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## How Exposure to Poverty Related Issues in the Classroom Affects Students' Attitudes and Interactions with Their Social Environment

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**How Exposure to Poverty Related Issues in the Classroom Affects Students'  
Attitudes and Interactions with Their Social Environment**

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of  
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Rocco Placenti

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

May 2022

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Pearl Stewart

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

**How Exposure to Poverty Related Issues in the Classroom Affects  
Students' Attitudes and Interactions with Their Social Environment**  
of

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Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program:

Family Science and Human Development

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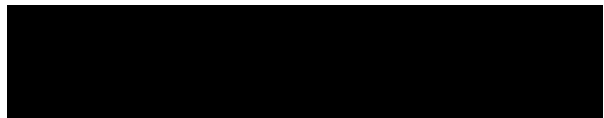
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### Abstract

Impoverishment and its presence are the saddest forms of brutality and have long been recognized in the United States (U.S.). The common attitude of Americans is to view impoverishment from individualistic characteristics in which it is believed that individuals will not want to work if aid is offered to them. People's attitudes towards those in poverty play a part in policy and practice in the American government. Therefore, this study explored how and the magnitude with which students' connections within their ecological systems and their attitudes shifted after the introduction to an undergraduate course on families in poverty. A qualitative approach -- i.e., semi-structured interviews -- permitted the researcher to understand the narratives of each participant, which were acknowledged in their statements. Throughout class observations, initial written responses, class discussions, and full interview procedures, adjustments were made to the interview guide as the researcher and the participants became comfortable communicating. Analysis of 44 students' observations, initial responses, class discussions, and 14 individual interviews from those 44 students highlighted three specific areas: *Input* – poverty meaning on arrival, *process* - how students made meaning, and *output* - students' attitudes to the end of class. Explicit quotes from students are provided for each major area to support the data. Results showed that students taking classes on poverty seemed to understand people who are impoverished from a self-confident perspective which extends beyond the individualistic dominance seen in the U.S. Limitations and recommendations are included.

*Keywords:* Qualitative approach, ecological system, make meaning, meaning-making

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**In memory of ...**

To the memory of my father Giuseppe (Cuciuzzu) Placenti with whom I spent only two weeks before he said goodbye to my nine siblings and my mother in Italy in the year 1989. You always are on my mind. I love you, Dad.

To the memory of my mother Emanuela (Mamma for the family and Nene' for others) Maganuco Placenti whom I had the time to fly to Italy for her funeral. I remember what she had told me on many occasions: "Rocco! You have the resemblances and the mind of your father, but you certainly have the soul of your mother." She was an altruistic human being. She died in Italy in the year 2011. I know, Mom, that you are smiling at my accomplishments. Mom! Thank you for listening to my prayers when I found myself in difficult situations. You and Dad will always be in my heart.

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### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the students in both classes and the participants who volunteered to be interviewed and tell their stories and experiences with their environment. I will provide a copy of this study to all of those who asked for it during our conversations.

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## **How Exposure to Poverty Related Issues in the Classroom Affects Students'**

### **Attitudes and Interactions with Their Social Environment.**

#### **Chapter I: Introduction**

“I think the best way to doing good to the poor, is not making them easy in poverty but leading or driving them out of it.”

Benjamin Franklin

#### **Context**

My interest in poverty emerged when I was a teenager in Italy. My mother told me alongside my nine siblings how difficult it was for her to live in extreme poverty and how important it was to receive a good education. Many years later, in my first year as a master's student, I read an article about the poor and became interested in people living in poverty within the United States. I gave my first-class presentation on this topic and the responses from my professor and my classmates (e.g., facial expression, participation, interest, and questions) inspired me to continue learning more about poverty, people struggling with poverty, and social justice. I realized that the more I knew about poverty, the more I wanted to bring awareness to the topic, and since then I have been very passionate about poverty and those struggling with it. Regarding the attitudes of undergraduate college students toward single mothers in poverty, I completed a master's thesis based on that interest. In my master's thesis (Placenti, 2016), I found that students' attitudes towards families in poverty changed because of taking a specific course which had exposed them to the issues related to the lives and experiences of those living in poverty. Further exploration of my thesis data, observation, and interaction with students, while acting as a Teaching Assistant (TA) during that class, has indicated the possibility that as

students' attitudes change so does the content of their interactions with their environments outside of class. This has led me to an interest in exploring how the information learned in that class informs their interactions in other environments.

### **Brief Literature Review**

Poverty has been an enduring issue in the United States, and it is likely to remain so. With a GDP of up to \$20.4 trillion, the U.S. is considered to have the largest economy in the world (The Wealth Record, 2020), yet we have a substantial poverty rate when compared to other industrialized nations (Rank, & Hirschl, 2021). Recent data from the U. S. Census Bureau (2020a) indicated that in 2010 the poverty rate was up 15.1% as opposed to 13.2% in 2008. This percentage, which represented 46.3 million people, denoted the largest increase in the past 60 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a). In 2019, the U. S. poverty rate registered around 34 million (10.5%) people living in poverty, and the number of families below the poverty line was 22.4 million (8.5%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a). Moreover, the number of females currently in poverty was revealed to be 19 million (11.5%) when compared to males with 15 million (9.4%) individuals currently below the poverty line (U. S. Census Bureau, 2020b). It has been found that at some point in their lifetime, a significant number of people in the United States will experience certain aspects of poverty, such as joblessness or fiscal adversity (Rank, 2004). Rank and Hirschl (1999) have stated that close to 33% of people will have lived under the poverty line before reaching the age of 35. This ratio will rise to more than 50% of all people before they will reach the age of 66 and will go on to 60% when they reach the age of 85. These figures have supported the possibility that a significant number of educated college students will have a professional or personal relationship with people who are affected by poverty in their post-degree careers (Alaimo et al., 2001).

Though there is much conversation and research about poverty, it is difficult to define because the concept is multifaceted. It has been defined in academic texts as a shortage of resources to meet the needs of society, a widespread sense of societal scarcity, or social inequality. Poverty is also defined as a constant absence of access to assets and belongings taken for granted by wealthy individuals of society (Schwartz & Robinson, 1991). Poverty has also been defined as a form of violence. For example, Žiković (2020), echoing Gandhi in the 1930s, indicated that poverty is the worst form of violence. In June 1998, the Heads of all United Nations (UN) agencies released a statement to define poverty as a denial of selection and prospects, along with disrespect for human dignity (United Nations, 2018). It means the absence of the basic capability to take part successfully in society. Furthermore, it could mean a lack of nutrition and clothing for one's family, lack of schools or health centers, lack of land on which to produce one's food or a job to make a living, and a lack of obtaining credit (Brandolini et al., 2010). To address global poverty, in 2015, the UN ratified 17 sustainable development goals set for the year 2030 (United Nations, 2018). In addition, there are competing theories of poverty that ultimately shape anti-poverty efforts which themselves may be dependent upon the definition adopted (Bradshaw, 2007).

The attitudes of those who do not live in poverty towards poverty-related issues and the impoverished are important, as those attitudes can influence both policy and the provision of services that are implemented or enforced because of those policies (Constance-Huggins et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2015). Attitude refers to a set of emotions, beliefs, and behaviors toward a particular object, person, thing, or event. They are often the result of experience or upbringing and can have a powerful influence over behavior. While attitudes are enduring, they can also change (Cozzarelli et al., 2001). Attitudes can also be defined as individual standpoints,



dispositions, or beliefs that may have constructive or adverse viewpoints, which respond positively or negatively to an entity like sets, rules, goods, or events (Ajzen & Cote, 2008; Cozzarelli et al., 2001). These attitudes often appear to be underpinned by an individual's belief about the degree to which responsibility for a person's impoverished state may be attributed to that person. People living in poverty have been subject to undesirable attributions and views, which blame the individuals for their socioeconomic status (SES) (Weiss-Gal et al., 2009). These undesirable attributions have contained beliefs that people in poverty lack motivation or have diminished intellect (Cozzarelli et al., 2001).

Wikle and Hoagland (2019) argued that if students accept these views, they will repeat them when they have contact with the population in their future careers or when discussing the issue of poverty outside the classroom setting with relatives, peers, coworkers, and classmates (e.g., students-ecosystem interactions). Recent literature has spoken of the need for and viability of addressing such attitudes at various points during a student's formal education (Bowman et al., 2003; Dickinson, 2015; Sigelman, 2012). It is acknowledged that students arrive at college with attitudes about a variety of issues already present (Boylston & O'Rourke, 2013), but given college students' typical stage of development (emerging adulthood), those attitudes could be prone to change as the student explores differing worldviews on their journey to establishing a personal identity (Arnett, 2000; Gutierrez & Park, 2015). Gutierrez and Park (2015) defined worldview as an individual's essential standpoints on public and theoretical reality, and it is related to various phases of inner meaning and welfare.

### **Problem Statement**

Though complex in both definition and solution, the existence of poverty has long been acknowledged in the United States. A variety of interventions have been employed to address the

prevalence of and solution to poverty. These interventions have produced various levels of success, yet the rate of poverty continues to pose a significant problem and those living in poverty continue to be viewed in a negative light. Various studies point to the need to learn about poverty and social justice as both moral and economic imperatives for learners (e.g., college students, social workers, nurses) who are or will be in contact with low-income and/or economically marginalized individuals (Constance-Huggins et al., 2020; De Luca & Benden, 2019; Hamilton & Martin-West, 2019; Kendric-Dunn et al., 2020).

Studies have revealed that adverse attitudes and stereotypes will continue to occur toward the issue of poverty and people living in poverty (Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Minaker et al., 2015; Woods et al., 2005), as well as these previously mentioned attitudes and beliefs, negatively influence the capability of professionals to provide appropriate and compassionate services (Salzman, 1995). While there have been some studies that explore college students' attitudes towards those who live in poverty (Ajzen & Conte, 2008; Sung et al., 2010) and various curricula have motivated the changes in those attitudes (Cox et al., 2012; Rice et al., 2017), less attention has been given to how or if those students transmit or share those changes of attitudes in their personal or professional environments outside the classroom. Therefore, this study examined the following question: How do undergraduate students taking a class focused on issues related to poverty, as well as impoverished individuals, make meaning of the information gained during the class?

### **Purpose Statement**

For this study the term 'make meaning' is used to illustrate the course of how students deduce, comprehend, or make sense of the material offered in class and reflect on what they knew before taking the class (Clayton et al., 2020; Mackie et al., 2021). The focus of this study is

to not only examine how students ‘make meaning’ of a class on poverty and those who live in poverty, but also whether the students’ experience of the class has influenced how they behave. Using a qualitative methodology, I identified the attitudes and beliefs of a student at various points during the class. The study also explored how students taking the course were transmitting their attitudes and beliefs in their social environments outside the class (e.g., with parents, peers, coworkers, and communities).

### **Significance**

After a close examination of previous studies, it was noted that some of them examined how there were gaps in the literature regarding the influence of the environment on students’ attitudes which play a key role toward poor individuals. The past scientific studies have delivered a considerable quantity of indication that poverty continues to occur in the U.S.A. and has a major impact on disadvantaged people. Given this, the examination of the previous studies highlighted a greater need for further investigation to address how students with modified attitudes can affect their environments and/or whether they convey these modified attitudes. There has not been clear research on this topic among junior and senior-level college students; in addition, there is limited research on emerging adults validating substantial support after taking the family science courses (Boylston & O’Rourke, 2013; Clift, 2020).

Previous studies related to attitudes toward those in poverty have been conducted with students and professionals in the fields of social work, nursing, and education (Constance-Huggins et al., 2020; FitzGerald & Hust, 2017; Langille-Hoppe et al., 2011). Professionals in these fields have significant levels of contact with those who are impoverished and make decisions with far-reaching consequences. Much of this work has been qualitative in design using a pre-test/post-test survey model. This has been true even when the study included

experiential or interactive activities. This study added to the literature in several ways. First, few if any of the studies examined the attitudes of family science students or professionals toward those in poverty. This is significant because graduates of Family Science programs often occupy jobs populated by or work with educators, social workers, and health care professionals. Thus, understanding and addressing those attitudes are equally important. Second, there is a small number of studies that examine the influence that negative attitudes have on the work of helping professionals, and no studies that examine how those attitudes influence their microsystems. Examining the extent to which college students convey these attitudes to others is essential because they will symbolize the new generation and the likelihood of social transformation. Their attitudes will be more relevant when they will champion those attitudes to their collective groups. They will also make a transformation in the lives of disadvantaged individuals by becoming instructors, members of the public labor force, counselors, and public front-runners.

### **Chapters Organization**

This study examined how and the extent to which students' interactions with their ecological system changed after the exposure to a course that specifically addressed issues related to impoverished families and individuals. The following chapters will cover: a) a literature review which includes poverty relief programs and attitudes determining those programs, attitudes toward poverty and those living in poverty, students' attitudes, and social justice, using education to modify attitudes; b) the methodology which includes the introduction, methodological approach, participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness, validity, and studies limitations; c) the results which present the analysis with themes and sub-themes emerged about the interviews questions; and d) a discussion of the results, implications and limitations, as well as suggestions for future studies, and a conclusion.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

In addition to being an enduring issue, poverty is a complex dilemma since it involves not only the economic conditions of those who are impoverished but the attitudes and beliefs of those who are not impoverished. This chapter begins with a review of the literature concerning poverty relief programs and the attitudes that have shaped those programs. Furthermore, the attitudes towards those for whom the programs were developed are also covered. Next, it addresses the attitudes about poverty and those living in poverty. In conclusion, this is followed by students' attitudes, and it also delineates how attitudes change.

### Brief History of Poverty Relief Programs

Upon acknowledging the influence of poverty on the lives of Americans affected by it and on their overall well-being alongside the reputation of the country, the United States government decided to implement a variety of poverty relief programs. The development and implementation of these programs have often been guided by the attitudes and beliefs of those who are not impoverished (Appelbaum & Gatta, 2006; Appelbaum et al., 2006). These attitudes are the reflections of ideologies and traditions rooted in the United States' legal and social ties to England. McDonald (1995) described the underlying tenets of the Poor Law enacted in Elizabethan England. Those laws reflected several core attitudes of the time where *people will not work if assistance is provided to them*, and poverty is an individual moral issue. This attitude traveled with those who colonized the United States (Backer, 1995; Rosenbaum, 2018). Backer (1995) discussed the similarities between the Elizabethan Poor Law and those policies that guide US social welfare programs. For Backer, these similarities include the belief that individuals have a responsibility to provide for themselves and that the practices of giving help would

inspire laziness within recipients. Others spoke of the Protestant Work Ethic which emphasizes the attitude that individuals could improve themselves by working very hard (Rusu, 2018).

The belief that poverty is a form of social misconduct and is entirely under the control of impoverished people has long served as a framework for the development and implementation of efforts to address poverty (Backer, 1995). Lee (2012) spoke about the Mothers' Pension Plan, which took place in the 1880s and 1890s and was the precursor to our current cash transfer programs. This program was initially a charitable non-governmental effort to provide aid for the widows and orphans of White working men. It was based on several underlying assumptions: neither the women nor the children were at fault for their impoverished state and that in the interest of the nation, children should be nurtured and educated by a devoted mother who should constantly be accessible to provide good care of them. It is important to note two important factors. First, the Mother's Pension Plan was open almost exclusively to White mothers, and second, the societal expectation for those women was that they do not work outside the home. This monetary support was therefore given without stigma (Lee, 2012; Seccombe 2007). According to Seccombe (2007), societal attitudes continued to support the ideology that mothers should remain at home to nurture and socialize their children rather than be in the workforce, and that such women were worthy of social and financial support. A shift began to occur when the government, as part of the New Deal, recognized, broadened, and provided financing for those supports as part of the so-called 'Welfare' program which included Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). This opened the program to all who met certain income criteria, rather than only to widows who were seen as worthy of support. It also opened the program to women and children of color and to mothers who had never been married (Seccombe 2007). Public attitudes toward poverty relief programs began to shift toward the negative as those benefits were seen as being

given to individuals who were unworthy of support as they had broken a societal prohibition against non-marital childbearing (Lee, 2012).

