

# **BRIDGES** **OUT OF POVERTY**

**STRATEGIES  
FOR PROFESSIONALS  
AND COMMUNITIES**

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– Philip DeVol

Thank you to the fine women who spent hours sharing their stories during our interviews. Your contributions truly enrich our understanding of how bridges out of poverty are built and traversed. Many thanks to Ben for his unfailing humor and continual encouragement—and to my parents for providing an exceptionally “resourceful” home and family.

– Terie Dreussi Smith

Ruby Payne’s book *A Framework for Understanding of Poverty* clicked with us as it does with most people, particularly those who work closely with people who live at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Ruby offered insight and encouragement to us as we worked on ways to apply her framework to the organizations that work with people in poverty. She continually offered us books and research from a variety of disciplines, always pushing us to a broader understanding of our topic and turning this project into a wonderful learning experience.

– Phil DeVol, Terie Dreussi Smith

*I sit on the splintery front porch of my cheesy Oregonian love shack and watch these people struggle to escape their ugliness, only to be recaptured by it again and again. Once you go trash, you never come back. The current climate offers me nothing but self-denial, so I'm comfortable living in the past. It's like coming out of the closet—I've come out of the trailer. I embrace the shame.*

– Jim Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto*

*Makes me wanna holler.*

– Marvin Gaye, Singer

*Anyone could tell it, anyone who had a momma who went eighteen years without a new dress so that her sons could have school clothes, who picked cotton in other people's fields and ironed other people's clothes and cleaned the mess in other people's houses, so that her children didn't have to live on welfare alone, so that one of them could climb up her backbone and escape the poverty and hopelessness that ringed them, free and clean.*

– Rick Bragg, *All Over but the Shoutin'*

## Introduction



Much has changed since this book was first published in 1999.

At that time the U.S. Welfare Reform Act of 1996 appeared to be producing impressive results. TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) caseloads had been cut in half, poverty and unemployment rates were at record lows, and there were substantial increases in the income levels of single-mother families. When the technology-driven economic boom ended in early 2000 it became apparent to poverty watchers, if not the media or the general public, that the gains were more a function of a strong economy than the welfare reform policy. When the attention of the nation shifted to terrorism and wars, people in poverty became invisible again, almost as invisible as they were in the 1950s.

Now, with a dubious debt of gratitude to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, poverty in the United States became visible again. Katrina blew away the generally held belief that welfare reform was a success and the U.S. economy was working for everyone. Even the popular media began raising questions about race and class.

But Katrina did more than make poverty visible again; it also has served as a metaphor for poverty itself. The storm threw communities into chaos, forcing community organizations, as well as individuals, into survival mode. Basic community resources such as housing, health care, education, police, transportation, and utilities were wiped out or severely disrupted. Community structures and budgets were overwhelmed. Similar language can be used to describe the impact of poverty on families. Poverty itself throws families into chaos, forcing them into survival mode. Basic resources are wiped out or severely disrupted. Family structures and budgets are inadequate and overwhelmed. Furthermore, the Katrina metaphor can be used to describe some

cities and rural communities. The difference between a natural disaster and the poverty disaster is this: For people and communities in poverty, the crisis tends to creep along in obscurity rather than front and center, day after day, in the news.

So what were the results of welfare reform, and what has happened since 2000 when the economic boom ended? Even though the minimum wage was raised four times during the 1990s, the arithmetic of life was still not working for people at the bottom of the ladder. In 1999 about 42% of persons considered poor *worked* and were still living in poverty. Poverty rates are up. From 2000 to 2005 the number of people in poverty in the United States rose 17%. In 2004 an additional 1.1 million people fell into poverty; it was the fourth year in a row that poverty numbers had grown. In 2004 there were 37 million people in poverty. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in December 2004 that 25% of all the jobs in the U.S. economy did not pay enough to lift a family above the poverty line. In some states 30% of all jobs did not pay a living wage. This country has become a nation where people can work full time and still be in poverty. Amy Glasmeier, in *An Atlas of Poverty in America*, sums up the current situation: “. . . [T]he experiment of the 1990s . . . has resulted in a growth in income poverty [as opposed to net-worth poverty] that leaves the nation’s most vulnerable members unprotected from economic uncertainty and insecurity.”

