

NC-NET Webinar Series: *Understanding Generational Poverty*

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Hope: Hello! And welcome to the NC-NET Webinar Series, designed to share promising practices from community colleges across North Carolina. Today's webinar is presented by Gigi Derballa and facilitated by Liz Watkin from AB Tech.

Liz: Okay, welcome to our webinar on Understanding Generational Poverty. My name is Liz Watkin, and I am an Instructional Designer with Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College. And with me is a colleague from the college, Gigi Derballa, who I will be asking questions of about generational poverty.

Generational poverty is an important topic for educators, as it sheds light on the diversity of learners we see in higher education, and how this economic diversity can impact their learning. As we shall see there is far more to poverty than being economically poor. Instructors who are aware of the more common aspects of generational poverty can equip themselves with tools and strategies to ensure all students are given an opportunity to excel.

Gigi Derballa has a BA in Philosophy and an MA in Literature. She has taught Humanities since 1986, and is the current Chair of the Humanities Department here at AB Tech. She has also taught an Ethics class for Mars Hill College for eight years, which focused on poverty and social justice. So, thank you so much, Gigi, for joining us.

Gigi: Thank you, Liz.

Liz: And I'm gonna ask your first question, which is, "Why is this topic so important to you?"

Gigi: This topic is important to me because in my own life, I came from a kind of a mixed family. Well, my mother came from poverty, and my father did not. Came from middle class. And so, they have a lot of kids. And it's interesting to see which of us followed the path of my father into education in middle class and those that kind of took on more of the values of my mother's upbringing. And I think that it's not just my own personal curiosity, but I think that we all should understand generational poverty. Because about 20% of Americans live in generational poverty.

And despite our cultural norms, our different values, we are all human, and deserve our basic human rights. I go back to

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Eleanor Roosevelt's Universal Declaration of Human Rights that she helped put together in response to the atrocities of World War II. But I think many of those rights she outlined should be foremost in American politics and American life. Eleanor Roosevelt believed, as I do, that every human deserves respect, education, dignity, a supportive environment, and life in a community.

I'd like to add that, here in America, as a very wealthy nation, I believe we all deserve clean water, electricity, medical care, and food security. There is enough for all of us here. We must find a balance of individual rights and responsibilities to make America a true community.

A few of you might question, as we go along, "Why should you support grown, healthy adults who can work for themselves, and maybe choose not to? And choose to live in poverty?" Well, if you're worrying about your tax dollars going there, they already are! Do you know how much our welfare system costs? Our prison systems? Our charity health care? Any one of those systems probably cost a whole lot more than providing education support and basic rights to all human beings.

So, that's why I care about this. I'm sorry, that was a long answer. Let's delve into some of the characteristics.

Liz: That was great! Thank you.

Gigi: Quick note, as we go along. I want to mention that, in this presentation, we will be talking about generalizations. There are always exceptions.

Liz: First of all, we talked about who is this presentation for.

Gigi: This presentation, I think is best for probably naive middle-class people, who don't know a lot about poverty, who might say things like, "Why should I support a healthy adult? Instead of that person working and getting a job like I do?" Well, that kind of person will probably gain a lot from this presentation.

Liz: Wonderful. So, we have three types of poverty that you talked about. And what are these three types? And how are they different from each other?

Gigi: Okay, that's a pretty quick and easy answer. There are three types of poverty.

There's *Situational Poverty*. And that's when you and I could be after Christmas, when we've just spent a lot of money on the kids for Christmas. Situational poverty, is also for college

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students. I don't know about you, but I ate a lot of the ten cent ramen noodles when I was in college! So, that's situational poverty. Means you're not always in it. There's a time in your life you are, but you'll get out of it.

Then there's the *Working Poor*, another type of poverty. There's much to say about the working poor, but that's not our focus today.

What I want to focus on is the third type of poverty, known as *Generational Poverty*. And that is when you come from parents of poverty, and pick up those values, and norms, and pass it on to your own children.

Liz: Wonderful. So, Gigi, given that you have experienced generational poverty in your own family, what are some of the differences that you've seen compared to the typical middle-class outlook?

Gigi: Okay. Let's divide this up because it's so big. Let's just look at the home first. And I'll contrast this with middle-class homes. But in generational poverty, the home itself can give us a lot of clues. For example, in generational poverty, instability and crowded housing is frequent. You might have six people living in a two-bedroom mobile home. That's not that uncommon.