Over time, programs to assist those in poverty continued to evolve but were constrained by and reflective of public, private, and political attitudes. These attitudes influenced program development, funding and eligibility, and service delivery. Quadagno (1995) stated that under President Johnson, the political and social attitude dictated a need to declare war on poverty. During this time frame, the 1960s was a time of political and social upheaval and protest, where issues of social injustice, including poverty, held prominence (Piven, 2014; Seccombe, 2007), and public attitudes allowed for the possibility of initiatives that might assist those living in poverty. As part of the War on Poverty, the Johnson administration supported programs that addressed housing, income, and education. For Katz (1990), in the 1970s and 1980s, conditions for mothers turned out to be worse than in the 1950s and 1960s as welfare cuts materialized due to increasingly negative attitudes toward those living in poverty, which were driven by negative stereotypes. Any such stereotypes were based on media portrayals of those in poverty as being mostly of African descent even though this was not true (Seccombe, 2007). Katz (1991) indicated that if individuals live in a culturally segregated place, prejudice is the dominant attitude due to the social acceptance of stereotypical attitudes.

Seccombe (2007) stated that in the 1980s under President Reagan and in the 1990s under President George H. W. Bush, a lot of people lost their entitlement to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as well as food stamps, Medicaid, and additional assistance because of cuts in funding and stricter eligibility requirements. The 1980s and 1990s showcased the attitudes of the politicians and the effect of these attitudes on the support provided for those living in poverty. These attitudes led to policies that diminished help for the poor because of the

myth of the '*welfare queen*' which held that people were abusing the government's assistance and women were having many babies to increase their level of income assistance (Seccombe, 2007). Seccombe also indicated that in 1996, legislation passed during the administration of President Clinton replaced AFDC with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Among the provisions of this legislation were substantial work obligations and a 5-year time limit (Seccombe, 2007). Other programs designated to provide support to those in need were also met with opposition. According to Nestle (2019), in 2017, the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP), formerly known as the food stamps program, helped many poor people in reducing hunger; however, the attitude of political rivals of SNAP assumed that the program was too costly, and it had inspired habit, scam, and laziness, which were found to be charged without evidence. Finally, the Affordable Care Act (ACA; e.g., Obamacare), which is aimed at providing healthcare to those who cannot afford such services, has been subject to efforts at repeal since it became law (Steinbrook, 2012).

### **Importance of Attitudes about Poverty & Those Living in Poverty**

Public and professional attitudes towards poverty and those living in poverty play a role in policy, practice, and social interaction. Attitudes and attributions are differentiated in connection to behaviors toward the poor. According to Cozzarelli et al. (2001), attributions for poverty are expected to be very much related to attitudes toward poverty, and those attitudes predict attitudes are appropriately related to social issues and likely inform individuals' actions. The content and development of these attitudes are influenced by a variety of factors including personal exposure to poverty, the attitudes held by those in our social environments, and the overall societal attitudes. Many of those who provide services for impoverished populations were not raised with an understanding of poverty or the impact of poverty on individuals and



communities (Bowman et al., 2003). In both cases, regardless of being in poverty or not, attitudes toward those living in poverty are more likely to be internalized negative beliefs that poverty is the fault and responsibility of the individual who did not work hard enough to get out of poverty. For example, people in poverty often experience internalized hatred and blame themselves for their state of being (Chae et al., 2010). As Martin (1996) stated, part of the blame for the collective stereotypes raised goes to the news media misrepresentations, which result in community misunderstandings that underline the prevailing prejudices. Overvalued institutions of race and poverty not only replicate and propagate negative cultural stereotypes but also reinforce White Americans' resistance to welfare. Whites maintain the belief that underprivileged individuals generally are Black and are to be held responsible for their conditions. Those operating under these assumptions are less amenable to funding welfare than are individuals who have a more accurate awareness of poverty (Kraus et al., 2019; Martin, 1996). In one study which included both social service practitioners and social service clients, Langille-Hoppe et al. (2011) highlighted such attitudes and stereotyping. The practitioners in the study were charged with providing tax-funded services for impoverished populations, using a set of rules and service guidelines. Those same practitioners also spoke of the deserving and undeserving of the poor. Practitioners who hold negative attitudes about their clients are less likely to provide effective services (FitzGerald & Hust, 2017; Lavender-Bratcher et al., 2017; Weaver & Yun, 2011). The clients in the Langille-Hoppe and associates' study spoke of their recognition of the practitioners' negative attitudes and the impact of those attitudes on service delivery.

Attitudes towards those in poverty (e.g., mental inclinations that are expressed by assessing specific entities with some degree of favor or disfavor) have also been shown to be

associated with poverty attributions, which may be defined as an individual's belief about the degree to which responsibility for a person's impoverished state may be attributed to that person (Cozzarelli et al., 2001). Destructive attributions and attitudes that accompany them may influence how individuals interact with those who are impoverished (Katz, 1991). When considering social views around the causes of poverty, it has been suggested that those attributions fall into three types: individualism, structuralism, and fatalism (Constance-Huggins et al., 2020; Seccombe 2007). Bradshaw (2007) indicated that public anti-poverty plans were developed and implemented by similar ideologies.

### *Types of Attribution*

**Individualism.** In the U.S., individualistic descriptions of poverty have typically been preferred over structural and fatalistic designations (Bradshaw, 2007; Campbell et al., 2001; Davids & Gouws, 2013; Hunt, 2004; Kleugel & Smith, 1986). European Americans, males, and middle-class individuals have been more inclined than others to state individualistic justifications for poverty (Weiss-Gal et al., 2009). Those with individualistic views point their fingers at people for their financial conditions and social situations (Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Seccombe, 2007). As determined by Moorman and Wicks-Smith (2012), individualistic designations could be defined as individuals that associate individualistic responsibility (or lack) with reasons for failure (e.g., heavy drinking and dishonesty). As proposed by Moorman and Wicks-Smith (2012), a considerable number of individuals in the United States were convinced that personal reasons were more frequent reasons for poverty than social concerns. These resounding beliefs were strongly tied to the Protestant Work Ethic, which asserted that individuals could advance themselves from poverty or prosper with hard work (Rusu, 2018).

As Blair et al. (2014) indicated, these individualistic attitudes originated from long-standing beliefs that the U.S. is a place in which a person's success is based on personal choices. This included the myth that social mobility is accessible to everyone, and that a person's financial status is linked to his or her efforts, gifted individuals who are recompensed and innovative, and individuals who are selected for their superior abilities or achievements and not for their birth or fortune (Kleugel & Smith, 1986).

**Social Structuralism.** Social structuralism attributes poverty to systematic inequalities that result in a shortage of opportunities (Seccombe, 2007). Social structuralism holds that fiscal, political, and/or social concerns and inequalities have been at the foundation of poverty (e.g., failure to provide satisfactory education, absence of reasonable employment opportunities, bias, and discrimination). Fiscal marginalization is a monumental problem for those in poverty (Orfield & Lee, 2006). Weiss-Gal and associates (2009) considered social structuralism to be based on the responsibility of the government; however, Weiss-Gal et al. also considered the inadequate public welfare establishment and public security, alongside the shortage of governmental control, and discrimination based on caste, race, origin, or sexual characteristics.

Social structural perspectives attribute poverty to external and societally based causes. Nickols and Nielsen (2011) indicated that a considerable number of individuals in poverty were struggling to survive, not because they did not desire to work, but instead because they did not have adequate training. To those with a social structural worldview, correcting these imbalances was perceived as one of the most significant solutions to eradicating poverty (Constance-Huggins et al., 2020). Sun (2001) indicated that white women in his research were more likely to choose structural reasons for poverty, while men were expected to select individualistic reasons; males and minorities who happen to be affiliated with social work undergraduates seem to point

to poverty as a consequence of both structural and individual factors; white social work undergraduates identify structural reasons within the collective environment. These same individuals view structural reasons as more significant in affecting poverty than white non-social work undergraduates. Sun considered different groups by their major (social workers and nonsocial workers), by their major and race (white social workers and nonwhite social workers, white nonsocial workers, and nonwhite nonsocial workers), or by major and gender (male social workers and female social workers, and male nonsocial workers and female nonsocial workers). These groups view the cause of poverty more as structural explanations than individualistic or fatalistic motives (Sun, 2001).

**Fatalism.** Fatalism considers the role of poor luck, illness, and unexpected situations as the main causes of poverty. A person with a fatalistic ideology describes the causes for being wealthy or being poor as reasons outside individual or societal control (Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Morcol, 1997). In addition, some fatalistic individuals believe that financial inequality is intended to exist in a capitalistic country and that the rich could provide capital to the financial system, which could be helpful to everyone (Cozzarelli et al.; Moral). Weiss-Gal et al. (2009) indicated that the fatalistic attribution simplifies poverty over issues above which neither the single person nor the public has much power over. These issues comprise destiny and bad fortune, innate absence of skill or capacity, and infirmity and disorder, among several other unlucky conditions (Cozzarelli et al.). In our historical time, our society is more inequitable than it has ever been. The disparity between the rich and the poor is wider than ever – the rich are getting richer, the middle class has shrunk, and more people are in poverty (Jiang & Probst, 2017). As indicated by Jiang and Probst (2017), the saying “the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer” is a sadly correct representation of our financial system. The findings of this study

showed that students, in our current historical time, want to become not only advocates for the poor but they are thinking to go beyond advocacy.

### **Development of Students' Attitudes**

The attitudes of college students are of interest to researchers because those attitudes influence their perceptions of themselves and others and will impact the work they do while in college as well as in their work after college. Students come to college with established attitudes about poverty and a variety of other issues. Those attitudes are formed throughout the students' lives. Though limited research exists that specifically examines the factors leading to students' attitudes toward poverty, some research examines the development of youth attitudes in other areas. Some factors that influence those pre-college attitudes include parents/family, peer culture, media (social and traditional), school life, community, and social engagement (Boylston & O'Rourke, 2013).

### ***Family and Peers***

Family and family relationships/interactions have been found to have a significant influence on student attitudes as well as on their peer relationships/interactions. While Bronfenbrenner (2004) discussed the importance of the family microsystem in the development of individuals, microsystems for college students also consist of immediate settings such as school, teachers, and extracurricular accomplishments.

Other studies have addressed how parental/family attitudes shape the attitudes and behaviors of students regarding a few topics. Research generally points to the intergenerational transmission of attitudes. The socialization progression that allows for this transmission may be direct and intentional by children watching parental/family behavior (Gauly, 2017; Min et al., 2012). The single and only recent study had found evidence for the intergenerational diffusion of

attitudes about poverty (Ron, 2015). Like parents, peers have been found to have a significant influence on attitude development (Halimi et al., 2021; Miklikowska et al., 2019). A few researchers have found the influence of peers to be related to the need to be included in a desirable peer group. Miklikowska and associates (2019) examined attitudes related to racial/ethnic prejudice and found strong relationships between prejudice and the attitudes of peers. Renn and Arnold (2003) articulated the influence of peer culture on the behavior and attitudes of college students, while Seddig (2020) found evidence of peer influence on attitudes among early/middle adolescents and emerging adults. Hamlimi et al. (2021) supported many others in the importance of peers in the lives of adolescents in the development of gender roles.

Selçuk and colleagues (2020) observed that the disrupted relationship between individuals' parents might also make people think that life will get worse for themselves and their families, if parents, who offer safety, are leading negotiators in the family. Arnold and colleagues (2012) uncovered the necessity for family involvement, as well as the improvement of family participation in school activities. Some scholars spoke about the importance of the intergenerational transmission of attitudes toward poverty as values over the family life course (Gauly, 2017; Min et al., 2012; Ron, 2015). Wikle and Hoagland (2019) discovered that young people uncovered interactions to be significant, pleasant, or less tense when spending time with trusted adults which may lead to modeling the behavior and attitudes of those adults.

### ***Media***

While emerging adults' characteristics such as family belief systems, peers, and experiences influence their attitudes, the media (e.g., television, print, movies, social media) has a particularly significant effect on their ways of thinking (Frank & Rice, 2017; Hopkins, 2009; Martin, 1996; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013). The media can influence individuals in forming

opinions about those in poverty as the media determines what news stories are presented to the public (Rose & Baumgartner). Hopkins (2009) indicated that the media often endorses the current characterization of minorities (e.g., African Americans) and stereotypes in magazines and on television as visual representations of poverty. This supports Martin (1996), who demonstrated how the news media misrepresented those in poverty as being predominantly Black and being involved in negative activities when, in fact, White non-Hispanics represented the largest numbers of those in poverty. Yamamoto and Kushin (2014) suggested that the broadcasts produced by well-known television news hosts influence the assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals in almost every house in the U.S.

Social media platforms increasingly serve as a source of news and as shapers of attitudes and behavior (Bonnievie et al., 2020), but those sources are often not subject to fact-checking (Martin, 1996; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013). Bonnievie & associates (2020) found positive results in using social media platforms and influencers to encourage positive attitudes toward vaccine use. Social media is also increasingly used as a tool for teaching informal settings. Njuguna et al. (2020) addressed students' attitudes toward their media use in the learning setting and how these outlets anticipate their effectiveness for work. Flores Vizcaya-Moreno and Perez-Canaveras (2020) found a relationship between the school time of the students with the utilization of Twitter as public media and the inclination of instruction methods such as Facebook and Twitter for learning updates, shared gaming, and the flipped classroom. For Vannucci et al. (2020), the social media environment intensified peer-influenced developments that had an emotional impact on adolescents' thoughts and conduct.

### ***Changing Attitudes During Emerging Adulthood***

Though students enter college with established attitudes, the college years have been identified as a critical time in the human development cycle. For most undergraduate students, the college years are firmly fixed in the developmental stage called emerging adulthood (Seider et al., 2011), which has been established as occurring between the ages of 18 to 29 (Arnett, 2016; Gutierrez & Park, 2015; Twenge, 2013). Emerging adulthood has grown to be defined as a distinctive phase in human development during which a person has concluded the tasks of their teenage years but has not yet fully acquired the roles and responsibilities of an adult (Arnett, 2000; Gutierrez & Park, 2015). During this time, college students begin to take greater ownership over themselves and their identities. They utilize their experiences from their childhood to build their adult identity and attitudes. They are open to new information and experiences which might reshape those previously held attitudes and beliefs (Arnett, 2016; Constance-Huggins et al., 2020; Seider et al., 2011). Individuals at this stage might review the principles and awareness that they had formed earlier in their lives as they attempt to cultivate wisdom and objectivity that define a distinct personality (Arnett, 2000). Thus, these years seem to be an expedient time to expose students to the problems and ramifications of poverty, as well as to the concept of social justice, as such exposure has the possibility of shaping future behavior and attitudes.