The Katrina metaphor can be used to illustrate how people respond to disasters and to poverty. To survive Katrina, people used reactive and sensory skills to solve immediate and concrete problems. There’s nothing abstract about keeping your head above water or finding food or shelter. Solving problems minute-by-minute, day-by-day with limited resources is a valuable survival skill that people in poverty possess. In a crisis of a relatively short duration—such as hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes—concrete, reactive problem solving is eventually replaced by abstract, proactive strategies that are based on future ramifications. This is the experience of many middle-class and wealthy people caught in the upheaval and chaos of natural disasters. For folks in poverty, on the other hand, natural disasters create a double

whammy. First, there is the disaster itself, after which the unrelenting and unending crisis, as experienced in poverty, forces people into the tyranny of the moment. This is where the future is lost, where people get stuck solving the same problems over and over, and where proactive planning is difficult to do.

Individuals in poverty aren't alone in this trap; many communities across the U.S. are so busy responding to crises that they too are using reactive strategies to survive. The same can be said of nations where poverty rates are extremely high.

People at the very bottom of the economic ladder aren't the only ones in trouble. For the first time in U.S. history, the middle class is shrinking. The median household income has been flat for five straight years, and only the top 5% of households experienced real income gains in 2004. The structures that created the middle class—well-paying jobs, the 40-hour workweek, assistance with college loans and home mortgages, and employer-provided health care and pensions—are falling away.

The economic insecurity of low-wage workers and the middle class threatens the viability of our communities. When members of the middle class flee the cities, taking the tax base and spending power with them . . . when Main Street empties of viable businesses and refills with pawn shops, used clothing stores, social service storefronts, and payday lenders . . . when people can't afford to stay in the community to raise their children because of the lack of well-paying jobs . . . and when the free and reduced-price lunch rate at the schools hits 50%, our communities are becoming unsustainable.

Our work is to improve the lives of people in poverty and, by extension, to help make sustainable communities in which everyone can do well. In this edition of *Bridges Out of Poverty* you will find an essay titled "The Additive Model: the aha! Process Approach to Developing Sustainable Communities." It expands on the ideas introduced here and lays out the philosophy behind our work. In it you will read about:

- Using the knowledge of people in poverty to build an accurate mental model of poverty.

- Studying poverty research in order to develop a continuum of strategies for building prosperous and healthy communities.
- Theories of change.
- The additive model and how it applies to aha! Process constructs.
- Sharing aha! Process constructs with people in poverty.
- Creating sustainable communities.

*Bridges Out of Poverty* is a starting point where one can develop accurate mental models of poverty, middle class, and wealth. It is a new lens through which readers can view themselves, their clients, and the community. Readers can begin to work on front-line staff skills and to develop new program designs in order to improve relationships and outcomes. The purpose is to give community leaders from all disciplines a start on that path. Hundreds of thousands of professionals in education, social services, health care, law enforcement, corrections, business, and government already have been exposed to and inspired by Dr. Ruby K. Payne's understanding of economic diversity. Many towns, cities, and counties—and some states—have begun making changes that come from her ideas, techniques, and approaches to change.

We hope this book will contribute to the good work you are doing.

## SOME KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. *Poverty is relative.* If everyone around you has similar circumstances, the notion of poverty and wealth is vague. Poverty or wealth exists only in relationship to known quantities or expectations.
2. *Poverty occurs in all races and in all countries.* The notion of middle class as a large segment of society is a phenomenon of the 20th and 21st centuries. The percentage of the population that is poor is subject to definition and circumstance.

3. *Economic class is a continuous line, not a clear-cut distinction.*  
In 2004, the poverty line in the United States was considered \$18,850 for a family of four. According to census data from 2003, the median household income was \$43,318, and 15% of U.S. households earned more than \$100,000 per year. Individuals are stationed all along the continuum of income; they sometimes move on that continuum as well.
4. *Generational poverty and situational poverty are different.* Generational poverty is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer. Situational poverty is a shorter time and is caused by circumstance (i.e., death, illness, divorce, etc.).
5. *This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions.*
6. *An individual brings with him/her the hidden rules of the class in which he/she was raised.* Even though the income of the individual may rise significantly, many of the patterns of thought, social interaction, cognitive strategies, etc., remain with the individual.
7. *Schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules of middle class.* These norms and hidden rules are not directly taught in schools or in businesses.
8. *For our clients to be successful, we must understand their hidden rules and teach them the rules that will make them successful at school, at work, and in the community.*
9. *We can neither excuse persons from poverty nor scold them for not knowing; as professionals we must teach them and provide support, insistence, and expectations.*

10. *In order to move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth, an individual must give up relationships for achievement (at least for some period of time).*
11. *We cannot blame the victims of poverty for being in poverty.* Economic systems are far beyond the reach of most people to control. Factories close, small farms fold, racism persists, and the economy fails to provide enough well-paying jobs. What we offer is a way for individuals to do better.
12. *We cannot continue to support stereotypes and prejudices about the poor.* There are many forms of welfare, but the poor are the only ones who are labeled “undeserving.” Others who receive welfare are students with government fellowships, homeowners with federal-tax and mortgage-interest deductions, corporations with government subsidies, and military bases that are kept open to prevent job losses.