Outside the home, the yard doesn't necessarily have new flowers planted, or bushes. The yard is not typically maintained, unless, you know, you just have to mow that grass or get kicked out.

There's usually in generational poverty not a lot of decor on the walls. Furniture sometimes is leftover, or it's free, or there's not a lot of money spent on furniture. And sometimes I know that, from my mother's point of view, we used to make bookshelves from concrete blocks and old pieces of wood, and that was a big part of my furniture in my room when I was a kid.

Also, in the home of people of generational poverty usually a TV is on. Maybe a radio. There's often a lot of background noise. And, if you'll notice, people of poverty tend to speak at a higher volume than people of middle class. And that's because of crowded housing and a lot of distractions going on in the house.

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Within the house itself, for the people that live there, in generational poverty, personal space is very hard to come by. I know, in my home, with my children, we all have our personal rooms. Each of my three children has his or her own room.

I have my chair. I have my certain cup for coffee, a certain cup for my iced tea, and I have private spaces with boundaries. So do my children. We don't get into each other's space. You won't find that in generational poverty. Things are very often shared, and there's no such thing as a "personal space." Everybody uses that same coffee cup. Everybody might use the same dresser.

Of course, in generational poverty, in homes, you probably will see limited possessions by people of poverty. And there's a reason for that. One of the reasons is that people of poverty tend to move a lot, whereas people of middle class don't move so much. So, it's easier to fill a middle-class garage with a lot of junk and nice furniture in the homes knowing that you may not be moving for 10 or 20 years. But for a rental, you don't take a lot of time to paint the walls and do the trim. And as far as possession goes, of course, you're not gonna have as many possessions because you don't have as much money.

Children often have no bath or bedtime ritual, and so they're missing that kind of structure. There could be a lot of reasons for that. First of all, there's a lot of people in the home. Could be that the mother is working at night or have other things to take care of instead of a very precise structure or bath or bedtime rituals.

Children from poverty often get free lunches, and sometimes take-home lunches. Thank goodness, we do that!

Children of poverty might struggle with self-esteem, because they look around at the middle-class friends, and their classmates. There's got to be a little feelings of "I don't have that. Maybe they're better than I." Or perhaps the middle-class children say, "Look how good I am! I have new Nike sneakers!"

Also, in poverty older children often take the place as parents, feeding and caring for the younger children.

Speaking of the older people in the home, let's talk about the stereotypical male/female roles. Unlike middle class, people of poverty generally follow a matriarchal structure. And it matters who your mother is. The mother is often the provider

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and nurturer. And so that's where you get the idea of a great insult is one that says "yo, yo mama!" You don't mess with somebody's mama! Mama is often the most precious person in the house. Males, on the other hand, can kind of come and go in generational poverty.

Oftentimes, men and women will not marry each other. They could get more benefits sometimes without the marriage. And what is marriage for? Because if you have to break up, that's going to cost a lot of money. So, that whole legal thing with marriage and partnership is not usually recognized in poverty.

Males are seen frequently as the lovers and the fighters. And if you'll notice, in poverty there's often talk of violence: I'm gonna cut you I'm gonna hit you! I'm gonna beat your butt, you know, kind of thing. While you may hear middle-class kids say that, as well, you'll see it more often among poverty. Just like you'll see the idea of spanking and corporal punishment geared more into poverty rather than middle-class.

It's interesting how people of poverty think of their relationships. Sometimes they see people as their possessions. I have a very good friend who comes from poverty, and she even gets a little jealous if I'm with another friend because I am her friend. But that's very common—very possessive relationships.

But then again, family is very, very important to people of poverty. So frequently, a college student will tell me I have to miss class. I'm going to take my mother to the doctor. Or my brother has to go to such and such. And I often think, "Well, can't your mother go to the doctor herself? Or your brother go wherever?" But there's that closeness.

My friend from poverty always says, "The most crowded hospital rooms, and most visitors in prisons, are from people of poverty, because if one person's there, families and friends are so close, they all go to visit.

Typically, in poverty men socialize mostly with men, and women with women. You'll see that more frequently than in middle class.