Gutierrez and Park (2015) suggested that in the phase of emerging adulthood, the individual's identity holds plasticity that may be shaped by a range of principles and suppositions that are revealed in a college setting. The researchers indicated that from educational experiences, the emerging adult college student forms their attitudes and visions for the future. This future may be personal but might also encompass a larger social or global context often referred to as a *worldview*. Arnett (2000) and Gutierrez and Park agreed that their worldview



could be altered among emerging adults and that this could be a normal development. Loignon and associates (2012) suggested that dental students had individualistic worldviews about people in poverty based on their limited contact with poor individuals in their environment. Loignon et al. indicated that many adults accused poor people of being reluctant toward employment, but the practical experiences of other students disproved the accusations against individuals in poverty. Instead, they viewed people in poverty as individuals burdened with multiple jobs with minimum wage and not being able to pay the bills and save any money (Loignon et al., 2012). Regarding the experience in class, Gutierrez and Park indicated that throughout emerging adulthood, students' worldviews are unstable, and this offers a chance to shape individuality and affect short-term and long-term decision-making. Gutierrez and Park identified undergraduate students as existing in a period of reevaluation and modification.

### **Social Justice**

Different studies reveal that social justice is related to peoples' attitudes towards those in poverty. According to Hill and associates (2016), if college students are not arriving at courses with a solid awareness of organizational explanations of poverty, instructors must be capable of identifying students' attitudes toward people in poverty and work with students to join in systemic, ecological, and social justice attitudes into their training. Hill and associates concluded that introducing the concept of social justice as it relates to poverty might be an appropriate addition to that changing worldview. Though the exact definition of social justice varies with the nature of specific academic and practice disciplines, there is a general agreement about the core of those definitions: Equal rights, equal opportunity, and equal treatment. Yet, this definition still does not address societal redistribution of resources, as the rich get richer while the poor get poorer (Jiang & Probst, 2017). In conceptualizing social justice and its roles in the development

of attitudes and behaviors for undergraduates in a family science program, Garcia-Reid, and associates (2016) described it as a development and a goal. It is a development in which people organize a conversation of opinions and ideas that consist of the functioning for the goals of mutual interest among social groups, by changing the rules to control injustice and performing as advocates for revisions (Garcia-Reid et al., 2016). The means to achieve social justice (e.g., equity, impartiality, fairness, parity, equality) as a goal is by adding the opinions of undergraduate family science students who study programs whitehanded on understanding marginalization, repression, and the control of organizations that sustain these imbalances (Garcia-Reid et al., 2016; Kendrick-Dunn, et al., 2020). Put simply, undergraduate family science students can create change in their historical time so that the wealth gap is smaller (Jiang & Probst, 2017)

Several organizations consider social justice essential to their work and missions. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) defines social justice as the pride and value of the individual, and the right to independence (Hamilton, & Martin-West, 2019). “Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights, and opportunities. Social workers aim to open the doors of access and opportunity for everyone, particularly those in greatest need” (Suvarnakhandi, 2020, p. 2). Social work education aims to provide students with the skills to provide social services with an emphasis on social justice, but individual attitudes towards race and poverty affect the effectiveness of their practice in the field (Constance-Huggins et al., 2020). According to Constance-Huggins et al. (2020), some investigations have discovered the outcome of social work education on students’ future work in the field is directly correlated. Education is seen as the achievement of awareness, abilities, ethics, principles, views, and conduct when it comes to poverty. The National Association of

School psychologists (NASP's) Board of Directors defined social justice as both a development and a goal, requiring action and social justice. Action includes defending the educational rights, possibilities, and well-being of all individuals; social justice primarily helps people whose views have been silenced and individuals who have been overlooked when their needs are ignored (National Association of School Psychologists, 2017). Kendrick-Dunn et al. (2020) suggested that scholars who advocate for social justice are not all free from bias, but that they are aware they do have a certain amount of bias. As a result, they ensure that their biases and those of others do not harm those in need of support. Social justice (or collective impartiality) interconnected with poverty has been the subject of many recent studies. It has been argued that financial assistance will help to lower poverty numbers (Mulvale & Franked, 2016). Hamilton and Martin-West (2019) have argued that current U.S. welfare policies violate the guarantees of social justice, self-respect, and self-esteem of low-income workers and their right to free will.

### **Using Education to Change Attitudes**

As the United States acknowledged the persistence and level of poverty, some sought to address thought Some saw an opportunity to begin their development during formal education. The study of beliefs about and attitudes toward those in poverty has covered the life span. These attitudes begin to form in early childhood and change that occur into and throughout adulthood years, these changes may occur at any time because of personal and educational experiences (Sigelman, 2012). In his study of school-aged children, Sigelman (2012) found that children have some understanding of poverty from a young age but that their attitudes toward and attributions for poverty change as they age. His findings suggested that younger children had benevolent attitudes toward those in poverty. Older children were found to be less benevolent which Sigelman suggested may be due to their experience having been driven by negative stereotypes

about those who are impoverished. Boylston and O'Rourke (2013) specified that while real attitudinal change requires some time to grow, educators with courses of study that deliberately focus on poverty and poverty-related issues, have a discrete opportunity to influence the growth of positive thinking and the anticipation of ethical and judgmental perspectives.

Depending on the stage of life, available resources, perception of need, and educational goals, differing strategies may be employed in the educational development. Some researchers saw the need for self-awareness and self-reflection on the part of professionals as essential parts of any intention to ameliorate the problem of poverty and people in poverty (Constance-Huggins et al., 2020; Steck et al., 2011). Salzman (1995) indicated that for obstacles to be overcome, it is essential to recognize and comprehend the experiences of those in poverty. Some studies have shown that the attitudes of learners who were initially derisive towards those in poverty change once they are exposed to multiracial and diversity exercises which expand their awareness (Steck et al., 2011). Researchers have maintained that though multiracial exercises within the assisting social services world have often accepted that learners' multiracial awareness grows consequently of the exercise; few studies have been prepared concerning the degree of attitudinal variation (Toporek & Pope-Davis, 2005). Many aspects of poverty have stretched beyond financial signs to embrace various phases of a person's life. Equally, people in poverty might be understood as a part of a distinct group about whom students in training must not only be educated but the personal attitudes of those students must also be challenged. Poverty attitudes and their connection to nursing education, have been widely studied as nurses often provide services for impoverished populations (Sword et al., 2004). Research has also indicated that after receiving higher education, students usually assumed constructional reasons for poverty (Sun, 2001). Since multiracial exercises were most frequently restricted to topics connected to race

(e.g., individuals' physical characteristics) and ethnicity (e.g., cultural, or regional factors, ancestry, and nationality), the presence of diverse cultural exercises, as is identified with SES and poverty, could have assisted students in allowing for sociopolitical structures when working with various cultures (Toporek & Pope-Davis, 2005). There were strong warnings that SES, explicitly poverty, is related to definite adverse attitudes and typecasts (Sutton, 2003).

### *Use of Simulations*

Poverty simulation exercises have been widely used to expose students to the issues and experiences of those in poverty. Simulation is used to teach, learn, and familiarize actual-world experiences in classrooms and other organized environments (Simones, 2008). Lateef (2010) indicated that simulation-based training advances knowledge increases self-assurance and gets learners ready for unexpected circumstances when related to family and health sciences simulation training. It can be useful for increasing awareness and expertise. Roll and Browne (2020) suggested that poverty simulation has been recognized as an encouraging method for training about poverty. For Cox et al. (2012), the practice of poverty simulation training also serves to endorse the understanding of the day-to-day struggle of people in poverty. De Luca and Benden (2019) utilized another form of active and experimental learning in social justice classrooms where students are asked to simply feed themselves using the allowed daily allotment of \$4.50 per day and record their comments. This method not only addresses professional skills but also teaches students or social workers to successfully deliver social services with sympathy. Requiring involvement with the poor might benefit the students to become conscious that people in poverty are not so much different than individuals who are not in poverty (Smith-Campbell, 2005).

The ultimate benefit of this kind of simulation is that people of diverse financial, governmental, and social groups can be exposed to another's truth and existing situations so an improved understanding can be achieved (Roll & Browne, 2020). Researchers have indicated that the use of simulations as part of the curriculum for learners in schools through the Health Sciences reduced bias and destructive stereotypes towards poor individuals, improved awareness of the struggle faced by people in poverty, and allowed students to encounter the poor. As a result, this has allowed learners to gain enriched attitudes towards and acceptance of poverty.

**Different Simulations.** Different scholars investigated the utility of various simulations. Nickols and Nielsen (2011) reported that *Welcome to State Poverty* is one of the simulations in which learners explore the lives of families in poverty with real settings and closing dates; this simulation helps individuals comprehend the veracity of poverty. Quantitative analysis indicates that simulations encouraged additional awareness of the environments supporting poverty. The outcomes reveal that poverty simulation builds a further nuanced sense of poverty (Nickols & Nielsen, 2011). In addition, students who have experienced simulations such as Community Action Poverty Simulations (CAPS), had shown signs of improved empathy towards the poor upon successful completion of the program. These simulations are team-building exercises with a predominant message; an outcome when exploring the utilization of CAPS simulations is the renovative disposition of the knowledge achieved during the poverty replication. Renovative learning is a phrase that involves more than just the accumulation of new experiences for a person; it suggests a transformation in both attitude and engagement (Rice et al., 2017). For King (2011), empathy plays a central role in the healing bond, and the role of empathy is noticeable and enduring; moreover, empathy is essential to helping defenseless people and seeing human encounters from an environmental and public perspective. Confirmation of the meaning of

empathy and the role it shows is public work that can be originated in social science education, classroom involvements, and research exercises; largely, the field of public labor has positively depended on empathy as a crucial strategy for assisting individuals (Bowman et al., 2003; Frank & Rice, 2017; King, 2011). Davidson et al. (2009) spoke about another simulation called the ‘Paper Bag Play’ in which the goal is to pretend to be living in India and play as a real member of that society. The student would be making money by constructing paper bags; the bags are then invented in a small store, which vends the bags to the public at the cost-of-living value. The outcome of the ‘Paper Bag Play’ simulation is that the students build a stronger awareness of poverty, and how complicated the development procedure is when put into practice (Davidson et al., 2009).

Furthermore, there is the online simulation (game) called SPENT in which students learn that a distinct undesirable variation in life can cause a chain of disastrous actions which can cause poverty (McKinney, 2011; Reid & Evanson, 2016; Urban Ministries of Durham (UMD), 2014). Other than SPENT, during the semester, Dickinson (2015) considered social provision and college students’ attitudes toward poverty and people in poverty without a home. Afterward, she instructed the students to work on varied projects (e.g., read a book related to people in poverty, have a job in a daycare administrative center, and also made-up short-term occupations in a homeless accommodation or low-income households). She observed that the semester converted the students’ attitudes toward poor families in a positive way.

### ***Education Development as Influences on Poverty Attitudes***

Scholars have suggested ways that education and face-to-face interaction with those who are impoverished influence people’s attitudes. According to Bennett (2008), known issues related to poverty and people in poverty are indispensable to effectively working in any number

of social institutions. Bennett suggested that by practicing and attaining concrete preparations on social matters, students will connect with needy people whose environment inspires awareness of the everyday battle confronted by the poor. In-class techniques such as content-specific reading followed by class discussion, or the use of poverty simulation exercises have been highlighted.

**Class Discussion.** Class discussion is one way in which students influence other students' attitudes toward people in poverty. Classroom discussion may offer students a chance to share their beliefs, an issue raised freely by an undergraduate, or to, indeed, listen to the beliefs of others who may have dissimilar experiences and thus improve a more distinct understanding of the course content whether the focus of discussion is a specific reading or an activity. This is analogous to the findings of Smith et al. (2011). Class discussions may be essential when the course content from time-to-time contests facts and truths that may guide students' worldviews. As Lehesvuori et al. (2013) suggested, class discussion is essential when it initiates observer students' construction of consciousness. The work of Hadjioannou (2007) highlighted the importance of discussion and provided two critical suggestions that seem germane to discussions of poverty and attitudes toward those in poverty. First, there must be an understanding that students' thoughts are welcome and valued. Further, the aim of the discussion is not *parroting* the ideas of the instructor. The second condition is the expectation of civility even if there is disagreement. Disagreement can be seen as an opportunity for learning and growth.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

#### **Brief Introduction**

Chapter three defines the investigation method and design for this study. This chapter begins with a restatement of the research question and a statement of researcher positionality as



it relates to the study. Next, is a description of the methodological approach including eligibility, and recruitment procedures. Afterward, the section describes the data collection methods which include individual written response questions (see Appendix A) at the beginning of class, time spent in class as a participant-observer, and interviews. In addition, the section includes a description of the data preparation with transcription and analytic strategies. Lastly, the section addresses us trustworthiness validity, and limitations of the study.

***Research Question:***

How do undergraduate students taking a class focused on issues related to poverty and impoverished individuals, make meaning of the information gained during the class?

**Researcher Positionality**

Recognizing and acknowledging researcher positionality is a significant part of qualitative research. In speaking of positionality, Holmes (2020) highlighted the idea that researchers are tangled by their values, beliefs, and views, and that researchers bring those unique aspects of themselves to their research. Other important factors might include personal demographics such as race, religion, age, political view, and socioeconomic status (Haynes 2012; Holmes, 2020; Secules et al., 2021). Furthermore, these factors influence all aspects of the research procedure including the formulation of the research question, theoretical perspectives, the chosen methodology, data collection and analysis, and conclusions drawn from that analysis (Haynes, 2012; Holmes, 2020; Relles, 2016). The term reflexivity describes the method used to identify one's positionality. It is an ongoing development that consists of the awareness of how the researcher's values and beliefs may impact the research procedures and results (Haynes,

2012). It is particularly useful in uncovering any bias that may arise throughout data gathering and analysis (Relles, 2016).

As indicated by Luttrell (2010), a researcher's passion, presumptions, assumptions, preoccupations, and predilections are what attract a researcher to an area of inquiry. Having engaged in a degree of self-reflection, I offered a description of myself in this study and these students. Among the most important aspects of myself about the subject of poverty is my belief in fairness and social justice. I have a passion to challenge social injustice and in the case of poverty, I believe this begins by exploring individual and societal attitudes toward those who live in poverty. My previous research, (Placenti, 2016), indicated that attitude change could occur if people (e.g., college students) were better educated about the many aspects of poverty. I, therefore, come to the study with the assumption that this class could promote attitude change and with a desire to examine the process in action.

There are several other aspects of my demographic profile which may influence this study. I am a middle-class, white, 72-year-old male. Though I am white and middle class like many of the participants, other aspects of my identity set me apart I am an 'older student,' so it is significant to note that this may have an impact on how students view me as a researcher. While expressing to the students that I am also a student may allow them to view me as one of them, the age difference may reduce this effect.

Finally, I have prior experience with this class in that 1.) I completed a Master's Thesis based on interviews done with students enrolled in 2015 and 2.) I have served as a Teaching Assistant and as a Co-Instructor of the Course in previous semesters.