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*When children grow up together in poverty, a bond is formed that is stronger than most anything. It's this same bond that causes so much pain. Adolph and Arnold reminded each other of their childhood, how they hid crackers in their shared bedroom so they would have something to eat.*

– Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

*It still broke Rico's heart to see poor families out for walks, the kids (thanks to television with its commercial overloads) with the "gimme" expressions on their faces. Or the mothers who had no business having so many kids dragging their children along, rage in their faces and the kind of anger that, to Rico's way of thinking, amounted to a craving to both take and destroy at the same time, like the kids he knew who started out breaking windows, gashing car finishes with broken beer bottles and knives, graduating to armed robbery and sometimes murder. . . .*

– Oscar Hijuelos, *Empress of the Splendid Season*

*The only thing poverty does is grind down your nerve endings to a point that you can work harder and stoop lower than most people are willing to. It chips away a person's dreams to the point that the hopelessness shows through, and the dreamer accepts that hard work and borrowed houses are all this life will ever be. While my mother will stare you in the eye and say she never thought of herself as poor, do not believe for one second that she did not see the rest of the world, the better world, spinning around her, out of reach.*

– Rick Bragg, *All Over but the Shoutin'*

*Sometimes, despite all her boundless "dignity"—that wondrous pride-saving province of the poor and working class—she got up in the morning and vomited, not from morning sickness or from something she'd eaten, but out of a kind of despair, the "bad nerves" that come from getting down on one's knees to wipe clean a stranger's toilet; from swallowing one's pride, out of necessity.*

– Oscar Hijuelos, *Empress of the Splendid Season*

## Definitions and Resources

To better understand people from poverty, the definition of poverty will be the “extent to which an individual does without resources.” The resources are the following:

**FINANCIAL:** Having the money to purchase goods and services.

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

**MENTAL:** Having the mental abilities and acquired skills (reading, writing, computing) to deal with daily life.

**SPIRITUAL:** Believing in divine purpose and guidance.

**PHYSICAL:** Having physical health and mobility.

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

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

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

**COPING STRATEGIES:** Being able to engage in procedural self-talk and the mindsets that allow issues to be moved from the concrete to the abstract. It is the ability to translate from the personal to the issue.

Typically, poverty is thought of in terms of financial resources only. However the reality is that *financial resources*, while extremely important, do not explain the differences in the success with which some individuals leave poverty nor the reasons that many stay in poverty. The ability to leave poverty is more dependent upon other resources than it is upon financial resources. Each of these resources plays a vital role in the success of an individual.

*Emotional resources* provide the stamina to withstand difficult and uncomfortable emotional situations and feelings. Emotional resources are the most important of all resources because, when present, they allow the individual not to return to old habit patterns. In order to move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth, an individual must suspend his/her “emotional memory bank” because the situations and hidden rules are so unlike what he/she has experienced previously. Therefore, a certain level of persistence and an ability to stay with the situation until it can be learned (and therefore feel comfortable) are necessary. This persistence (i.e., staying with the situation) is proof that emotional resources are present. Emotional resources come, at least in part, from role models.

*Mental resources* are simply being able to process information and use it in daily living. If an individual can read, write, and compute, he/she has a decided advantage. That person can access information from many different free sources, as well as be somewhat self-sufficient at the least.

*Spiritual resources* are the belief that help can be obtained from a higher power, that there is a purpose for living, and that worth and love are gifts from God. This is a powerful resource because the individual does not see him/herself as hopeless and useless, but rather as capable and having worth and value.

*Physical resources* are having a body that works, that is capable and mobile. Such an individual can be self-sufficient.

*Support systems* are resources. To whom does one go when help is needed? Those individuals available and who will help are resources. When the child is sick and you have to be at work—who takes care of the child? Where do you go when money is short and the baby needs medicine?

Support systems are not just about meeting financial or emotional needs. They are about knowledge bases as well. How do you get into college? Who sits and listens when you get rejected? Who helps you negotiate the mountains of paper? Who assists you with your algebra homework when you don't know how to do it? Those people are all support systems. They may also be role models.

*Relationships/role models* are resources. All individuals have role models. The question is the extent to which the role model is nurturing or appropriate. Can the role model parent? Work successfully? Provide a gender role for the individual? It is largely from role models that the person learns how to live life emotionally.