As far as the individuals go, in poverty your personality is much more significant than it is within middle class. To have a good personality, especially a sense of humor, is great because entertainment is so important to people of poverty. In fact, their motivators often are family and entertainment. If you

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ask, "What's an ideal day for a person of poverty?" It's usually gonna be something like hanging out with my friends and family. Maybe playing video games. Or going to a movie. Or watching a movie. Or just somehow being entertained.

Because poverty often results in very crowded housing, there sometimes isn't as strong a connection as you might see in middle class, where mom and dad might sit down with the two kids every night for dinner. So that in poverty you sometimes will see gangs being very appealing because it's a part of a community that one might join outside of the crowded home.

So, with that, shall we move on to middle class? Let's see how that's different. So, in middle class the home itself, well, if you can see on this slide, it looks like the yard is "yard of the month." You don't see those awards going into poor neighborhoods. There's usually a orderliness and a cleanliness. If we go inside the home, we're likely to see a garage that has tools up hanging on the wall, or tool chests. And you go inside, there's calendars reminding people of appointments and practices. There's shoe racks in the closets, and winter clothes on the top racks. It's going to be usually pretty well organized. Lots of home decor. Knickknacks that, "Look," poverty would think, "Why are you spending money on that?"

A person of poverty may be used to getting utilities turned off. But in the middle-class home, if you have a storm and your electricity goes out for an hour, people of middle class tend to panic. Can't imagine living without electricity for more than two hours!

We go into the kitchen. And the kitchen generally is well stocked with good foods often times. In poverty, the quantity of food is important. In middle class, the quality of food is important. So, you'll see different product brands in each kitchen, in each home.

Usually, like in this home that we're looking at, there's probably a bedroom for each individual that lives in that home, and I bet it's not too overcrowded. We're probably talking about four to five people live in this home, and it looks plenty big enough for them.

In terms of the children, children of middle class often have after-school activities, dance lessons, sports, gymnastics—those kind of things. Whereas, children of poverty don't usually get involved in after-school activities. Oftentimes

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there's a cost for that. Children of middle-class families usually get to have themed birthday parties. [laughing] I remember some of the themes my children had. I think we had "Batman" once. And "Little Princess." Oh yeah, we did the "Little Pony" themed birthday party once. You don't see that for children of poverty too much.

And, not only do children have their own themed birthday parties, but they're frequently going to other people's birthday parties. And getting a gift that looks like it costs a decent amount is a good thing. People of poverty may not be able to bring a gift when they attend the party. I know we had a few parties, where a child couldn't bring a gift. I remember one in particular—didn't want to take the goody bag at the end because she hadn't brought anything. I think I ended up giving her 6 goody bags! [laughing]

Children raised in a house like this probably get new outfits. They go shopping before school starts for this year's new clothes. They get new outfits for Christmas, or Easter. Again, children in poverty don't have that.

Stereotypically, male and female roles are quite different in middle class. Although this is getting to be a little old-fashioned. But, at least up until about 2000, we saw the male as the provider generally, and the mother more as a nurturer. And yes, we know those stereotypical roles are starting to give way, but they still hold a little weight.

Usually parents in a home from middle class are very protective. They want to know, if their children is going to go to a party, who's giving it? Who's gonna be there? I know that, when my own kids were gonna spend the night, I'd always have to call the mom. I want to know more. When I taught this class, actually, one of the journal entry questions was, "If you come from middle class, and your child gets invited to sleep at a home, for somebody that lives in a maybe not-so-healthy neighborhood, that you're concerned about, do you let them spend the night or not?" It's a tough question for some of us. And I had that issue come up with my own children. So, I did let her spend the night. But we called and talked frequently. And then, the little girl came and spent the night at our house frequently. And it was very interesting to watch the interaction between the two. The little girl from poverty was so intrigued with our refrigerator and what was in it. [laughing]

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Anyway, the stereotypical roles. It's the people from middle class who generally join the PTA, or other organizations. Soccer moms—they tend to go with their kids, or at least go to their games on the weekends if they're into sports. People of middle class tend to follow sports teams, have flags (?), and even college teams. People of poverty don't follow the colleges quite as much. Usually there's a connection to the college that you might have gone to.

In the middle-class home, family reputation is very important. It is not uncommon to hear a person of middle class say to their children, you know, "Don't embarrass me."

And, finally, I want to say that it seems that, in middle class, socialization occurs between men and women mixed.