## **Methodological Approach**

This study utilized the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach to explore the process by which a group of undergraduate students made meaning of the information gained during the class focused on poverty and individuals living in poverty. The use of the constructivist approach seemed appropriate given its' focus on the construction of meaning (Charmaz 2006; Tie et al., 2019). While there are quantitative tools that can measure attitudes at the beginning and the end of an experience, this study sought specifically to explore the process by which the students gained the understanding that shaped those attitudes. Those processes may well be unique to a classroom environment and beyond the reach of quantitative methods (Nathaniel, 2021)

. researcher to hear the stories of the participants told in their own words (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) described qualitative methods as a means of gaining a deep understanding of those experiences. Smith (2004) spoke of some forms of qualitative research as giving students leave to make sense of their individual and societal world, while the investigator is attempting to make sense of the students attempting to make sense of their individual and societal worlds. The qualitative methodology seems an appropriate approach to examine the students' attempts to make sense of their newfound understanding of poverty and their attempts to incorporate that understanding into their worldview and relationships with those in their microsystems. This design was employed to gather data from undergraduate students from a Family Science and Human Development course focused on families in poverty.

## **Participants**

### ***Description of Research Site***

The participants were drawn from Montclair State University (MSU) which is a public establishment in New Jersey (Campus Facts, 2021). MSU has an enrollment of over 21,000 total

students with around 16,000 undergraduate students, which includes around 90% full-time students per semester (Campus Facts, 2021). MSU is one of the largest universities in New Jersey with about 70% of students receiving financial aid and 44% (undergraduates only) using the Federal Pell Grant (Student Financial Aid 2019). Though MSU has evident cultural diversity among students, this university is classified as a primarily White institution with a student body that is 40% White and 13% African American (Campus Facts, 2021). MSU has been designated as a Hispanic Serving Institute, which indicates a population of at least 25% Latino/Hispanic undergraduates (Campus Facts, 2021; Hegji, 2017), and which assumes the provision of programming to meet the needs of that population. In addition, MSU is situated near numerous areas with significant concentrations of poor individuals, so it is likely that students will have Student Teachings, Internships, or other community-based experiences, or that they will access employment openings that require labor with underprivileged people.

At the time of the study, the course from which participants were drawn, *Poverty and Families* (FSHD-445), was the only course in the Family Science and Human Development (FSHD) curriculum that specifically addressed issues associated with impoverished people and families. It was an upper-division undergraduate class and was a requirement for all students in the major. The two classes were scheduled: one in the morning, twice a week, and the other in the evening once a week. The FSHD major included concentrations in Pre-K-3 and K-6 Education, Family Service, and Gerontology. The students in this department were all equipped to go into the fields of teaching or human services immediately upon the conclusion of their undergraduate degrees. Attitudes toward poverty and those living in poverty played an important part in service provision (Constance-Huggins et al., 2020), so examining these students offered

the opportunity to see how class or curriculum impacted students and the way they utilized/transferred knowledge outside of the class.

The course ‘Poverty and Families’ seemed a particularly appropriate choice as it examines the impact of economic configurations, societal circumstances, gender, and race/ethnicity on the family structure. This course also examines the numerous societal complications that place people in jeopardy as well as family configurations and community circumstances such as poverty, access to funds, and environmental localities. Community interaction is typically embedded in the course, though COVID restrictions have imposed limitations on these activities. Among the expectations of the course, were that students test their preconceived attitudes toward impoverished populations and categorize ways in which those attitudes could affect their future jobs with children and families. Students also identified situations in which the standard of living and SES affected individuals’ abilities to realize expected goals. The students show mindfulness of how social, political, and economic attitudes toward lawful organizations and programs affected the difficulties faced in the inner cities. In addition, students described options for procedures and programs intended to ameliorate the issues of inner-city families in poverty.

Since this course focuses on families in poverty, the materials (reading and audiovisual) are selected carefully with the objective of understanding poverty and people in poverty. These materials were intended to reveal direct interpretations of the lives of poor individuals and families, and were first-hand accounts where possible (e.g., individuals writing about or describing their own experiences). In addition, this train was linked together with poverty simulation exercises with occasional visits to organizations and locations assisting individuals who were living in poverty. Some of the tools employed during the course include specific

readings or audiovisual materials that illuminated poverty in a variety of physical and social environmental contexts. For example, Parker (1971) in “What is Poverty” told the readers about a single mother’s personal story; this is an essay about the mother and her children living in rural poverty that illustrates the economic, social, emotional, and infrastructural issues related to rural poverty. “A Few Good Men” (Edin, 2005) is reading about the reasons for the lack of marriage between impoverished women and the men with whom they had children; this is another one of those topics that no one reinks about because most of the students in the class did not necessarily think about marriage based upon real life. However, students initially thought that impoverished women were different than them. “Lalee’s Kin: The Legacy of Cotton” (Froemke, 2001) is an HBO documentary that relates the lives and relationships of an impoverished, multigenerational, African American family living in an impoverished rural, Southern community. A variety of videos and audio clips which illustrated other topics related to poverty were also part of the course (see Appendix B). Experiential Exercises, such as “Minimum Wage Budget,” which is an exercise to develop a monthly budget for a single parent and three children (ages 2, 4, 12) based upon the parent’s minimum wage (\$7.25/hr.) job; and finally, SPENT (McKinney, 2011), which is an online poverty simulation about the challenges people in poverty may face when they have only \$1,000.00 in their savings account and lose their job and home. During the semester, these tools presented the intricacy of poverty and generated dialogues where students willingly shared their state of mind and considerations.

Both instructor-guided and student-driven discussions were crucial to the class. Dependent upon the activity, discussions occurred in large or small groups, or in face-to-face or online formats. These discussions allow students to manage their thoughts and feelings regarding

class activities and materials. In addition, discussion allows students to hear differing points of view and experiences.

Before being exposed to course content, students were asked to respond to four questions (see Appendix A) to broadly assess their thoughts about attitudes toward poverty and people in poverty. A detailed analysis consisting of artifacts (initial written responses, participant observation, and interviews) was conducted to investigate how undergraduate students taking a class primarily focused on issues related to poverty, as well as impoverished individuals, made meaning of the material presented in the class. In addition, the focus was on if students thought it had impacted their beliefs, attitudes, and interactions with those living in poverty. The initial written responses consisted of 44 students and encompassed students' lack of knowledge on how much support underprivileged people received from the federal government, the responsibility of society, and the cause of poverty. The participant observation during the semesters revealed that students' attitudes changed. In addition, the interviews with 14 participants illuminated additional information about working harder rather than just advocating, challenging what people insinuate about those in poverty, and that this moment in history is a time for people to step out and act. In this study, pseudonyms were applied to name the participants, towns, and agencies.

### ***Participant Description***

For this study, there were a total of 44 students across the two class sections involved in the study. I conducted multiple observations of the 44 students in their class environments. When reporting the data, everybody was originally given a name to differentiate comments among students; not to trace a single student from beginning to end. However, in the reporting stage, it proved important to trace the experience of some students as support for the theoretical model developed. Fourteen of those 44 students volunteered to participate in face-to-face or Zoom

interviews at the end of the semester. Though demographic information was collected only from those students interviewed, a visual assessment of the 44 students indicated most were female. Out of all 44 students, only three were presumed to be male. I also perceived that there were three Black students, five Latino students, three Middle Eastern students, two Asian descent students, and the rest were White non-Hispanic students. Of the 14 participants interviewed, 13 participants were between the ages of 20 and 23 to fit into the stage labeled “emerging adulthood” and one was 31 years old. Participants and their family’s demographic information from the interviewees are reported in table 1.

**Table 1****Students and Families Demographic Information from Interviewees**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Range</b>
<b>Students Age</b>	21	21.5	21.8	3.6	20-31
<b>Family size</b>	4	3.5	4.8	2.3	2-10

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Students Occupation</b>		
Full Time	9	64.3
Part-Time	5	35.7
<b>2021 Family gross annual income</b>		
\$ 50,000 or less	5	35.7
\$ 75,000 to 50,001	5	35.7
\$ 100,000 to 75,001	0	0
\$ 100,001 or more	4	28.6
<b>Parents Marital Status</b>		
Married	10	71.5
Divorced	1	7.1
Single	2	14.3
Widowed	1	7.1
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White not Hispanic	10	71.5
Hispanic	2	14.3
African American	1	7.1



Palestinian	1	7.1
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic	11	78.6
Muslim	1	7.1
Believed only in God	2	14.3
<b>Living with</b>		
Both Parents	9	64.3
Mothers	3	21.5
Boyfriend	1	7.1
Dorm	1	7.1
<b>Social Class</b>		
Middle Class	8	57.2
Working Class	5	35.7
Poor	1	7.1

The study intended to gather information from students in the *Poverty and Families* course in the fall of 2021 and only students enrolled in this course were eligible to participate in this study.

All students enrolled in the class had attained at least junior status since this is an upper-division course. Another motive for counting junior and senior students was that these participants were most likely to have selected their majors by this stage and possibly were functioning with additional delineated notions linked to society and poverty (Sue et al., 1992; Sue & Sue, 2007).

### ***Recruitment Procedures***

Throughout recruitment, I informed possible participants that they were being invited to take part in a study, that participation was voluntary, and that the decision to participate would not influence their grade in class; in fact, the course instructors were unaware of which students volunteered to be interviewed. All participants were informed of the anonymity of the study by the Consent Form for Adults (see Appendix F). After participants signed the consent form, they completed the demographic information form (see Appendix G). If in any event participants experienced some inconvenience and/or discomfort in discussing details of their thoughts and

feelings regarding people in poverty, attached to the consent form they found a copy of Counseling and Psychological Services' contact information (see Appendix H).

Having received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of MSU, I recruited participants enrolled in the class at the time of data collection from multiple sections of FSHD-445 at MSU. I made an in-person plea to the class/es (see Appendix C) or sent an email invitation (see Appendix D) for recruitment. The text for both mechanisms was approved by the IRB. To extend the number of potential participants, I used a referral method. This referral method is usually referred to as snowball sampling. This is where I, at the end of the interviews, asked the participants for recommendations of students who may be eligible for the conditions of the research (Robinson, 2014).

### **Data Collection**

Data collection included the utilization of several methods. Each method described below was selected to add depth to the dataset. In a previous study, I conducted interviews where I asked a retrospective question about attitude change. The reason, I did repeat this strategy was that I wanted an actual record of the student's thoughts about poverty before their exposure to material from the class. This was gained from the written response questions (see Appendix A) at the beginning of class. Then, I wanted to observe the students during the semester as they made meaning of what was going on. Because I was present at every class session and utilized observation, including participant observation as a primary data collection method, I was able to gain insight into the process of meaning-making. When appropriate I took the role of participant-observer. For example, during the Minimum Wage Exercise, I walked the room and interacted with the groups. I asked and asked students what was hard to decide and observed their method of decision making and what information was used in that decision making. From the interviews,

I wanted to find out what the students got from the class at the end of the semester. I asked questions about students' attitudes before class, during class, and at the end of the class. In other words, the interviews were at the end so that the researcher could clarify exactly what was going on with the students' attitudes toward poverty and those in poverty and could talk about how they might then take that information out into the world. In this study, the observations and the exercises were meant to be more global and serve as an overview (of issues and general progression of students) for me as a researcher. The interviews were meant to address whatever questions or concepts come to light.

### ***Methods***

**Participant Observer.** For this study, I positioned myself as a participant-observer in each of the class sections. In this role, I was recognized by the students as an observer but was also able to participate in classroom activities as necessary or desired (Kawulich, 2005). Since the research question involved exploring how a particular class might influence meaning-making for its students, being present to witness relevant events and activities seemed useful. As part of the participant observation portion of data collection, I gathered field notes related to meaning-making.

**Participant Observation.** Participant Observation is unique because the researcher is present and participates in the day-to-day activities of the participants. I was present for each class session in the semester in which data was collected. The key to being allowed to interact in such a way is the building of rapport. The building of rapport must be done over time and requires a complete understanding of the action (Kawulich, 2005). Rapport is built over time; it involves establishing a trusting relationship with the community so that the cultural members feel secure in sharing sensitive information with the researcher to the extent that they feel

assured that the information gathered and reported will be presented accurately and dependably. Rapport-building involves active listening, showing respect and empathy, being truthful, and showing a commitment to the well-being of the community or individual. Rapport is also related to the issue of reciprocity, the giving back of something in return for their sharing their lives with the researcher

Kawulich (2005) indicated that participant observation is the procedure allowing scholars to discover the accomplishments of the individuals in the research in an environmental setting. That was the process that allowed me to learn about the activities of the students in the study. In this study, the observations showed the spontaneous and fruitful thoughts the students expressed freely. For Kawulich (2005), participant observation is more challenging than just observing not including participation in the pursuit of the situation. Still, there are circumstances that which participation is essential for interpretation. Observation without participating in the discussion or activities may not provide a total interpretation of the action (Kawulich, 2005). I observed all class meetings and was an active participant in the discussions by asking questions and making sure that I understood the students correctly; I went through the readings, asked questions in the simulation exercises, and watched the videos and the movies throughout the semester. I also witnessed the class discussions that helped me and the students of making meaning about poverty and those in poverty. The discussion became an important tool for me to understand better all students in coming together to express freely their attitudes towards underprivileged individuals.

**Field Notes.** As Mulhall (2003) indicated, field notes are important in a qualitative design such as that used in this study. "Field notes are the primary way of capturing the data that is collected from participant observations" (Kawulich, 2005 p. 21). Each of the previously cited

authors agrees that the process of writing field notes is unique to the researcher. As I observed the students in both classes, I wrote very short notes about how students behaved and interacted as well as what they said during the process of class activities and events. Then, immediately after class I went to a computer lab and typed the complete field notes. This involved making meaning of the notes and while the experiences were still fresh in my mind., I transferred those to the observation notes (see Appendix I). As per Kawulich (2005), I was mindful of the ethical concern regarding the need to protect the privacy of the students in field notes to avoid their recognition and insured personal identities was stated in ways that minimized the chances of recognition Like Kawulich (2005), my procedure of notetaking was not completed till I reviewed my notes to be certain that I combined the assessment with observations during the procedure.

***Research Journal.*** Another important part of data gatherings and analysis was the research journal. This journal was used to trace my own biases and development as a researcher throughout the study and monitor my own beliefs, abilities, feelings, and attitudes as suggested by Ortlipp (2008). Ortlipp (2008), also spoke to the need for self-reflection and this proved to be particularly important in this study as ideas about social justice. Scholars can do research journals by maintaining a thorough academic journal during the study and they can establish transparency on the study's development and recognize the outcome of significant self-reflection on evaluation design. Luttrell (2010) proposed researchers keep a journal next to their beds for thoughts that come late in the night and that is exactly what I did during the semester. The research journal helped me to recall my progress during the semester; especially on the progress of my research question which I was changing up to the last couple of weeks of this study. In other words, the focus of the question changed throughout the study based on the information gathered from participants. Furthermore, scholars should be concerned about their role in the

analysis procedures as the key mechanism of data gathering (Ortlipp, 2008). One area of particular importance for me was my feeling and commitment to social justice and helping behavior. It influenced my data collection because each time participants spoke with passion about social justice or injustice, my facial expression showed an instant sign of approval or disapproval and that was very difficult to hide. It also influenced my analysis because I was feeling unconsciously good when participants spoke about helping the people in need and that reinforced my own belief.