*Knowledge of hidden rules* is crucial to whatever class in which the individual wishes to live. Hidden rules exist in poverty, in middle class, and in wealth, as well as in ethnic groups and other units of people. Hidden rules are about the unspoken understandings that cue the members of the group that this individual does or does not fit. For example, three of the hidden rules in poverty are the following: The noise level is high (the TV is always on, and everyone may talk at once), the most important information is non-verbal, and one of the main values of an individual to the group is an ability to entertain. And in all classes there are hidden rules about food, dress, decorum, etc. Generally, in order to successfully move from one class to the next, it is important to have a spouse or mentor from the class to which you wish to move to model and teach you the hidden rules.

*Coping strategies* are the mindsets, approaches and techniques (including procedural self-talk) that allow issues to be moved from the concrete to the abstract. It is the ability to translate from the personal to the issue.

## SCENARIO #1: SALLY AND HER SUPERVISOR

### Background

Sally recently graduated with an LPN from a community college 20 miles from her home. Her education was paid for by the Home Health Aides Program at the local Department of Human Services. Because of her complex home life it took Sally twice as long as usual to get through the course. The head of the Nursing Department took a special interest in Sally and supported her determination to make it. Sally made friends with others in the nursing program, but none of them lives in her county. She was hired at the rural community hospital three months ago. While going through school she lived with her mother who looked after her children. Since getting a job she has moved in with her boyfriend who insulted Sally's mother, and now Sally and her mother aren't talking. Sally depends on her boyfriend to provide her with rides. He works construction and is laid off in the winter. He has agreed to look after her three children. Sally and her boyfriend fight often over his drinking, and she suspects that he is fooling around with another woman. Sally has gotten into trouble with her supervisor for taking and making a lot of personal phone calls to resolve family crises that occur almost on a daily basis. In the last three months she has used all of her sick days and has been late several times.

### Current Situation

You've just gotten a call from your kids. Your boyfriend was meant to pick them up after your son's basketball practice, but he didn't show up. The two girls went to the gym to wait like you told them. You've talked to the coach but he can't take them home today like he has done in the past. The other two LPNs on the unit have agreed to cover for you, but your supervisor has said you can't leave. She says there are three hours left on your shift, and you have been missing too much work over family problems. You can't understand what the problem is if the others are willing to cover for you. You thought that when you got a degree you would be treated with more respect,

not like at the factory and fast-food places where you’ve worked for short periods of time in the past.

What resources does Sally have? Mark 1 if resources are very low, 3 if there are some but not enough resources, and 5 if there are enough resources to function in a middle-class environment. Use a question mark if there isn’t enough information to make a determination.

RESOURCES — SCENARIO #1	VERY LOW → ENOUGH					?
	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial						
Emotional						
Mental						
Spiritual						
Physical						
Support systems						
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules						
Role models						

## SCENARIO #2: BERTHA

### Background

Bertha is a 23-year-old Caucasian woman with three children. She just got off probation for beating up a woman. Until ninth grade she did well in school, but in high school others teased her about her name, her looks, and her clothes. Her brother taught her how to fight to get respect and to stop the teasing. It worked, but she was angry a lot, and her grades kept dropping. Bertha dated older men and would take them home with her. Her parents were in their 70s and unable to control her. Several of the older boyfriends lived with her and her parents. The father of her first child took off before the baby was born.

Bertha has been on and off welfare since her first child was born. She has been to mental-health counseling twice—once as part of her probation and

earlier when she was suspected of child abuse and encouraged to get counseling by Children’s Services.

### Current Situation

You are married to a man who makes minimum wage. He is very supportive of you and tries hard with your kids. You are on food stamps. You have been attending a technical school and are one quarter away from completing a secretarial course. Things are now going well for you, and you want to help others to make up for your past. One way would be to take in a 16-year-old foster child. You’ve just heard through the grapevine that the people who make the foster placements don’t think you are a good candidate. You are angry because the counseling you’ve done and the classes you’ve taken don’t seem to count for anything. You plan to go to the department first thing on Monday to tell them how you feel.

What resources does Bertha have? Mark 1 if resources are very low, 3 if there are some but not enough resources, and 5 if there are enough resources to function in a middle-class environment. Use a question mark if there isn’t enough information to make a determination.

RESOURCES – SCENARIO #2	VERY LOW → ENOUGH					?
	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial						
Emotional						
Mental						
Spiritual						
Physical						
Support systems						
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules						
Role models						

## SCENARIO #3: OPIE AND OPRAH

### Background

Opie is a 12-year-old African-American girl and the oldest of five children. She runs the household because her mother, Oprah, works long hours as a domestic. Grandmother, who is 80, is senile and lives with them, as well as an out-of-work uncle.