Now individually, people of middle class often have hobbies. You don't find that very often with people of poverty. People of middle class often enjoy outdoor activities: biking, kayaking, hiking. Again, you don't find people of poverty able to do very many of those things.

In the middle-class home, individuals expect and feel entitled to privacy: "How dare you go into my special drawer?!" Or, "How dare you open my diary?!" We are so boundary-bound, whereas people of poverty don't have that.

The last thing I want to mention about individuals in middle class is that reciprocity is common. If the family that lives in this house had the neighbors over for dinner, it's kind of expected that the neighbors are going to have them for dinner another time. That reciprocity you don't see so often with poverty. A person of this home might, you know, send a...in my neighborhood, it's give each other little Christmas gifts. One of the neighbors bakes cookies and brings them all around. I felt bad. I felt like I had to do something. I'm into reciprocity. So, I started giving little poinsettias to my neighbors. But you wouldn't tend to see that too much in poverty.

So, that kind of sums up what home and family life and how they are different, I think.

Now, let's take a look at money and health. In generational poverty the poverty trap on this slide shows you there's low economic growth, low saving, low-income. People of poverty tend to spend money quickly. They spend it immediately, because if they don't, it could be gone for something else. And money is

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so important to have at certain times, but savings is very hard to do when you're poor. People of poverty tend to spend a lot of money at certain times of the year, for example, around Christmas.

My friend I was telling you about, who possesses me as a friend, in November she went to ask the bank to borrow money, based on her income tax refund she will get in January and February, so she could buy her kids Christmas presents. Also people of poverty tend to spend a whole lot at the beginning of the month when they get their money, and then, you know, by two, three weeks in, that's when they'll hit the food banks a lot more often.

People of poverty tend not to have credit cards. And unfortunately, we capitalists are predators for the poor. We offer them crazy lottery tickets, that "you know, I'm gonna hit it one, you know." Eighty dollars later there goes the electric bill money. You still haven't made anything.

Pawn shops are strategically placed in poor areas, so you can pawn. Loan advances, cheque advances. Again, you'll find more of them in areas of poverty.

In terms of health, people of poverty...well, first of all, it could very well be food insecure. So, nutrition isn't a top priority. "Not being hungry" is the priority. Whether or not it's got a lot of vitamin A or C in it doesn't matter. You just want..., people of poverty want not to be hungry. So, they often eat foods that are inexpensive and not necessarily so good for you. And I think of times when I've been in situational poverty myself, we tended to eat a lot of ramen noodles, mac and cheese. You know, the vegetables would have been nice, but when I can get three boxes of mac and cheese for a buck, or a pack of apples for \$3.99, I can afford the mac and cheese better.

Health wise people of poverty are often exposed to addiction, not that people the middle class are not, and in fact, the opioid crisis gets everyone. But unfortunately, poverty lends itself well to substance abuse and addiction.

People of poverty often smoke cigarettes. I think that's an adult kind of thing. You see a lot of younger teenagers in poverty trying to smoke cigarettes. We don't see that as much, I don't know what the percentages are, but...

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I think people of poverty may be vulnerable to sexual predators. Again, that doesn't mean people of middle class aren't also vulnerable to sexual predators, but because of cousins moving in, and crowded housing, and very little private space, the sexual predators have an easier time getting what they want.

People of poverty don't usually go for annual physical exams. And they have undiagnosed physical problems. Could be diabetic, could have heart disease, and so on, and not know that. Usually when people of poverty are sick, they'll go to the ER. Dentist visits are rare, and they're usually for extractions, not preventative, because, of course, people of poverty don't usually have insurance. And unless it's very life-threatening, people of poverty don't usually have surgeries unless they absolutely have to.

Whereas, if we move on to people of middle class, people of middle class tend to want to manage their money, perhaps save money.

Oh, I should also mention people of poverty tend to give more to charity, and more frequently. They're not giving as much, but they do give. Last Christmas I remember there was a Salvation Army worker asking for money. And I came out of a store, and I looked, and I only had 20s. I was going to give him something and I thought, "No, I'm not giving you the 20." I walked by and this homeless person came up and put a few dollars in. Boy, did I feel awful. I should have gone back and given him the 20. But people of middle-class tend not to give money to family and friends. They'll give to charity, but very regulated, and tax-deductible usually.