**Written Artifacts.** The analysis of written documents was used as a method for gathering data in this study. As a typical part of the class, a variety of written assignments were produced as part of an overall mechanism to assess student progress. The use of such written material in grounded theory research was validated by Charmaz (2006). She referred to such material as elicited text. Though the researcher did not insert the specific assignments into the class for this study, those assignments proved useful. In addition to monitoring student progress, a significant number of those assignments addressed student understanding of poverty and its implications. For this study, this *understanding* might be translated as how students make the meaning of poverty as they progress through the class. For example, the class began with an assignment designed to uncover students' understanding and knowledge of poverty and poverty-related issues before beginning class. Students were required to complete online, a brief exercise during sessions 1 or 2 of the semester. This artifact provided me with an initial understanding of students' attitudes and reduced the reliance on interviewee memories about pre-class attitudes. Other written assignments throughout the semester provided information about how the meaning and understanding of poverty changed throughout the semester and whether or not those changes were attached to particular exercises, events, or materials. These documents were provided to me

by the Teaching Assistants with a numbered code rather than the students' names. I did that to avoid the possibility of preconceived notions or biases during the interviews at the end of the semester. As I analyzed the data, I substituted the numbers with anonymous names.

**Participation in Poverty Simulation Exercises.** I worked with the data collected from students' initial responses, class discussions, participation in simulation exercises, current events, class presentations, and interviews. The data from the participation in these simulation exercises were significant for my study; that is the reason I am highlighting them here. There were two such exercises used during this study.

Students joined in a poverty simulation exercise called the "Minimum Wage Budget," which provided real-world training. Students were given the task of budgeting for a parent with three children (ages 2, 4, and 12) constructed upon the parent's minimum salary (\$7.25/hr.) job. In this exercise, students made assessments about expenditures for the entire family. This exercise was also conducted in groups, and I was going around the class observing how students were completing the training. It was clear that groups were struggling with how to compensate for renting an apartment in New Jersey and paying for childcare in addition to all other expenses. I was able to ask questions and observe the process as well as the outcome.

Students also participated in a poverty simulation exercise called SPENT with a written assignment for it. SPENT is an interactive online game about the challenges that individuals (e.g., those in poverty) can face when they lose their job and housing. While playing the game, students made decisions about expenses and recorded those decisions as well as their rationale for making them. The exercise game was followed by in-class and online discussions about the experience and the decision-making involved in the experience. I am speaking about this specific exercise in the methodology because it was mentioned often by the students in many events

during the semester in class and r the interviews at the end of the class. As I did for the written responses at the beginning of the semester, I also asked the TAs to send me the students' answers to the simulation exercise without the students' names and I identified them with anonymous names.

***Individual Interviews.*** Semi-structured interviews were utilized, as they provide examiners the consent to employ open-ended, direct questions to stimulate students' experiences and the denotation they offer to them (Livesay & Lawrence, 2018). The interview guide was reflective of the literature examining multiple areas and topics. Though the initial interview guide included the questions that can be found in Appendix E, the questions contained in it were supplemented by questions that rose from my analysis of data occurring before the interviews (e.g. written assignment, field notes).

I interviewed all the participants who volunteered and asked follow-up questions. The interviews were recorded, and all the participants were made aware of the presence of the recorder. Because of the current Pandemic, provisions were made for both face-to-face and online interviews. Students were interviewed face-to-face or online for approximately 45 minutes. I started a conversation with interviewees concerning their existing views about individual/social attitudes toward the poor. Individual interviews were applied for this study to obtain the expressions, narratives, and lived involvements of the students (Seidman, 2013). The practice of one-on-one interviews allowed for the conversation of topics that students may have felt less comfortable exploring in a group situation. Interviews were conducted in several locations on the university grounds where the students attended in person or any place on Zoom subject to the accessibility of the interviewee and the interviewer. I believed that by allowing multiple opportunities for the interview, the students were more relaxed and open.



The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants with partial notes taken as well. Brief notetaking allowed me to relate to the interview and the student and pay attention to body language and what was being said. These notes were valuable as part of the development of each interview. It was significant for the interview to run as a discussion to obtain reliable narratives relating to the questions. The interviews usually lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, but the length was decided by the student's inclination to continue in the interview.

During the entire interview process, changes were made to the interview guide as I became accustomed to the language patterns of the students and as themes started to reveal themselves; this procedure is known as semi-structured interviewing. With this procedure, there were large themes I covered but allowed the students to tell their stories (Rabionet, 2011). Just before the interview, students were given the chance to ask any questions concerning the interview or information within it. The participants knew me in some capacity given my position as an observer in their classes and the participants who were interviewed were only from the classes I observed. Furthermore, before the interviews started, I asked the students to confer if there were any issues they did not want to talk over, and I respected their wishes and did not ask questions about those issues.

The individual interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded on two digital voice recorders, Olympus WS-700M and Philips Voice Tracker 2000 as a backup. They were sent to Otter.ai to be transcribed as soon as each interview was over. Otter.ai is an automated transcription service for simple audio or video recordings and "ai" stands for artificial intelligence. I received the transcription usually the same day. As I heard the audio and read through the transcriptions, I made changes and edited any errors to make certain that the verbatim transcription was the same as recorded. After I reviewed each interview, I sent the

transcription to the participant for verification and accuracy. Similarly, to Strauss & Corbin (1998), I described this practice as trying out my interpretation/meaning-making on the participants and seeing if my understanding resonates with them.

### **Data Analysis**

The approach to analyzing the data was a continuous comparative method where I associated parts of data beside one another to assess and define any connections and dissimilarities in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The analysis of data in the study was truly an ongoing process, given that data arrived throughout the semester. The approach to analyzing the data was a continuous comparative method as is appropriate for qualitative research in general and grounded theory research in particular (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tie, et al., 2019). The analysis started with the data from the initial written responses which were received by me during the third week of the semester. This was consistent with the work of Tie et al., who described the instant comparative analysis as beginning “with the first data generated or collected” (2019, p. 5) and continuing throughout the research process. I analyzed data from class discussions three times a week (one for a section). I analyzed data on current events assignments every week. As the combination procedure started, themes were acknowledged cautiously as more became linked and assessments altered the themes and assignment of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The procedure of gathering and analyzing data constantly allowed me to improve the procedure and recognize recurrent themes

I also analyzed data from the written reflection of the SPENT online exercise which was completed approximately one month before the end of the class. This assignment was critical in several ways. First it provided data written by students about their own experience and

perception of that experience. Second, the requirements of the assignment provided a before and after a glimpse of their understanding of the lives of those in poverty and provide evidence that the exercise at least began the process of shaping their thinking.

At the end of the semester, I analyzed the transcripts of the interviews. While a portion of the questions on the interviews come from the initial interview guide, a number of the questions asked were based on an analysis of data I had previously collected. Thus, much of the data contained in the interview transcripts was the result of theoretical sampling. This type of sampling began after I had preliminary information to work from. In this case, after many weeks of observations and the analysis of several written assignments (Durham et al., 2018; Tie, et al, 2019), I began to see the emergence of themes that would shape the theoretical model. The interview phase allowed for solidification and clarification of the nuances of the themes. In addition, in trying to determine the extent to which my initial analysis “did not account for the full range of relevant experiences” (Charmaz, 2006, p.108), I went back to my interviews and to the written assignments multiple times to fill in the gaps regarding that range of experiences. This was also consistent with the constant comparative method form of data collection and with the need for theoretical sampling.

As I gathered data from various forms, open coding was applied to categorize concepts, and concepts were associated throughout all the interviews making meaning in the process. When I deciphered the data from spoken to transcribed formats, I made judgments about sentence configuration, pauses, tone, and significance. These judgments were also a portion of the analytic development. Analysis, at all phases of the assignment, included being self-conscious and clear about the way that I made choices and offered ways to examine my development. In the interactive practice, I needed to take into consideration the analytic

interactions between me and the participants. When I took part with college students in an interview situation, it was significant to identify undergraduate students' thoughts. They understood questions from time to time in rather different ways. They were cautious in what they selected to communicate, and, in their answers to questions, were rather careful about forming representations of their knowledge. I made meaning by deeply understanding what participants were saying. Axial coding was employed to recognize connections between the open codes and expanded categories that contributed to greater themes from the gathered data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I asked my critical friends who interpreted the data and discussed differences, to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. As Schreiber and Stern (2001) suggested the transcripts were open coded for the first interviews to explore the data for defining words and content that had connotations. To triangulate the data, the interview audio was used for reminders and notetaking, which supported the connection of the coded transcriptions to generate themes and subthemes of the data. I also triangulate the data using other sources. For example, I triangulate what was said in interviews with responses from initial thoughts, SPENT essays, and comments made in class.

I used Smith's (2004) five-stage approach to data analysis only for interviews and it is carried out in five stages. First, I read and reread the transcripts to gain an extensive comprehension of students' assessments and experiences concerning poverty. Second, I establish the concepts of the interviews. Third, I identified developing themes. Fourth, I related and cluster developing themes that I established. Fifth, condensed the data and combined it into super-ordinate themes. My critical friends completed their initial analysis of the data individually, before approaching together to review and discuss their analyses. Mainly, this analysis intended to gather data on the attitudes, acknowledgments, and views that people embraced concerning poverty and those in poverty. The present study also aimed to discover conceivable interactions

between attitudes, acknowledgments, and views, as they describe aspects for themselves and others. The exploration of this piece of research was carried out through attitudes toward poverty). The goal was to find through each student whether the attitudes of individuals change after students have taken the course, and how their attitudes influenced their environment and ecological systems.

### **Trustworthiness**

I received feedback from my critical friends to ensure trustworthiness.

- a. Credibility - participating in reflexivity and participant checking by making sure to self-reflect about who I was and my biases, beliefs, and values. I suggested to my critical friends to document their beliefs and biases during our debriefings, ensuring that I captured participants' actual lived experiences and did not misunderstand their responses.
- b. Transferability - collecting background information and informing the reader of the background from the literature so that other researchers can apply this to other individuals or situations.
- c. Dependability - making the best use of density and determining if the research procedure was well-documented, revised, and audited.
- d. Conformability - preserving an audit trail by providing complete documentation of the procedures related to the study with the inclusion of decisions made.
- e. Reciprocity achieving the issue of what each stakeholder wanted out of the research that needed to be negotiated carefully (Herr & Anderson, 2005)

Different approaches to data gathering were useful to improve the validity of this research. I showed assurance in offering veracity in my results. Observation materials that were

gathered were used to link to the material gathered throughout the interviews. Moreover, I planned to achieve triangulation by ensuring individual interviews, observations of the participants in their classes, and member checking were also valid. As indicated by Lemon and Haye (2020), I used triangulation which served as an opportunity to reinforce the credibility and dependability of this study, and as a strength of this qualitative research. Member checking permitted me to evaluate again the results over the initial series of interviews against different interviews examined; this procedure guaranteed that I was interpreting my findings properly rather than misjudging what was happening and what was being said (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The way I established trustworthiness was by sending the data I was gathering to my critical friends. Then, debriefing to get feedback and make decisions together. The critical friends worked independently, and, in our meetings, we discussed feedback on every critical view like analysis of the students' initial responses, the students' reflection on the SPENT simulation exercise, and the students' interviews.

## **Chapter IV: Findings**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the extent to which and the process of meaning-making in actual time. This study, forming-making, is intended deep understanding of the activities (e.g., class discussions and current events) carried out in class. In addition, I explored how this class influenced and helped students to make meaning of poverty by understanding the material presented to them. The *Poverty and Families* course teaches students material to help them create their own stories concerning poverty and those in poverty. In this qualitative study of 44 students taking the

course, I analyzed the responses produced. As I made meaning of the data, I divided the description of the data into three *areas of interest* rather than into *themes* as is typical of *Qualitative Research*. Area One was important as it was necessary to understand where the students began in their meaning-making to assess change. Area Two addressed the strategies, materials, and tools which emerged as the most salient for students. Area Three describes the meaning students made of poverty after having been exposed to information in the class. Area Four spoke to the actions and intentions of students after having made meaning of the information gained in the class. These areas are based on the research question.

***Research Question:***

How do undergraduate students taking a class focused on issues related to poverty and impoverished individuals, make meaning of the information gained during the class?

**Area 1: Students' Knowledge and Attitudes Towards Poverty to the Beginning of Class**

As data collection and analysis progressed, it became apparent that to tell the story of these students' meaning-making journey, it was important to recognize their starting point. This area contained three subareas that illuminated not only the attitudes of the students before being exposed to class materials and experiences, but also the sources of those attitudes. These subareas consisted of attitudes shaped by limited knowledge or incorrect information attitudes shaped by family and peers, and attitudes shaped by experience.

***Attitudes Shaped by Limited Knowledge or Incorrect Information***

Though asked directly about their attitudes toward those in poverty, a significant number of students could not or would not provide an answer other than assertions of not having enough information on the topic. Before being exposed to class content, undergraduates were asked to

respond to four questions to consider their thoughts about poverty and to gain some understanding of the above meaning they made of poverty. An analysis of the responses provided insight into students' pre-class attitudes. One noteworthy finding in that analysis was the lack of *actual* exposure to those living in poverty as well as a lack of information about those living in poverty. Students used this as a rationale for expressing no attitudes toward those living in poverty. Addison is an example of a student who did not give any opinion about poverty due to a lack of understanding. She stated: "To be truly honest, I am nowhere near educated enough to even place an opinion on this question." Here students showed a lack of information and exposure to poverty and related issues.

Those who were able to articulate a response spoke in terms of how the poverty of others made them [the students] feel. Students spoke about the way they felt about the experiences of people in poverty. For example, Ava stated: "Getting out of the cycle of poverty is exhausting and I feel awful for those who are stuck in it." Another example is Abigail, who felt sad and guilty, she stated: "I always feel sad when I see people who live in poverty. It makes me feel guilty but also grateful to have everything I have." In addition, Avery felt terrible and also guilty, and stated: "I feel terrible that ... there are people hungry and starving ... I often feel guilty and wish I did more to lend a hand." Here students revealed the way they felt about the reality of those in poverty but mainly their sense of guilt and the desire to help. They seem willing to express feelings about the situation but stop short of addressing feelings about the people involved.

Class discussions and exercises during the first two weeks of the class provided additional insight regarding student thoughts about the issue of poverty and the lack of awareness about people living in poverty. For example, Aubrey claimed that she could not speak about



poverty and those in poverty because of a lack of awareness and information. She stated: “I can't speak upon this topic [poverty and the poor] as much as I would love to due to my lack of awareness or information”. Ashley stated: “I didn't know that we have so many poor people in so many places of the United States.” Anna opened a discussion about disasters and poverty in many places of the country and stated: “I knew about Hurricane Katrina in the state of Louisiana, but I didn't know about the poverty in Detroit, Appalachia, Kentucky, and Connecticut.” This could be seen as an acknowledgment of poverty when connected to or exposed by natural disaster but of limited awareness of daily poverty that is not present in the media before class. For many, media portrayals or exposition of those in poverty is the access point for knowledge or awareness of poverty. Kaley offered an example of these attitudes shaped by the media.

For some participants, attitudes were shaped by the media before receiving information in class. The examples provided were indicative of students who, lacking any other information, formed their understanding of poverty based on the most easily accessible or most prominent information. For example, Kaylee indicated that she often noticed how poverty and those in poverty were represented on TV, in movies, and on major news networks. Kaylee stated:

Well, for me, I think, a lot of media and the way that it's portrayed on the news, especially also in, like entertainment things as well, you know, like movies and TV, seeing people impoverished on the street as well. And only seeing that because that's a very visual way to see poverty.

Sara spoke about seeing poverty and people in poverty not only directly on the streets and when she was traveling but, on the news, and on social media. She acknowledged: “I guess would be like, seeing it like firsthand is that like factor? And like, just like seeing on the news, like as media when I'm traveling, seeing, you know, like people poverty, and then on the streets.”