You are Opie's mother, Oprah. You are 32 years old. You were married for 10 years to your husband, and then he was killed in a car accident on the way to work two years ago. You work 60 hours a week as a domestic for a doctor. You go to the Missionary Baptist Church every Sunday where you lead the choir. Your employer treats you well, and you take home about \$300 every week. You ride public transportation to work and the church bus on Sunday. You want your children to go to college, even though you only finished 10th grade.

### Current Situation

Your employer gives you a \$400 Christmas bonus. You thank the Lord at church for the gift. After church, three different people approach you privately. One asks for \$50 to have the electricity turned on; one asks for \$100 to feed her brother's family; one asks for \$60 to replace a pair of broken glasses. You were hoping to save some money for an emergency.

Opie has the opportunity to be in a state-sponsored competition that requires after-school practices. You want her to do that, but you must have her at home after school every day.

What resources do Opie and Oprah have? Mark 1 if resources are very low, 3 if there are some but not enough resources, and 5 if there are enough resources to function in a middle-class environment. Use a question mark if there isn't enough information to make a determination.

RESOURCES – SCENARIO #3	VERY LOW → ENOUGH					?
	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial						
Emotional						
Mental						
Spiritual						
Physical						
Support systems						
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules						
Role models						

## SCENARIO #4: JERRY

### Background

Jerry just completed a substance-abuse treatment program while serving time in the county jail. He sees an outpatient counselor once a week and attends two AA meetings a week. Most of his family members are heavy drinkers, and several use drugs as well. Jerry is in his second marriage. His wife, who threatened to leave him because of his drinking, is now saying that he is spending too much time at AA meetings. She isn't sure about the AA talk she hears, and she distrusts the AA people. His brothers and mother think that he has been brainwashed by the treatment program into thinking that he is alcoholic. His mother fixes him dinner and tells him to come live with them. She doesn't believe that he has a drinking problem either. She thinks that all of his problems stem from his wife.

Meanwhile, Jerry's ex-wife has let him know that she is interested in him again. His daughter, who lives with his ex-wife, wants him back too, and he doesn't get along well with the two children of his current wife. Both of Jerry's wives have been on and off welfare, and for short periods of time they have held jobs. He has made his money by fixing people's cars, selling scrap, and

shoplifting. He has been in the county jail a number of times for disorderly conduct and resisting arrest, but he has never been caught for shoplifting and doesn't see it to be a problem. In fact, he is so accomplished that his wife and other family members usually give him a list of what they want for birthdays and Christmas, and he will get them what they want.

### Current Situation

You've been told by your counselor and the guys in AA that you need to be with dry people in dry places and get honest (which means giving up stealing)—and that you shouldn't make any major relationship decisions during the first year of your sobriety. You know you're an alcoholic, and you want to quit drinking, but they're asking you to give up your family. You're thinking of taking your mom up on her offer to live with her. That way you could start over and forget about the headaches everyone is giving you.

What resources does Jerry have? Mark 1 if resources are very low, 3 if there are some but not enough resources, and 5 if there are enough resources to function in a middle-class environment. Use a question mark if there isn't enough information to make a determination.

RESOURCES — SCENARIO #4	VERY LOW → ENOUGH					?
	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial						
Emotional						
Mental						
Spiritual						
Physical						
Support systems						
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules						
Role models						

## SCENARIO #5: LARRY AND THE TRUST FUND

### Background

Larry is a low-functioning 35-year-old man. He went to the Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities school as a child and to the workshop as an adult. With the help of the agency he found a job in a pallet factory where he has been earning minimum wage for two years. He sees less of his job coach now and relies on the boss to give him work he can handle. Larry lives with his father in a mobile home in an old trailer park on the edge of town. His father is a manual laborer also. They have no phone and an old beat-up car. Larry wants a new bicycle, but his father reminds him that they can't afford one, so Larry rides his old bike around town. To save money, Larry's father keeps the trailer cool in winter and turns on the hot water only once a week. On Saturdays Larry takes his weekly bath. Larry's mother died when he was 20. He and his father go to church most Sundays. Larry gives his check to his father, and his father gives him a little pocket money.

Larry's boss has taken a lot of time to teach Larry his job, and he puts up with Larry's occasional outbursts. His boss and wife include Larry in activities of the company's bicycle club and, even though he doesn't really ride "with" the others, Larry does join in some of the social events. A social worker in the group has instructed Larry on how to wash his hands after going to the bathroom.

### Current Situation

Your father has just died, and you learn that he had been investing money in the stock market for years. He left you one million dollars! The first thing you did was buy a new bicycle, a phone, an electric blanket, and cable TV. Now you are going to quit your job.