People of middle class don't talk about how much they make usually. That's kind of taboo.

And people in the middle class generally have credit card debt. And they have car payments. Whereas, people of poverty don't.

In terms of health, people of middle class often get regular dental cleanings. They take prescribed medicines because they go to their doctor every year, and they keep up with all of their health issues. People of middle class may or may not exercise, but they're more likely to understand the importance of diet and exercise for feeling good. People of poverty don't usually look at how the diet or exercise affects them as

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individuals. The focus is more on: "will we have enough to eat tonight?"

People of middle class in terms of "health" tend to go to counseling for stress, for marriage issues, for raising teenagers. They go see therapists. People of poverty usually don't have that support, and they tend to deal with those issues by themselves, which is sad to me, because I can't imagine the stress of not being able to feed your family.

Okay. And let's look into one other little area for the differences between generational poverty in education and jobs. So, if we look at people of poverty, well, a job is usually "just a job." They are often under-employed or unemployed.

Children of poverty can be just as smart as people of middle class. But there has been some research lately to suggest the more generations one is in poverty, the more it affects our brain's potential. So, I don't know where we're going with that I'd like to see more about that study.

But I know that people of poverty will generally do well if they like the teacher or their boss. That connection, that relationship is very important. If the child thinks the teacher doesn't like him or her, they tend not to want to please that teacher, so they don't do as well. If, on the job, when the boss man or boss woman gets a little irritable, the person of poverty may take it personally and tend to quit. So, it really matters about that relationship. Of course, people of poverty tend to lack higher education, so their jobs are limited.

And one more thing I'd like to mention about education and jobs is language. I feel that this is so important. People of poverty tend to speak in "casual register," where people of middle class tend to speak in more "formal register." This can be very difficult, because all of our tests, our schools, our job applications, our legal documentation is all in formal register.

Casual register is the kind of talk you might have with friends, like, "Hey bro! What's up? How's it going?" People in poverty use casual register which contains limited vocabulary and lacks structure. If I were to tell you, Liz, about Jack and Jill going up the hill to get some water, if I'm telling it to you in casual register, I might start with Jack and Jill at the top of the hill, and Jack falling down. Oh yeah, they had gone up for water. The order of the story is very different. It's

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often interactive, where I might say, "Do you know Jack? Do y'know Jack went up? Did you know Jack fell down that hill? Yeah, he went with Jill to get some water." Okay, that's casual register. Lax structure. A limited vocabulary development. And doesn't seem quite as organized. Can often also repeat themselves in casual register.

So, if we flip over to middle class and look at these same two topics, education and jobs, you can see that in middle class, work and achievement are the motivators. As with...in poverty it is entertainment and relationships. In education, what drives people usually is work and achievement. We ask our little ones, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" You see? You're just constantly gearing them to be good workers. "Did you get A's on your report card?" For people of middle class, that's very important. Attending the A-B honor-roll ceremony, and things like that.

Whereas, people of poverty tend to be left out of those things frequently. And it's not because they can't do it. In education, kids, and I'm sure if any of you teachers are listening, you know that children of poverty tend to forget to bring their homework. They forget to have their moms sign anything. Or they remember that a big project is due the night before, and all of a sudden, they need a project board, and the mom has no money to go out and buy the project board (or mom or dad).

So, in schools you'll see people of poverty have very different needs. One of the reasons: it's not that the child of poverty is so forgetful, but there's not a ritual. There's not a ritual to say, "What did you do in school today? What did you learn? Do you have any homework?" That is kind of left out in poverty. So, in middle-class, work and achievement, and we start them young, trying to get them geared toward that way, especially to be career-minded, we emphasize the importance of education. And now, people of poverty also understand education is important, and they revere it, but it is not such a thing that they're tied to as much because people of poverty are looking for food. They're looking for jobs. They're figuring out ways to pay the bill, and so on.

In the middle class, formal register is usually spoken where we try to expand our vocabulary. We tend to structure our language in a way that uses bigger words when we can. And, to tell a

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story, we usually do it chronologically, or have some other organizing principle.