Generally, students pointed out that their attitudes towards poverty and those in poverty were shaped by knowledge and exposure gained from their life experiences before being in class.

For certain students, there was a thought that the media neglected to show poverty as an issue for everyday people in favor of the extreme or dramatic versions that would draw more viewers.

This allowed students to ignore poverty in everyday life and shaped their understanding of the daily realities of poverty. Here Layla gave an example of how the media should represent the poor by showing not only the people who are in extreme poverty but also those who are silent and who need help as much as those who are under the bridges. She stated:

They show people under the New York bridge or show people on the Hoboken bridge.

And it's like, that is an extreme version of what poverty looks like. And although this is important to show because it shows that people are suffering to this extent, it can be something as little as somebody just walking to work every day with holes in their shoes or not being able to afford proper meals, like that side of Poverty isn't shown, which is the most common type of problem that we face as America sees. That is never shown in the media. It's sort of the media. It's It looks like they have not showered in days, or they don't have enough clothes. But it could be somebody that looks normal to you. But they could be going through the worst things behind closed doors. And I feel that's what needs to be showcased more

As Layla speaks of this it raised the question of the meaning, she made of her own experience of poverty. Since she was living in poverty but not having her experience portrayed, it may explain the feelings of isolation experienced by her family and the realization after the class that many others like hidden from public view.

One of the earliest artifacts produced in the class was the initial written responses to a set of questions specifically designed to gather information about student attitudes before class. One of those questions explored student knowledge of levels of federal spending for programs to support those in poverty. Analysis of responses to that question combined with a follow-up class discussion indicated either lack of awareness or thought given to the topic or inflated ideas about the level of support provided. For instance, like some other students who responded, Samantha admitted: "I have no clue how much money is allocated to those that are in poverty." Even among the students who claimed no knowledge of the topic was the message that the amount of funding was too low to meet the needs of the population. When students were willing to provide numbers, they were often incorrect. Madison assumed that the percentage was five percent and she stated: "I believe that it's very low based on how I've seen people in poverty live. I would guess 5%...;" Chloe believed that it was not less than 15 percent. She went as high as 40% and she stated: "I think the percentage of the federal budget to help support those in poverty is 15-40. The reality is that the government is spending between 2 to 3 percent of the federal budget. While that is a significant amount of money, it is not them w enough to support programs like childcare. For study been before this class, had career plans (family services, social work, teaching) that would likely bring them into contact with those living in poverty, the continued absence of information would leave the unable to gain a clearer understanding of the implications of poverty for their students/clients to whom they serve.

### *Attitudes Shaped by Family*

Analysis of the data from the interviews revealed that students' attitudes before beginning the class were influenced by interactions with their parents and siblings before they were exposed to the material in class. For example, students indicated that they often spoke about

poverty and those in poverty with their families. Emma was curious and she wondered why the poor had problems with money and why poor people looked different than her and her family.

She said:

Yes, I would talk to my parents about the poor and because they're my parents, I would ask them questions about money. And why is this person like this? And we're like this? I was always curious. So yeah, I'm talking to parents, not really anybody else.

The participants indicated family messaging about poverty was both spoken and unspoken. In her interview, Layla remembered that her mother told her and her siblings not to engage in public behaviors that might indicate poverty, and this influenced her attitudes towards poverty and those in poverty. She acknowledged:

She [my mom] would tell me not to grab extra food. Or she would tell me not to like eat so quickly in restaurants because she didn't want people to think that like I was starved. And I guess it just added to the stigma.

She began to see poverty as a stigmatized status and as was later revealed she developed a bias against those in poverty. Another also spoke of this issue: "I speak about poverty very little because I do not want others to know I am poor and not wish to be stigmatized."

Abigail provided an example of parents not speaking negatively about people in poverty, but still delivering negative messaging about the poor. She said:

I live very close to New York City ... you would come across many people who are homeless. And as a person, I've always wanted to help. And my dad was very protective and always had kind of the insight that they might be dangerous ... they might spend the money on the wrong thing. A couple of times, instead of leaving money, I have left meals for people. Just because I know if they're, if they're saying they're hungry, and sometimes

I've had gift cards, or I don't have money on me, I know I can get them something. But I think my family, my parent's output was, you know, you had to be very cautious in life. But for me, in my head, I always just felt something. You know, there's always something that leads someone to that point in their life, and I just feel bad. Not that my parents don't feel bad, but I guess sometimes I want to help. I just don't know what to do. So, while Abigail was aware of the negative messaging, she chose not to shape her actions or attitudes around that messaging but to behave according to her views. Abigail was one of the few students to arrive in class verbally articulating ideas about social justice.

In addition, Sophia was also involved in family discussions about impoverished people especially during certain Holidays when people practicing her religion are expected to donate as much as possible. Sophia acknowledged:

Because of my religion, we're constantly told, you have to give ... discussion within ... family, ... especially during like Ramadan, that's the one that we fast. So, when we speak about that, during that month, ... you have to donate as much as possible ... I've spoken to my siblings.

In general, students indicated that their families influenced their attitudes before having the opportunity to make meaning of the information regarding poverty and those in poverty. Whether the intent was positive or negative, the families of these students shaped their thinking into an 'us vs them' dynamic. 'Us' indicated they were a group different from the poor and 'them' indicated that the poor were inferior to Us. Simply put, 'us' represents superiority on several levels which include socioeconomic status, but might also issues of generosity, and reality. Those in poverty were judged as second-class citizens. For some, there was a positive message that *we* must help *them*. For others, it was staying away from them lest they harm you or

waste the resources you give them. For those who have lived in poverty, the message was to not reveal yourself as “them” lest You’re stigmatized.

### *Attitude Shaped by Experience*

Here, we found that some of the students grow up in poverty and others had some experience of being in contact with people in poverty and demonstrated understanding of those who were impoverished based on interactions in the workplace... for example, Nevaeh, Alyssa, and Layla in particular, who grew up in an impoverished environment, showed a sense of being judged by others for not wearing expensive items, feeling overlooked by society, or feeling embarrassed

Though most students reported having no exposure to those living in poverty, a few students acknowledged various experiences with impoverished populations. The following data points highlighted the importance of personal experiences in the development of attitudes. Several students offered statements about having work experience that shaped their thinking about poverty. Evelyn was an intern at an organization where she had direct contact with adults in poverty. She stated:

I empathize with people in poverty. I'm from ‘*Notown*’ and I'm around people in poverty all the time. I intern at an organization [that provides services for people in poverty]. I don't see people in poverty as less than. I've had such wonderful conversations and connections with people in poverty in my community and at [the organization where I work].

Alexis had experience with people in poverty when she worked with youngsters in New York. She expressed: “I did like fieldwork in New York First of all, and then some kids on there were in poverty. So didn't have like a lot to eat and stuff ... and good clothes.” Before being enrolled

in the class, Charlotte had experience being a volunteer at a school in Newark. She stated:” I volunteered in Newark at a school, so I saw, like, poverty there. And I feel that shaped like what I thought about it before taking the class.” Amelia had a distinct experience, she worked with poor children at a school. She stated: “I have experienced and the discrete group being around children at schools that live in poverty and it's so sad to see and know that children may not have enough food at home.”

As future teachers, Alexis, Charlotte, and Amelia were preparing themselves for ways how they could better fulfill the needs of their students to have proper food to eat and could concentrate on their studies.

Hannah worked in a store where people used WIC and EBT cards, and she did not give any thoughts about the subject before enrolling in the class; she told: “I currently work at a food store. And we do have people ... WIC and EBT. And I didn't think too much of it before taking this class.” Hailey also worked in a grocery store where poor people came in and out of her workplace and she stated: “I work at a grocery store and have seen first hand how embarrassed some are to pay with WIC [Women, Infants, and Children] or EBT [Electronic Benefit Transfer] or food-stamps.” Allison’s experience came from working at a supermarket in a poor area, and she also worked with children. She stated:

I used to work at a family-owned supermarket and had a lot of customers with WIC checks and EBT food stamps. I didn't think anything of it as I know there are people out there who truly need it and don't qualify. However, just like the kids I work with, it becomes sad at times.

Though Hannah, Hailey, and Allison were not given any thoughts about poverty before taking the class, these students had previous experience and contact with those in poverty; like the

overall population of the study, most seem to have given little thought to the issues related to living in poverty. Those who paid heed seemed to do so only superficially, but for one who acknowledged the embarrassment of using various government benefits to access food. This embarrassment may be attached to the stigma of being *known as poor*.

Several students shared their experience of living in poverty and how that had shaped their attitudes by making them more compassionate, empathetic, and nuanced in their understanding. Each of these participants speaks of feeling judged for being impoverished and some seem to have internalized the stigma that came with the judgment. Nevaeh's experience was growing up in a poor family and she stated: "My family did not have a lot of money growing up. Due to this, like an ignorant child, I often felt judged for not having the latest UGGs [boots], clothes from the trending store, or dumb things like that." Alyssa also lived in a poor family during the recession, and she felt neglected by society. She stated:

When I was younger my family was hit hard by the recession, so I saw firsthand how my family struggled. I feel as if people in poverty feel neglected and embarrassed to ask for help. These people in poverty are mostly hard-working individuals but the money they do make is not enough for their families to have enough nutritious food or good healthcare.

They scrape by trying to make ends meet but it is nearly impossible for them

Layla's experience of living in poverty was exacerbated by the message that showcased how being impoverished is a source of shame and something to be hidden. She stated:

I grew up thinking that it was embarrassing to be poor only because my mom for an entire life made it super embarrassing. Like she would always tell me to never tell people how many people live in our apartment. I have like seven cousins and my aunt and everybody just living there ...why I felt so embarrassed about it was because of my mom.



Layla's story reflected the practice of impoverished families sharing space to reduce the cost of housing. Layla also delved into the stigma attributed to the poor. She felt that there was a stigma attached to many individuals and that such stigma influences behavior. It was sometimes difficult to avoid the stigma. To avoid the stigma people who were impoverished hide their poverty.

Layla stated:

I feel like there is a giant stigma that's like put on a lot of people poverty seems like it's like embarrassing, or like humiliating or just nasty ... And whenever people talk about [the poor], they smell or like they look gross, But like it's more than that. which is why people like to go out of their ways to buy these expensive things, even if they can't afford it

In examining students' attitudes before class, these data indicated limited willingness or ability to articulate attitudes. There was, however, information about how attitudes were shaped. Lack of exposure or information was demonstrated for most participants. Those who had experience with impoverished people still seemed to think little about the lived experience of the population. Study participants who had lived in poverty struggled with the stigma that came with being impoverished. These preliminary data were useful for this study because they served for me as a starting point, a way to understand the meaning participants attached to poverty, that I could compare with the findings at the end of the semester.

## **Area 2: Students Made Meaning**

This section discusses the process by which undergraduates made meaning of the material to which they were exposed in class that is considered part of their microsystem. While there were a variety of strategies and tools utilized during the semester, class observations and participant interviews revealed some aspects of the class to be particularly powerful in the

process of the meaning-making king. The most mentioned aspects of the development of their understanding of poverty were class discussions, simulation exercises, and experiences with videos and movies.

### *Class Discussions*

Whether planned by the instructor or driven by students, a class discussion emerged as a significant pathway to gaining and processing information about poverty and making meaning based on that information. It was not merely exposure e to the material but the critical thinking that came as a result of that discussion that instigated change. While my daily observations of the class, recorded as Field Notes, revealed the importance of discussion, the statements of the interviewees provided reinforcement. For example, Sara said:

Yeah, so definitely is important to have a class discussion on this topic [poverty] ... because everyone has their own story to share ... I also think that hearing other voices, like in the same room as you make you, like, realize other things ... So, hearing it from your classmate, and hearing it from like a teacher or just discussing in general, is important

Even though issues of poverty and obligations to the impoverished are discussed frequently in her religious community, Sophia acknowledged that class discussions were important. Hearing, reading, and interacting with individuals who held different viewpoints were useful. She specified:

Class discussion is] very important I think it was good for me to get a sense of what others go through even more like being able to like read about it, and hear the statistics and like, people's point of view by watching the documentaries ... when I learned about

the mother who worked by Disney World, who worked like three jobs for fast food and she still wasn't making enough money to support her children, ... Very enlightening. Yes.

The words of these students highlighted the overall significance of discussion in the process of meaning-making. Their emphasis on hearing or seeing from the perspectives of others, and then discussing those perspectives as a way to better understand the lives of those in poverty was apparent. These class discussions represent a primary source/site for my observations. The source and subject matter of these discussions were varied but included targeted readings, class activities a, and class assignments such as Current Events Flanagan et al. (2014) spoke about the importance of discussion of current events related to the knowledge and understanding of social issues and discrimination against specific groups.

**Targeted Reading.** A variety of readings were required of students and those readings were often the basis for class discussion. One particular reading (Parker) produced much discussion that influenced students understanding of poverty in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Some students contemplated how that reading reflected changes in the meaning they attached to poverty when they were younger, and the meaning attached at the end of the class. Layla provided such an example in her interview. She said:

I feel like reading her [Parker's] story, made me like, appreciate myself or I guess appreciate, like the life that I lived a little more. When I was younger, I didn't understand what poverty really, I was just got mad that my mom could not afford, like, the shoes that I wanted. And all my friends had the same shoes. And I would just think that she just didn't want to buy them. But I know I'm looking back and I'm like, wow, like, I can't even imagine what she has to go through

Since this interview was conducted at the end of the semester, this student was able to bring information and experience from various exercises to her understanding of her mother's past decision-making.

Afterward, from my observation, the discussion about that reading shifted a focus on a single not writing from a first-person perspective. Students thought that Parker was very realistic and her writing in lingua franca and from a first-person viewpoint gave them new insight into poverty. For a student, Parker's distinct writing style allowed readers to step into the shoes of the main character, and this, in turn, became very real and emotional for the student. More specifically, from the class discussion a student stated:

Really, ... trying to bring the reader into the story, as if we were there with her. And it was very emotional. And it may have made me also realize, like, wow, this is what it's like to be in poverty, even though I can experience it myself. Someone wrote it so well, that it touched others. So, I thought that was really, it was a really good reason ... So it's like, it's like as if you're reading it and like, you're going through it yourself?

Zoey was influenced by the way Parker depicted a woman addressing and describing poverty and how she accepted her living conditions. She stated:

... affected me because it was like so transparent it was like this is what it is ... this person is putting into words her entire life her entire situation what poverty is to her? And yeah, like that having a first-person everything feels twice as realistic for me whenever.

It was noted that the reading was given during the first week of class, but that the information contained in it was referenced by students in conjunction with several topics throughout the semester.

**Class Assignment (Current Events).** The discussion also proved critical as it allowed students to guide the trajectory of the class. The assignment most likely to prod student-driven discussions that promoted meaning-making and critical thinking was the current event report. Because the topics addressed in this assignment were chosen by students and set in the realities of the present, the discussions were timely, and the topics resonated with the immediate interests of the students. One student raised the issue of poverty and COVID vaccinations in the US. One She stated: “In less wealthy states of the country [the United States], the citizens of that state are less likely to be vaccinated” (Field Notes). After some discussion of possible reasons for this disparity, the discussion then developed into thoughts on vaccinations at an international level. One student offered this information: “in some countries, there is no vaccine available, and like it or not, the differences between the rich and the poor continue to exist in a global setting.” Having money or not having money became the reason why people were vaccinated or not in a local and global sense. A student came out with a solution for this issue, suggesting a way of convincing people to get vaccinated; she stated:

If the federal government would say, okay, you have until this date to start the vaccination process. After that we are sending all of our surplus vaccines to another country that does not have enough vaccines; maybe this idea could work, leading many people to get vaccinated.