What resources does Larry have? Mark 1 if resources are very low, 3 if there are some but not enough resources, and 5 if there are enough resources to function in a middle-class environment. Use a question mark if there isn't enough information to make a determination.

RESOURCES — SCENARIO #5	VERY LOW → ENOUGH					?
	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial						
Emotional						
Mental						
Spiritual						
Physical						
Support systems						
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules						
Role models						

## SCENARIO #6: JUAN AND RAMON

### Background

Juan is a 6-year-old Hispanic boy who lives with his uncle Ramón. Juan’s father was murdered in a gang-related killing. His uncle is angry about the death of Juan’s father. When his uncle is not around, Juan stays with his grandmother, who speaks no English. The uncle makes his living selling drugs but is very respectful toward his mother.

You are Juan’s uncle, Ramón, age 25. You doubt that you will live many more years because you know that most of the people like you are either dead or in jail. You are angry. Your brother, Juan’s father, was killed by a rival gang two years ago when Juan was 4. Juan is your godchild, and you will defend him with your blood. Juan’s mother was a piece of white trash and wouldn’t take care of Juan like a good mother should. She is in jail now for gang-related activities. You leave Juan with your mother often because the activities you’re involved in are too dangerous to have Juan along. You are a leader in your gang and sell drugs as well. Your mother speaks only Spanish, but you have taught Juan to be very respectful towards her. She goes to Mass every Sunday and takes Juan with her when she can. You make \$1,000 a week on the average.

### Current Situation

Juan comes home with a notice about a parent-teacher conference. You are away, hiding from the police. Grandmother cannot read Spanish or English.

The rival gang has killed another one of your gang members. This has forced you to be away from Juan more than you would like. Plans are that you will kill the leader of the rival gang, but then you will need to go to Mexico for some time to hide. You are thinking about taking Juan with you because he is all in the world that you love. You are stockpiling money. You don't want to take him out of school, but he is only 6; he can catch up. You don't think you'll live past 30, and you want to have time with him.

What resources do Juan and Ramón have? Mark 1 if resources are very low, 3 if there are some but not enough resources, and 5 if there are enough resources to function in a middle-class environment. Use a question mark if there isn't enough information to make a determination.

RESOURCES — SCENARIO #6	VERY LOW → ENOUGH					?
	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial						
Emotional						
Mental						
Spiritual						
Physical						
Support systems						
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules						
Role models						

## SCENARIO #7: JOHN AND ADELE

### Background

John is an 8-year-old Caucasian boy. His father is a doctor and remarried but does not see his children. He pays minimal child support. The mother, Adele, works part time and is an alcoholic. One younger sibling, a girl who is mentally and physically handicapped, lives with the mother and John.

You are Adele, John's mother. You are 29 years old. You quit college your sophomore year so that you could go to work to support John's father as he went through medical school. You were both elated when John was born. During the time your husband was an intern, you found that a drink or two or three in the evening calmed you down, especially since your husband was gone so much. When your second child was born, she was severely handicapped. Both of you were in shock. A year later your husband finished his residency, announced that he was in love with another woman, and divorced you. Last you heard your husband is driving a Porsche, and he and his new wife spent their most recent vacation in Cancún. Your parents are dead. You have a sister who lives 50 miles away. Your weekly income, including child support, is \$300 before taxes. Your handicapped child is 3 years old and is in day care provided by the school district.

### Current Situation

You have been late to work for the third time this month. Your car broke down, and it will take \$400 to fix it. Your boss told you that you will be docked a day's pay—and that if you're late again you will be fired. You don't know how you're going to get to work tomorrow. You consider several choices: (1) You can go car shopping, (2) you can put the car in the garage and worry about the money later, (3) you can invite the mechanic over for dinner, (4) you can get mad and quit, (5) you can call your ex and threaten to take him back to court unless he pays for the car, (6) you can get a second job, or (7) you can get drunk.

Your daughter has had another seizure, and you took her to the doctor

(one of the reasons you were late for work). The new medicine will cost you \$45 every month.

John comes home from school and states that the school is going to have a reading contest. Every book you read with him will earn points for him. Each book is one point, and he wants to earn 100 points. You must do physical therapy with your daughter each evening for 30 minutes, as well as get dinner. For John to get his books, he needs you to go to the library with him. You have only enough gas to go to work and back for the rest of the week, maybe not that. He also tells you that the school is having an open house, and he will get a pencil if you come. But John is not old enough to watch your daughter. Your ex has already threatened to bring up in court that you are an unfit mother if you try to get more money from him.