In my own family I mentioned that some of my family took on the norms of generational poverty. And I can tell you that, like my brother, Mark, he lives in poverty. And he speaks casual register. And I can see the differences. When Mark tells a story, I might have been able to tell you that same story in five minutes or less. But Mark dramatizes the whole thing, and it's very entertaining. You'd much rather hear the story from him than from me. But that's one of the differences. I can't emphasize that enough, because I also have a son-in-law who comes from poverty, and he comes from rural North Carolina. He's got a very strong southern accent. And he uses words that make me cringe a few times, like ain't, and you'uns, and...but that's okay, because that's what makes him unique. But I don't think it helps him get a job.

Liz: So, let's talk about some of the philosophical kind of ideas or the philosophical outlook that differs between people in generational poverty versus the middle-class kind of philosophy outlook. What are some of those key characteristics?

Gigi: Well, you know I'm going to say this in terms of what I see within my own family and friends who come from poverty. It seems that the thing that characterizes them is "not taking control and responsibility of their own life." They tend to see life in terms of they're a victim. "Look what happened to me. Either I have bad luck or it's God's will, but these things are out of my control, and they keep happening to me." So, if you mix those driving forces of relationships and entertainment, it goes well with that victimization. If something good happens to you, it's good luck rather than "How did I do that myself?"

I remember once, my brother and I—my parents had eight children—and my brother was held back twice. And so, he was only one year older than me, and we were in middle school together. And I was doing very well at school and I had gotten A-B Honor Roll. And so, we got to go to a ceremony at the end of the school year in the gym. And my dad had to work, but my mom was there. And my brother, for the first time in his life, had also made the A-B Honor Roll. And he was so proud of himself! We sat with my mom. And then, you know, when they called our names, we both went up and got our certificate. And I remember coming home, and my dad asking my brother, "What did he do differently to be on the A-B Honor Roll?" And he said,

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"The teacher just likes me better." [laughing] And then my dad said, "What did I do to be on the A-B Honor Roll?" And I said, "Well, I did my homework." So, you can see a very big difference, in that I didn't think I was a victim. I had control over: if I want to be on the A-B Honor Roll, I will! For my brother, it was a matter of luck.

Another thing I notice with people of poverty for "philosophy" is that they tend to focus more on the present, than people of middle class. Through all the mindfulness and things we middle-class people do to relieve stress, or to be in the present moment, you know, for people of poverty that comes a little more easily, because the future is a concern and a big question mark. "How are we gonna get through?" I know that's true for my brother. So, just focusing on day to day, he gets so excited about the springtime, and the leaves coming on the trees, and the flowers blooming, so much more, probably than I do because, if you ask me to close my eyes for 30 seconds and notice what I'm thinking, my thoughts are usually on the future. And I know that, for my brother, Mark, it's very much on the present.

Fate plays a big role for people of poverty and I think I mentioned that: that goes along with victimization. It's in my fate. It's in my cards to struggle in this life. Or it was fate that we met. Or that my car had a flat tire today. Rather than, "Wow, my car had a flat tire because I haven't checked on the tires in a while." Yeah, you don't think it's anything outside of my control. But that was my perspective.

People of poverty tend also to dramatize things or openly display feelings. Emotion often trumps reason. And so, again, I was in a hospital waiting room once. One of my brothers was dying. And we were in a large waiting room. There was another big family there. It was a lot of people waiting to hear the word on one of their family members or friends who was there. And when the doctor came in and told them that their family member had passed, the crying, and the misery—it was a shock, I'm sure. But many of them were emotionally losing control of themselves. I remember one woman could not walk out. They had to go get a wheelchair for her.

Interestingly, and sadly, my brother also died that night. And there were probably six of us family members there in that waiting room. And, when the doctor came and told us, I noticed how different the response was. We sadly had a few tears fall,

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and we left. We didn't stay there with everyone else, like the other family had done. So, that was very different.

People of poverty are usually more comfortable with people like themselves. And I would say probably the same is true for middle-class, although you'll see middle-class bumper stickers trying to celebrate diversity a little more. Also, people of poverty tend to really stick so much with people like them.

And let me give you an example. If you can relate to...maybe it might be a Hispanic neighborhood that lives in poverty, but you have that common feeling with Hispanics, so you feel good around Hispanic people of poverty. Whereas, if you go to visit, let's say, a well-to-do neighborhood where some Spanish people live, they're not so comfortable. Middle-class, you tend to be more comfortable in any of those.

