy for social class (Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2011). Most cultural psychological research has defined *working-class* as individuals who have less than a 4-year degree and *middle-class* as individuals with a 4-year degree or more. Given that the current research uses a more fine-grained distinction between social class levels, we also took income into account and therefore defined the poverty sample according to whether they had incomes low enough to qualify for public assistance.
2. The 2010 median household income in California for individuals with “some college” (the modal level of educational attainment in our working-class sample) was \$51,876, a number consistent with the mean household income reported among individuals in our working-class sample (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).
3. We did not ask about participants’ actual family size; rather, we only asked about the family members with whom they are in contact.
4. We used the *friends* and *family* Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) categories, rather than the *social* category, because we were interested in social resources (i.e., connections to friends and family). The “social” category includes words (e.g., person, give, admit, ask) that go far beyond the social resources that are the primary focus of this article.

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