The mechanic calls and invites you out to dinner. He tells you that you might be able to work something out in terms of payment. It has been a long time since you have been out, and he is good-looking and seems like a nice man.

What resources do John and Adele have? Mark 1 if resources are very low, 3 if there are some but not enough resources, and 5 if there are enough resources to function in a middle-class environment. Use a question mark if there isn't enough information to make a determination.

RESOURCES — SCENARIO #7	VERY LOW → ENOUGH					?
	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial						
Emotional						
Mental						
Spiritual						
Physical						
Support systems						
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules						
Role models						

## DISCUSSION OF SCENARIOS

Each scenario illustrates a situation that arises for people with limited resources. The poor act for understandable reasons in direct response to circumstances they face. The scenarios offer a variance in the amount and kinds of resources available, as well as a variation on the theme of poverty. Use the table below to assess resources and focus thinking on the complexities of poverty.

Rank the resources on a scale of 1 to 5—1 for not having any resources at all, 5 for having an abundance of the particular resource.

RESOURCES	SCENARIO						
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
Financial							
Emotional							
Mental							
Spiritual							
Physical							
Support systems							
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules							
Role models							

Like many individuals who live in poverty, Sally doesn't know the middle-class rules about not missing work or being late. She has brought her poverty-culture rules to work. They include relying on others to cover her workload while she takes care of her kids. The supervisor, operating from a middle-class orientation, is baffled by Sally's chaotic lifestyle, a boyfriend whom Sally cannot rely upon, and the failure of Sally to find some consistent way to solve her child-care needs. Sally has held a number of jobs but not the quality of this one. She never kept any of them very long.

According to a 1997 study by the Urban Institute of Washington, DC, this is a common pattern for people working their way out of poverty. It takes two to four years to work into a job that pays well and has medical benefits.

Bertha is also in the process of change, which can take time. Any major life change is done in plateaus of learning and consolidation of gains. Each step is marked by the loss of some relationships, the grieving over the loss, a change in self-image, the learning of new skills, and the practicing of new skills. There is no guarantee that others will recognize the changes Bertha has made. Reputations are hard to change. In this scenario Bertha has learned some middle-class rules and has made significant progress. The way in which she handles this crisis will say a lot about how well she can use middle-class rules.

Another example of a poverty characteristic is the incident with Oprah at church where she receives the extra money and immediately is besieged with requests. One of the hidden rules of poverty is that any extra money is shared. Middle class puts a great deal of emphasis on being self-sufficient. In poverty, the clear understanding is that one will never get ahead, so when extra money is available, it is either shared or quickly spent. There are always emergencies and needs; one might as well enjoy the moment. Oprah will share the money; she has no choice. If she doesn't, the next time she is in need she will be left out in the cold. It is the hidden rule of the support system. In poverty, people are possessions, and people can rely only on each other. It is absolutely imperative that the needs of the individual come first. After all, that is all you have—people.

The scenario about Jerry is included to illustrate the poverty culture's attitude about jail and discipline. For many individuals who live in poverty, jail is a part of life. Chemical dependency and its attendant consequences often lead to problems with the police. An individual in generational poverty views organized society with distrust and distaste. The line between what is legal and illegal is thin and frequently crossed. A lack of resources means that the individual will spend periods of time in jail for crossing that line because he/she doesn't have the resources to avoid it. The reality is that middle class and upper class also cross the line—but not with the frequency of those in poverty. In addition, the upper and middle classes generally have the resources to avoid jail. The poor see jail simply as a part of life and not necessarily always bad.

Jerry's scenario also illustrates the role of the matriarchal household and the view that those in generational poverty have of discipline. Negative consequences and discipline are about penance and forgiveness, not about change. The mother is the most powerful figure in generational poverty. Not only does she control the limited resources, she is also the "keeper of the soul." She dispenses penance and forgiveness. The typical pattern in poverty for discipline is to verbally chastise the child or physically beat the child, then offer forgiveness to him/her. The hidden rule about food in poverty is that food is equated with love. As indicated previously, in the final analysis all you have are people. How do you show people that you love them? You give them food so they can continue to live. One of the mistakes society makes is to misunderstand the role of punishment in generational poverty. Punishment is not about change; individuals in poverty believe in fate and destiny. Punishment is about penance and forgiveness. Therefore, to expect changed behavior after a jail term is usually a false hope.

In Jerry's case his role as a fighter/lover, his family's attitude toward drinking, and his role as the supplier of stolen items illustrates how the poverty culture can undermine efforts an individual makes to remain sober. Achievement in any area means giving up some relationships. In order to remain sober, Jerry will have to give up some contact with his family.