People of generational poverty also have extreme freedom of speech, and sometimes we could be a little stunned by what they say. Sometimes I can't believe my brother said that to me. [laughing] I remember when we were younger, even sexual things! He tends to want to tell all details! I don't want to hear that! To me that's a taboo! You don't talk about those kind of things!

And lastly, in generational poverty I think there's a philosophy about this "system." And by that I'm talking about the police, the fire department, our local 211's or 911's. People of poverty tend not to trust the system. You might see family abuse going on, and no one calls the police, because you don't want to call attention to anything. Could be Uncle Joe is there and he's drunk, or maybe cousin Sue has a court order for her arrest, or something. You just tend not to call. Whereas, in middle class, people tend to depend on that system, and use that system for protection. For people of poverty, they don't see police as protectors. So, it's a very different world view.

And in middle class, you probably already know this, but in middle class the unspoken philosophy is that you "create your own reality." I know that's the bottom line of existentialism, but it seems to have infiltrated middle class: that we get what we deserve; we get what we work for; you work hard, you accomplish it. I don't think it's fair that we live in a world of meritocracy, and that being of a middle class makes you a better person than somebody of poverty, but we are so geared toward that, and we think people of poverty are not good enough because they didn't try hard enough. They're not trying to

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create their own reality. And unfortunately, that's the bad rap my brother gets often. The driving forces for people of middle class, I've mentioned, is "work and achievement." And there is a focus on the future.

Violence is not very common, at least threats of violence not so common in the middle class.

And people of middle class are often reserved about sharing their feelings.

And they're more likely to, like I said, embrace diversity.

Fate is up in the air with people of middle class. Some, of course, are big believers, and believe God controls, but ultimately, it's up to you as an individual to create the best life for yourself.

In conversations, the people of poverty tend to talk about other people a lot. People of middle class tend to talk about ideas a little bit more.

Oh, one other thing I didn't mention. The people of poverty are very locally concerned with their own neighborhood often, maybe even their own city. But people of middle class tend to be more nationally involved. I think it's always funny to see the "world news tonight" and it's really all about our nation. It's not really "world news." But the middle class tends to focus more on national ideas. Whereas, people of poverty: local ideas. And alternatively, people of wealth are more internationally minded.

As I mentioned, the relationship with the system for people of middle class, they rely heavily on that system, and in fact, believe the system is made for them.

Liz: Thank you, Gigi. So, having discussed those things, if someone manages to get out of poverty and become economically middle class, will their outlook on values change based on their new socioeconomic status? Or do they carry some of that philosophy and outlook?

Gigi: Good question! Because generational poverty isn't just about money. If it was about money, we could probably do things to be more equal. Well, I don't know. I don't know if we could in a capitalist society. But generational poverty isn't about money.

My brother and I came from the same, you might say, "lower middle class." It was in between poverty and middle class. But I think that for most people of poverty, there is not just a

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lack of money, or there may not even be a lack of money at all. And they still take on some of the norms of poverty.

Some of the things that we also need to look at as teachers, and as instructors, people who work with the public: also know that people of poverty may be lacking in support systems. They may not have people to tutor them after school. They may not have the kind of health systems to be a part of that, you know, supporting healthy teeth and gums, and healthy bodies, and exercise. You know, not always are there support systems in place for people of poverty.

Also, emotional resources are a big one. I think my mother had kind of a victim mentality. And I say that because I remember when she had breast cancer, one of my sisters told my mom when she was going in for her radiation to "help the radiation" by thinking of the radiation as little, like pac-men eating the cancer inside of her, and my mother responding "Oh, that's ridiculous! If science can't help me, nothing I do is gonna help." So, I think my mother saw herself as a victim .it was God's fate, I guess, that she got cancer. But I know that my mother, too, was pretty dramatic. And when she got angry we would all run. Not that she was violent, but emotionally a lot of verbal vomit came out a lot of times. It was like, oh, just hold your ears! Because that's how mom learned to deal with life.

My father was always on the quiet side. Emotionally he didn't show a whole lot. You know, if he got angry you might notice he was being irritable, but not at all like my mother. You definitely knew when she was happy, sad, you know. But she grew up during the Depression and her father had died from alcoholism when she was young. So, her emotional responses... Her mother, her own mother, had to rely on the goodness of others and charity of others, really, to get through that that horrible time. So, emotionally I always felt like my mom maybe didn't have proper support systems for how to deal with things emotionally, so it came out as loud tears or it was always loud. Ha! So, there could be a lack of proper emotional resources or we might even talk about "emotional intelligence" here.