Here, students discussed what has been seen as a matter of personal choice and ultimately came to the realization that for people in poverty, choices are constrained by the decisions of others. For example, in a discussion, most students did not recognize that vaccines must be purchased even if the individual does not pay for them. What began as a report on nation vaccinations disparities based on socioeconomic status and race in the United States moved to the global level

at the motivation of the students. This interaction allowed students to make meaning of the vaccination and issue raised at a variety of levels.

Since many of the students taking the course were to be teachers, issues making meaning of poverty concerning nation education were often part of current event discussions. In one case a student spoke about a school in Virginia and had stated specifically:

The wealthier areas of the state had more resources (teacher-student ratio, more books, or laptops that the students could take home), and how obviously, the poor public school was nothing like that. A change needed to happen to see improvement for the public schools on the other side of the state.

The discussion centered on how students in poor areas could learn without tools. She continued: “They need books, and to be able to bring books home to study and be prepared for the days which they returned to school.” From comments made by students during the discussion, it became apparent that some students (future teachers) were hearing of the disparities for the first time and contemplating how both teachers and students might be affected.

Also from the field notes, a student spoke about another “*Current Event*” concerning mobile showers in which homeless people could shower for 20-30 minutes and use shampoo and toilets. A student thought that it was interesting because homeless people could have their own little space and they would not have to pay for anything. The discussion was further developed when a student stated: “Let us think how many times we hear people complain because people who are homeless are often not clean.” A second student spoke of the long-term implications of “If people do not have basic hygiene, no one is going to hire them.” Current event discussions often began with reports of specific events in specific places but were broadened into more far-reaching territories to understand the meaning and experiences of poverty.

The purpose of current event exercises and class discussions was not simply exposure to information, but the critical thinking that appeared as a consequence of both tools.

**Individualism versus Structuralism** The debate about the cause of poverty was among the most pervasive topics throughout the semester. It arose often during discussion of a wide range of other topics as it was also tied to the solution for poverty. Because it was so pervasive, I chose to follow up during the interview phase of the study and will present information from both data sources here. Exploration of this debate revealed that students recognized individualism as reflecting on the responsibility of the individual for their situation and structuralism as reflecting on the responsibility mainly of the people who made social policy decisions. Here, based on observations and interviews, I came to understand that a significant number of these students held individualistic beliefs at the beginning of the course through action several did not appear to realize it.

***Individualistic Thinking.*** During-class discussion I learned that individualism was a predominant view early on and that it began shifting to structuralism over time. From the Field Notes, a class discussion on students' attitudes started with the idea that attitudes are rooted not just in people's personal past experiences, but also in the attitude of the society which is based on individualistic ideas – that is, *work hard enough, you can make it, but you should not expect nor need any assistance from anyone, nor should you be expected to assist others.*

Some students held this view. For example, Alyssa was clear in her understanding of poverty as being the result of personal choices and in her interview stated: "I believe that poverty is just caused by a person's choices." Another student asserted that the American dream is a valid statement and she said, "In this country, people start at the bottom, they work hard, and they work their way up to succeed." But some other students like Sophia expressed this differently by

giving a hidden individualistic form of thinking, and stated: “Yes, everybody should have access to some health care but if I can afford to pay more, I should have access to better health care.” Based on other statements made by Sophia, throughout the semester, it seems unlikely that she recognized the individualistic undertones of her statement.

Other students were aware that the individualistic system was at work but was also vocal about the inequities contained in it. That was made evident by a student who stated, “The whole American idea of working hard doesn't quite work because people do not have the resources to get to where they should be improving.” A different student said, “It is not just about working hard. You can work so hard and remain poor.” Another student’s concern was: “Unfortunately here in the United States, we have that individualistic attitude that says you're supposed to take care of it and if you can't, you are somehow lesser than those who can.” Another student added: “Yes, but attitudes; we're not born with it, we learn attitudes.”

The words of these students indicate that they are aware of the focus on individualism but not all saw it favorably. Of those who did not see it favorably, there seemed a recognition of inequity and that hard work could be thwarted by those inequities. When discussion or questioning turned to the causes of poverty students revealed recognition of the connection between individual attributions for poverty and negative attitudes toward those in poverty. Consequently, if people believe that poverty is an individual problem, then they are more likely to have a negative attitude, and if they believe poverty is related to social structure, they are less likely to have negative attitudes about impoverished people. For several students, the societal assumptions about people in poverty were that they had personal issues or characteristics that created and kept them in an impoverished state. Addison spoke about individualistic attitudes but distanced herself by defining them as societal rather than personal.



I get so annoyed when people try to immediately blame the person because they reach the point of homelessness. People in my town especially constantly assume that the person is an addict and/or lazy which is honestly the dumbest assumption. No one would purposely live or go through that struggle because they want to.

Gabriella continued in the same vein in her rejection of these attitudes. From the interview, she stated: “Unfortunately, people who are on welfare get the title as unmotivated or are told they don't work hard enough to get where they need to be. It is unfair for people who are in poverty to be judged/ridiculed.” For example, Leah also in her initial written response, acknowledged that people were poor because “they are lazy because it is their responsibility. In her initial written response, Emma felt that some individuals stayed poor because that was the only way they saw themselves, and stated:

*I do not believe in handouts, and I do believe that there are so many opportunities out there, especially with the internet where people can educate themselves and find great jobs to make a living. I have compassion for people who have grown up in poverty and that's all they've ever known*

Though most students were unwilling to claim individualistic ideas about poverty and those who live in poverty, it was clear that they were aware of such beliefs. Some recognized and articulated the problem that such beliefs could cause for those living in poverty.

***Structuralistic Thinking.*** Student thoughts about structuralism were also apparent. A few students came to the class aware of structural barriers and other students became more aware as the semester progressed. The issue of health care was raised frequently as issues of health impact many areas of life. In the discussion about health care, some students like Emma, for example, thought that: “In a country like the United States, everyone should have access to excellent

health care.” Other students were unwilling to commit to excellent health care for all but were willing to say everyone should have some access since the United States is a medically advanced country.

Several students began by giving statements on the structural causes of poverty. Thus, for Sophia, the causes of poverty were the impractical expectations of companies and lack of education, and she stated: “The cause of poverty, in my opinion, is the unfair and unrealistic expectations of the corporate world ... from a poor education, and thus creates a never-ending cycle of living in poverty.” For Emily, the cause of poverty was the lack of work available and if there were enough jobs, the poor could break free of poverty. She stated: “... describe my thoughts on the cause of poverty is because of the lack of jobs. When there are not enough jobs for people it is hard for people to make a living and break the cycle of poverty.”

When speaking of structuralism, the idea of government responsibility was often mentioned with some students questioning if the government cared about those in poverty. For example, Isabella thought that people in poverty did not receive enough support from the government and stated:

What is even more outrageous is that the government thinks or does not care that so many people are struggling in poverty and receive a lack of support. The people to blame for this are not the people living in poverty and their lifestyle, but those within the government who believe that [limited] dollars a month can be enough for a family to live off for a month.

Other students suggested the responsibility was not solely in the hands of the government.

Sophia was one of those students who believed that society had the responsibility to care for its people, especially the poor, and that people can be the change for future generations. She stated:

“I believe we are just as responsible as the government is as a society to help and provide support anyway, we can for those in poverty”. Brooklyn agreed and expanded the type of support. She stated: “I believe as a society we can do more to help support people in poverty. Not only should we provide support financially but also emotionally because these people are struggling.”

The transition from individualistic thinking to structural thinking about poverty among these students was sometimes subtle and often incomplete as some students sought to mingle structural solutions with individual solutions (everyone gets some health care, but wealthier people deserve better health care). Or, if there were enough jobs, one could work their way out of poverty but no discussion of a wage structure that would permit this (work hard and you can make it).

### ***Experiences with Visual Media***

Among the tools used to stimulate thinking and offer context for the information provided was the use of visual/video content. Kaylee stated that she “learned better with visual media” which was illustrative of statements made by other participants throughout the class. The visual media used included short clips (typically less than 10 minutes) from sites such as YouTube, documentaries, and full-length movies. The experience students had by having class discussions after watching YouTube clips, videos and movies was a transition practice between lack of information and the realization of the condition in which those in poverty lived, and what poverty was.

These short videos appeared to begin the process of helping students to transition from the idea of poor people as a monolithic group about whom they had little information to real people, the conditions in which they lived, and the struggles they face. In the YouTube clip “Having Children in Poverty by Kathryn Edin” (see Appendix B), Ella spoke about single

women in poverty and said: “single mothers who need to raise their children ... I feel like there's less opportunity for them because you need going back to that food security clip.” For some students, the messaging in particular videos was something they could relate to the lives and decision-making of those who were impoverished but seemed equally applicable to their own lives. In the animated video: *Who Moved My Cheese* (see Appendix B) presented at the beginning of the semester, the subject matter of the class was the discussion about choices people make in their lives. Some complained about doing nothing (e.g., Hem), and those go on and look for new possibilities (new cheese). Aubrey stated: “Sometimes we make individual choices. Some good. Some are not so good. Haw’s choice was to look for new cheese and Hem’s choice was to complain about who took his cheese.” Lillian said: “I want to be like Haw, to look for new opportunities and take notes of my experiences.” For her, the meaning of the video was that in real life people should be willing to accept changes. She stated: “Be ready to change quickly and enjoy it ... keep moving.” Victoria discussed the point when Haw realized that the cheese was gone and said: “Get out, go and find new cheese. He was hesitant at first, but he went out and found new cheese.”

Participants demonstrated resilience and empathy by linking John Q’s movie (lack of health care) to current issues in society (COVID and accompanying lack of health care). In addition, to showing videos in class, movies, and documentaries were also used. These resources presented a variety of aspects of poverty in the context of a storyline or the chronicling of the lives of actual people. In the movie: In *The Pursuit of Happiness* (see Appendix B), students discussed the condition of a single father who found himself without any place to live he was forced to go to a shelter with his young son (Field Notes). A student stated: “I respected the father who refused to give up and who was willing to build a good quality of life for himself and

especially for his young son.” Another student thought that the father in the movie was able to take the best approach to be ethical and resilient even though he was forced to sleep in a public bathroom with his son. The student felt sad and that it was hard to watch but what was sadder, was knowing that in reality there were a lot of people in those conditions without a way out. She acknowledged:

for the pursuit of happiness, I feel like, the father was able to choose almost the best of both worlds. Because he remained ethical and kind of sustainable, but like sustainable and like really weird with sleep in the bathroom. ... It's very sad, but it's like the sad reality that a lot of people live in. And sometimes there great isn't a way out. Like, what are the choices that are like some going to hire you at a firm to dress up the way you can just up very low?

After students watched the movie *John Q* (see Appendix B), the discussion was based on how an honest man could find himself in a situation in which his young son needed a heart transplant and his health insurance was not willing to pay for it. A student observation was: “I don’t know if I may have done the same, but I understand that is a desperate move.” Another student added: “Especially now with the coronavirus pandemic, anyone can find himself without health insurance, and when John Q. took the ER area hostage his drastic action was justified.” This student saw a story about health care beyond the reach of a father who took some drastic measures and she related that to what was happening with the coronavirus pandemic. She extrapolated this working theory and said, “Yeah, here's someone who had some health insurance, but it was not enough, or they were without health insurance. Nowadays, some people either don’t have health insurance, they get sick like coronavirus, or they have health insurance, but currently, they won't cover coronavirus costs.”

In the documentary: Lalee's Kin (see Appendix B), the discussion was mainly on the great-grandmother in which Abigail said: "She [great-grandmother] was an example of a strong woman with a strong willingness to take good care of the little children." Sophia spoke about the principal of the elementary school whose institution was on probation and she stated: "I admired the principal who was able to bring the school out of the probation at least for that year." Abigail and Sophia made meaning of the documentary based on two issues: Poverty and education. The issue of poverty exists in rural south of the country where people do not have water and have to go to a detention facility to get it. The other issue was the level of education the students had which was less than 2.00 (minimum required from schools) and which schools were put on probation.

In these videos, students found relatable meaning in relatable messages which helped them to conceptualize issues. This was more than just a story being told for the enjoyment of the public. These were opportunities for students to blend knowledge gained in the class with the storylines of the movies or the experiences of those in the documentaries to better understand the consequences of poverty.

Watching video content helped the students to adjust their attitudes toward poverty and individuals in poverty. As students were watching the videos, they were finding the meaning within those videos. Upon the completion of the videos, class discussions were helping the students to fully develop the meaning they saw. For example, speaking about the movie "Pursuit of Happiness," a student said: "Sleep in the [public] bathroom. ... It's very sad, but it's like the sad reality that a lot of people live ... And sometimes there isn't a way out." By looking at the videos, students were finding some kind of meaning that applied to those who live in poverty, and in doing so, they were discussing the meanings they had found and had helped others find

meaning as well. That was such a successful part of the dynamic interaction among these students by telling their own stories and at the end of it all, they exchanged both their interactions and their feelings. As a result, these students tried to come up with meaning and/or knowledge that was unique to them. It came about as a result of that interaction in which meaning was being made by the students.

### *Poverty Simulation Exercises*

Considering my overall data set, specific activities which influenced students to make meaning of the lives of impoverished people were the Minimum Wage budget and the SPENT simulation exercises. I am speaking about these two particular exercises because, in my class observation, students were referring to these two exercises very often in the class discussions and during the interviews.

**Minimum Wage Budget.** From my observations, the discussion on the Minimum Wage budget simulation exercise was a specific activity within which students began to consider the financial difficulties of living in poverty. This was a particularly good opportunity for participant observation as students actively engaged in a process of meaning-making in real-time. For context: Students began the exercise in groups of four or five students to produce a monthly budget for a single parent who was working into a full-time minimum wage of \$7.25/hr. (\$15,080). The family was unable to access any governmental support than free lunch and breakfast which was available during the school year. This exercise was based on a federal salary of \$ 7.25 per hour and \$15,080 annually. It was conducted in groups of four or five students and the discussion was an interesting one in which students spontaneously made valid points in influencing each other's thoughts to make meaning of hardship. Avery, for her group, reported that a single parent with three children could not survive by earning a minimum wage job

and stated: “We feel frustrated and a single mother with three children cannot possibly live with just a minimum wage.” Abigail, from another group, stated that childcare and rent for an apartment were both expensive and it would be impossible to pay both of them with a minimum wage salary and indicated: “For us, childcare is expensive and getting paid with a minimum wage, it is impossible to be able to afford it if we also consider paying the rent for an apartment.” Ella, from a different group, thought that transportation for going to work and buying food was expensive and added: “This group thought that other than those reasons mentioned by other groups, we thought that transportation for going to work, coming back home, and shopping is also expensive.”

An example was the discussion regarding the minimum wage on whether to raise it. Some students were saying to raise it because as Elizabeth stated: “It is necessary to raise [minimum wage] to survive, childcare, rent, transportation, and food are very expensive today.” Other students like Gabriella were stating: “it is better not to raise it because many people would get laid off and that would ruin the lives of so many families.” These discussions focused not only on the budgets developed but, on the thoughts and feelings about the process and decision-making.