The Larry scenario illustrates that some people in poverty have cognitive deficiencies. Those who qualify for services from MR/DD agencies may be blended into the workforce with training and the help of a job coach. Larry's life of financial poverty was reversed in part by the sudden acquisition of \$1 million, but there is the danger that Larry will cut himself off from the people who have served as mentors and a support system for him. Who will mediate experiences to Larry if he cuts himself off from the people who care about him and help him?

The Juan/Ramón scenario is included to make some points about the role of violence and gangs in poverty. Gangs are a type of support system. They provide virtually all of the resources needed for survival. Fighting and physical violence are a part of poverty. People living in poverty need to be able to defend themselves physically, or they need someone to be their protector.

Middle class uses space to deal with conflict and disagreement—i.e., they go to a different room and cool off; they purchase enough land so they are not encroached upon; they live in neighborhoods where people keep their distance. But in poverty, separation is not an option. The only way to defend turf is physically. Also, individuals in poverty are seldom going to call the police, for two reasons: First, the police may be looking for them; second, the police are going to be slow to respond. So why bother calling?

The John/Adele scenario highlights the number of children who are in situational poverty because of divorce. Adele is making the slide from middle class to poverty, and she doesn't know the rules of poverty. Adele is an example of what happens when an individual allows her difficulties to erode her emotional resources. Because of her alcoholism, she is emotionally weak. (The reverse also is true—i.e., her emotional weakness leads to her dependence on alcohol.) Of all the resources, emotional resources seem to be paramount in maintaining a lifestyle with some semblance of order. When emotional resources are absent, the slide into poverty is almost guaranteed. But because her financial resources are limited, she must learn the rules of generational poverty. And one of the rules in generational poverty for women is this: You may need to use your body for survival. After all, that is all that is truly yours. Sex will bring in money and favors. Values are important, but they don't put food on the table—or bring relief from intense pressure. So Adele will probably go out with the mechanic, for two reasons: (1) She can get her car fixed, and (2) she can have an evening out on the town.

## **WHAT IMPLICATIONS DOES THIS INFORMATION HAVE FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICE, HEALTH CARE, OR WORK SETTING?**

Once it has been determined that the problems being faced by clients or employees are not systems issues, the resources of the individual should be analyzed. We want to avoid blaming individuals and yet seek to understand and be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. What may seem to be workable suggestions from a middle-class point of view may be virtually impossible given the resources available to someone who is in poverty.

Staff members who do intakes and assessments should be trained in gathering data on the resources that are available to clients. The intention to identify and adequately serve people from the poverty culture should be formalized by gathering the necessary data on intake and assessment forms.

The following form can be added to the client file as a way to focus attention on economic resources. Filling out the form can serve as a reminder to staff members that economic resources determine behavior and must be taken into account when doing planning with clients.

### Resources

RESOURCES	VERY LOW → ENOUGH					?	COMMENTS, PLANNING/ TREATMENT ISSUES
	1	2	3	4	5		
Financial							
Emotional							
Mental							
Spiritual							
Physical							
Support systems							
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules							
Role models							

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*Now suddenly I was expected to sit in a room and communicate with a bunch of strangers in an entirely new way. Compared with South Street, school was artificial and pointless. I had received no preparation to help me adjust to it or do what was expected of me.*

– Carl Upchurch, *Convicted in the Womb*

*Rico found his way and grew accustomed to the coded diction and syntax of his instructors. (In Catholic school his teachers always talked about life and school as a communal experience, as in “We must pray,” or, “We must study.” In public school the teachers were more tentative about their relationships to the students: “Which of you can answer that question? Anyone? You there . . . Anyone?” In this school the teachers spoke in a detached but certain manner: “One must be prepared. One must study. One must be resilient.”) He worked hard, and not for one moment, for all his misgivings, did he forget that, among the sons of investment bankers, advertising executives, lawyers, doctors, psychologists, corporate presidents, he was the son of a waiter and a cleaning woman.*

– Oscar Hijuelos, *Empress of the Splendid Season*

*The nearly uniform advantages received by the children of the college-educated professionals suggest the evolution of an increasingly distinct subculture in American society, one in which adults routinely transmit to their offspring the symbolic thinking and confident problem solving that mark the adults’ economic activities and that are so difficult for outsiders to acquire in mid-life. A trend toward separation into subcultures jeopardizes the upward mobility that has given this nation greatness and presages the tragedy of downward mobility that produces increasing numbers of working poor. If this trend is to be reversed, a beginning must be made now. The issue is no longer one of eradicating poverty or of putting welfare recipients to work but of reversing a trend, the downward drift of the working class.*

– Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley (1995). *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. (p. 204). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

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