Also, for people of poverty sometimes people who have mental or physical difficulties, challenges, may end up in poverty. Again, that's a facet that they are not being well supported in.

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People of poverty often don't have positive role models or relationships to look up to. And their dreams and aspirations are often limited. I remember reading a part from Ruby Payne's book, "Understanding Generational Poverty." And she writes: People of poverty...if you ask the little kid what does he want to be when he grows up? Well, he's not exposed to the kind of people you might meet in a middle-class neighborhood: might be a radiologist, or a x-ray technician, or... They don't know about these things. Who are they dealing with? Social workers. Maybe teachers at school. But they don't know "I want to grow up and be a dental hygienist." Because chances are: they've never had a dental cleaning. So, their dreams and aspirations are often limited out of just not knowing, and not being exposed.

So, when we get into middle class, middle class may also have some of these resources missing, but there's often support systems in place, that we are aware of, that will reach out and help us or is just a part of our life that we don't think that much of.

Liz: Thank you, Gigi. Let's also talk a little bit then about what each group can learn from each other, because as you've carefully shown, there are pluses and minuses to being from both groups.

Gigi: That's a great question, Liz. What can we learn? Certainly, we have a lot to learn from each other.

I, at one time, married a man from Egypt in my younger days. We had a great relationship, for a while anyway! But learning about his culture was just so fascinating to me because I think I related it to my own family: that we actually had two cultures going on within our own family. And just like I can look at the Arab culture, and think, "Gawd, I wish we Americans maybe took better care of our elderly like my ex-husband's family did."

We can also learn from people of poverty. What people of middle class can learn? Well, I don't know. Whenever I'm with my brother Mark, I love being in the present moment with him, where we can, you know, if he comes over, we walk around the yard. And we look at the things in the yard. And we look at the birds singing. And he's so much into this moment. He doesn't need to talk about what we're gonna be doing, you know, next weekend. Just be here now. So, I wish we middle-class people could learn from that.

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Also, the idea from poverty that your personality matters a lot, and in fact, is probably more important than acquisitions—any stuff you might accumulate. And certainly, my brother embodies that. He would much rather, he would say, have time with me at Christmas, than a thing I could give him. And I think we middle class people could learn from that.

Also, I love Mark's nonconformity, because he values his own personality, he carves a place out, and he fine-tunes this all the time about who he is, and it's definitely a nonconformist. But it works for him. And it didn't always work for him. In school, like I said, he was behind a couple of grades. Ha! According to him he had some teachers who didn't like him. But he learned to become a person that he is comfortable with, no matter what anybody else says. And I think that's a great lesson for us.

Now, what can people of poverty learn? I wish that Mark didn't have a victim mentality. I wish that he saw that he can create his reality himself.

The language distinctions: you know, for brother Mark that worked OK. For son-in-law Shane, maybe not as much. I think that in American culture we are expected to use formal register most of the time, and that becomes problematic—the more generations one is in poverty. But trying to get people of poverty to expand their vocabulary and use some organization could be a good thing.

And finally, the number one way out of poverty is education. And Mark says he's too old. Can't learn it now. But he wished he had gotten an education when he was younger. So, looking out for our education and our future and knowing how to pay that bill at the end of the month, being secure about that, is something we take for granted. But I wish that we could all, at least brother Mark, participate in taking care of ourselves—not just in the present moment, but for the future as well.

Liz: Well, thank you, so much, Gigi. I really do appreciate you contributing all of your ideas for this. Did you have anything else you wanted to share before we go?

Gigi: Just that I want to emphasize again these are generalizations. My brother Mark may not fit your friend who comes from poverty. But people of middle class need to understand that the little group of second graders, who seem to be louder than the other children, are probably children of poverty, and there's a

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reason for that. And learn how to celebrate and acknowledge each other's values and norms. Thank you.

Liz: So, we wanted to thank you all for listening. This is Liz Watkin and I wanted to thank Gigi Derballa for sharing her ideas.

We will make the PowerPoint available to you, as well as Gigi's email address, if you have questions that you would like to pose about the topic of generational poverty. She can talk to you. And everybody have a great day!

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