When the students started the budget exercise, they were in small groups. This allowed the students to be in their microsystem. Given that the class is a microsystem, the groups with the Minimum Wage budget exercise are in some ways actual microsystems that occur within the real world. This allowed the students to share information and certain ideas before deciding what was the best decision.

**SPENT.** I also analyzed the written answers and class discussions on the SPENT simulation exercise, which was assigned close to the end of the semester; stimulating responses



came to light, helping me to discover the development of making meaning of the material presented in class that resulted in changing their attitudes toward poverty and those in poverty. For many students, this exercise was an eye-opening experience, providing them with a better understanding, and a new way of thinking about people in poverty. Emily stated: “Overall, this game was an eye-opener because it shows the value of life and it helped me realize that people are struggling every day even when they do not know it.” For Abigail, participating in this simulation exercise resulted not only in becoming open-minded but also in becoming aware of the sacrifices made to get through to the month with enough money. She stated:

Overall, this experience was very eye-opening. I did not realize how much there is to sacrifice to get through the month without enough money. Participating in this exercise opened my mind to new ways of thinking about how life is way too expensive.

Students also spoke about the way they felt while conducting the SPENT simulation exercise. They remember vividly the choices they made were very difficult and painful. Layla indicated that she liked doing the exercise and she managed to go through the month, but she had to say no to certain needs and felt guilty. She had to decide between saying no to the needs of her children or having no place to live. Layla reflected on the moral value for the wishes of the children, but it was financially necessary and stated:

the simulation, I liked. In the end ... I had money to spend, but it was very sad because ... I felt guilty because I had to say no to a lot of things ... like you're ethical, but it will cost you because now you have nowhere to live.

Layla realized how expensive it was to act ethically and behave ethically. She felt guilty saying no to things she liked to have but she wanted to make sure to have a place to live. People in

poverty are seen as unethical and do only know that it can be expensive because they may not be able to afford to do what is ethically right.

For some other students, this simulation influenced their attitudes. Isabella changed her attitude knowing what \$10.00 could mean for the poor, the decisions they must make to provide for their children, and the struggle to survive. She stated:

This also influenced my attitude towards people in poverty now that I know ten dollars can go a long way for them ... especially when there are children who need to be provided for. Overall, this exercise has productively affected me and made me more aware of the instances, attitudes, and day-to-day occurrences that families in poverty, unfortunately, have to go through to survive on a daily took into consideration not only how people in poverty spend their money, but also outside factors which they cannot control, and stated:

My attitude towards those living in poverty has grown with more empathy than before. I now understand it is not just them watching what and how they spend but also taking into consideration all other outside situations that they cannot control.

Simulation exercises in class were focused as much on how students felt about poverty and people in poverty, and what they learned about life in poverty. Students learned how hard was to make decisions and how the exercises influenced their thinking about the lives of people. The simulation online exercises like SPENT offered support and empathy in this study.

This was the area in which students made meaning of the artifacts presented in class.

Considering the totality of the data, students were linking discussions between them about exercises, videos, and moves. This area represented the process by which students made meaning of the total material offered to them. Here we saw the changes in attitudes of many students who

were willing to share with the class through the discussions and/or with me through the interviews.

### **Area 3: Attitude at End of Class**

Throughout the course, these students were exposed to information and experiences which had the potential to shape their thinking about poverty. While it cannot be said that all students experienced change or that change was experienced at the same level by all students, by the end of the semester, some of these students demonstrated and articulated a more nuanced understanding of the lives of those living in poverty. For those students, I define their new understanding of poverty as having made meaning of the information gained over the semester. Students made meaning of poverty the combining information and experiences that spoke to them and by the end of the semester, some of these students demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the lives of those living in poverty.

A number of the students interviewed specifically described changes in the way they understood the experience of poverty and linked those changes to the class and sometimes to specific aspects of the class. During her interview, Zoey acknowledged that she began the class with some ideas about poverty by having work experience but did not see it as being particularly relevant to her life. She described her change as follows:

So how did I feel about poverty before taking the class? I was aware of it. Like, I knew it was a problem. But I never really tried to put myself in those shoes. So, after taking the class, I've, like, a better understanding of what someone in poverty lives through.

William provided a more detailed description of the changes in his attitude and his more nuanced understanding of poverty. In this quote, he articulated several points raised by other students as I observed during class discussions, conducted interviews, and reviewed written documents.

My attitude changed, just thinking about poverty from a new perspective. Understanding it doesn't have a certain image to it, like how it's displayed on TV or whatnot, or in the news. It's just everyday people sometimes next to you, struggling? It also made me think of how poverty is not just, you know, providing a plate for someone and shelter for someone like it's a lot more than that people need. Like, mental health services, job training, and support. So it just made me think harder. And it opened my eyes to a lot more situations of people. From this class, I just understood more about what somebody in poverty lives like. And then, and, like, definitely, the Spent simulation as well, like, really made me put my shoes into someone who was going through poverty

Abigail also concurred about the influence of this class in shaping her understanding of poverty.

I think it's left a bigger impact on me than many classes I've taken. Just hearing stories or seeing how bad things are. I feel like it has opened my eyes. I got somewhat of an understanding because you can't know what living in poverty is like unless you're living in poverty. It's one of those things that till it happens to you don't know exactly what it's like. But I feel like this class has helped me get closer to understanding what it might be like.

Like others in the study, Abigail felt a broader understanding of poverty that would be useful as she was planning a career in teaching. Taking this class was important for her to listen to stories and understand the way people in poverty were living.

For Layla, a particular reading, written in the first person, detailing the daily and ongoing issues of a woman and her children living in poverty was key in her meaning around stereotyping. Layla was able to put faces and names to people in poverty and began to see beyond the stereotypes of the poor. She indicated:

They're real people with real names. And like they do exist. So, it's like, I just like with him using real people's examples, like the papers ... about the lady. I think it was Joe Parker, and these are real people.

For Layla, the process of meaning-making around poverty was complex as she first needed to make meaning of her own experience as an impoverished person. Her mother's negative messaging about poverty, delivered since childhood led to bias against people like herself (impoverished) and internalization of the stigma. She did not acknowledge the bias at the beginning of class but during her interview, she acknowledged her initial bias toward those in poverty and spoke of the change in meaning she and her family now attaches to those who live in poverty She stated:

Like my entire life. I just thought that that was just an embarrassing thing to go through. Because now like I had that bias when-making when I came to class. But now it's like, okay, my family and I understand that ... a lot of people go through this every day.

While it is almost certain that many years of bias and stigmatization cannot be undone in a single semester, Layla appears to have attached a meaning to the lives of those in poverty that is not focused on individual deficits.

Layla spoke about the thoughts she had before the class about wasting resources. Gradually, she had accomplished so much relative to her environment. She felt that the whole aspect of poverty and the way people struggled mattered. She said:

I'd say that I wouldn't like it once I was I felt like before the class, I will waste a lot of maybe opportunities or like food, but now it's like a social environment. It's like, hey, everything counts, like in a social environment. Everyone's living and going through then struggles ...

Zoey referred to the idea of being positive regarding the food people had and the manner community interrelated with their environment. At the end of the semester, she was mindful of her natural environment and was beginning to alter her behavior. She stated:

Like, be more appreciative, like, appreciate the food that's in your house appreciates, appreciate the way you interact with others socially, appreciate the fact that you could socialize properly with others, and you don't have any struggles regarding that. So it just made me feel more like more aware of my environment, and how I should start changing my behavior. To just give back more.

At the end of the semester, in the interview, Leah's attitude remained di same as in the beginning because, "even though I understand that some people become impoverished due to things outside of their control, I still feel that most people in poverty are to blame for the circumstances."

Emma's attitude also in her interview continued to feel the same and she acknowledged:

*I think, yes. I like the discussions we have in these types of classes, especially in this one. But a part of me kind of doesn't like it too because we have college courses about this type of stuff, but nothing ever seems to be changed. So, it kind of just contradicts itself. Like why are we learning about this when nothing is happening to help these people? Let's just learn in-depth how we're constantly screwing these people over for lack of beta ter word.*

For the many students in this study who articulated change, in this area of interest, considering the overall data set, showed a distinct understanding of people in poverty. They became more aware of their environment, realized that people in poverty were for real and they had real names, put themselves in the shoes of the poor, feel not embarrassing being poor, feel more aware of their environment, and think about how they should begin altering their behavior.

**Area 4: Moving Forward**

The newly acquired knowledge/deeper understanding of poverty had led participants (interviewed) to take or plan a course of action in their environment. Those actions included: Motivation to impact the microsystem, social justice, advocacy, and going beyond advocacy.

***Motivation to Impact the Microsystem***

During classroom observations, students would sometimes allude to sharing information with family and peers outside the class. Follow-up during the interview phase of the study indicated this sharing occurred for virtually all of the interviewees, though the circumstances, intent, and outcomes differed. Considering all sets of my data, from class discussions and interviews, students spoke about attempting to impact their microsystems outside of the classroom. The overall concept of this section is that students want to share what they learned in class with the outside world.

While several microsystems may have been active in the lives of these students, those who spoke about information sharing began with their family and roommates. As these were the groups with whom they had the most contact and the most interactive relationships. Abigail shared the information with people who had similar interests and/or strong connections to her. She said:

I remember talking to my roommate about stuff, I've gone over in class because she's very passionate about this topic. And I have, you know, discussed what it's been like doing certain projects like this SPENT assignment. I'm one of those people who when something shocks me, I feel like I have to share it with people. Or at least people close to me. I honestly feel a lot of guilt for feeling like I'm not doing enough.

As previously stated, Abigail was one of the students who arrived in class with ideas about Social Justice already present. That may be attached to her interactions with the roommate who is ‘passionate’ about the topic of poverty. Sara also followed this pattern is beginning to share her understanding of poverty by saying “you know, sharing the information that I know from this class already with my roommates, and my mom, I feel like that's a start.”

Though interviewees spoke about sharing accurate information and their new understanding of poverty with family and friends, not all spoke of the outcome of those interactions. Of those who did speak of outcomes, the level of acceptance of the information and the alternate meaning the student now attached to poverty varied.

Alexis felt more comfortable talking to her parents about impoverished people, and at Christmas, she challenged family members who made negative statements about those in poverty who receive governmental support. In describing an interaction with extended family members during a holiday celebration, she stated:

Like we talked about it on Christmas because they don't like some people are saying Oh, like there's no need for like, like having given everyone free lunch and I was like trying to explain to them Oh, ~~like no~~, like some kids, ~~like~~ have no food at home. And then they kind of understood. They didn't get it as much. I'd say.

She noticed that her parents understood what she had said however, she was not sure if they understood her message. Nonetheless there appeared to be no negative implications for the relationship. This was not the case for all participants who challenged the parental attitudes toward those in poverty. Hannah reported relational changes and tension as a result of her sharing “my interactions have changed definitely at home. There have been a lot more arguments



between my parents and me because my beliefs and thoughts are now a bit different than my parents.”

The pre-existing relationships between these students and the closest microsystems allowed them a pathway to share information when they chose to do so. That sharing particularly within their family systems was part of dynamic long-term exchange. The family system provided much of the information that shaped student understanding before entry into the class. Now, having completed the class, these students are bringing information back to the family group that may change or enhance the group’s understanding of poverty.

For some, the sharing was spontaneous and related to specific class material or activities. When asked during her interview to describe how the class shaped her thinking, Zoey recalled a class discussion that mentioned impoverished individuals in her county. Following that discussion, she called home and spoke directly to her family, and they discussed the idea of poverty in her community and many other communities in the vicinity. She indicated “I remember a talk about counties in class, my county was there That exercise impacted me. And after the exercise, I ran in to call my parents and I was like, wow”. She then moved to share the information with peers, saying “I have other friends who do homework with me. I’m like, oh, my God, did you know that this happened? And they’re like, Oh, my God, no idea”. Her surprise was that poverty existed in her wealthy county. She gained a new understanding of the inhabitants of the area with which she previously considered herself *familiar*.

Students in this study began sharing information with and within the microsystems with which they were most familiar but their efforts and plans did not end at this level. For example, Sara actively challenged people who judged the poor to be lazy and unwilling to find work. She

thought it was necessary to educate people by giving adequate information while modifying their behavior. She stated:

I guess you can say, when people judge them, like very heartedly and say, like, oh, they are too lazy to go get a job, ... there are so many other factors that come into it that ... they don't know about. So, I think the most important thing is to be knowledgeable, give the correct information to these people that are asking you and you know, just trying to maybe change their behavior ...

Zoey also spoke about sharing what she had comprehended in the classroom with others outside the classroom related to poverty and those in poverty. She proposed to stand up to individuals who did not understand what it meant to be in deprivation. She wanted individuals to place themselves in the shoes of those in poverty and have them understand how that would feel. She also liked to show individuals how to appreciate their current status while not being in poverty at that moment. She told:

So, I'm planning to share it in ... conversation about poverty, you probably haven't talked about it, especially in my career. ... introduce the conversation and be like, hey, try to put yourself in someone's shoes. Use that example. Because I win on my shoes. How would this make you feel? Not trying to offend you or anything. But how would this make you feel?

While it was not clear whether these efforts had moved beyond the planning stage, it is noteworthy that the students recognized the need to share the information gained during the class beyond their closest microsystems.

In the end, some students challenged what individuals wrongly said about people in poverty and they attempted to influence their macrosystems outside of the class by being social

workers, and advocates. They felt free to speak to their parents about the poor and convince them that it was falsely implied how the poor obtain free lunches while informing them that many children were hungry.

### *Social Justice and Advocacy*

Issues and concerns related to social justice and advocacy were also present in the minds of these participants. A few students entered the class speaking of social justice but for most, the idea and their understanding of the society just developed over the semester. For some undergraduates, social justice could be the voice the poor needed to have. For Zoey with her ambition to become thought in terms of advocacy and providing services to meet the immediate and long term needs of those who are impoverished

I say that social justice could be a voice of poverty. But right now, it's not quite the voice we need. ... they could provide new laws, new rules, and how to help out ... a voice that's trained, and a voice that has made connections ... to families that are struggling, ... You need to look at what they need ... put yourself in their shoes. And ... be the voice that they need or provide the services.

Zoey was not alone in her appreciation of the need to connect with those families and individuals in poverty to understand what services and resources are required. William also expressed this during his interview as did students in my observations.

Given that the discourse around poverty typically revolves around a lack of economic resources, social justice as it relates to wages attracted several students. Ella addressed this issue as she recalled a YouTube video shown in class that focused on low low-water and food insecurity, but which somehow led her to focus more broadly. Her particular interest was income

inequality for women and the need for systemic change. When asked to speak about changes need to achieve social justice, she stated:

It has to be systemic. The system does favor the affluent people. The poor urban communities are down upon because they're not the same skin color or have the same economic status ... They feel like women make less than men which ... in the 21st century 2021 ... still a struggle today ... You need your computer ... to go to these interviews seem to take the right things to get that job but they may look at the town you live in and be like I don't know if they're

For some students, social justice meant fighting for equal opportunities, rights, and gender discrimination in wages. Considering the year in which people live (i.e., 2021), there is still race/ethnicity discrimination on social standings, financial standings, or for just being employed. For example, Abigail spoke about the right for women to receive the same salary wages as men. She was shocked that in this current period, women are still paid less than men even though women are completing the same work. She stated:

Opportunity and equal rights affect to affected hand how much you're paid. There are still places women still don't make as much as men often. And that still blows my mind considering what year it is. And how some people based on their race or ethnicity might be looked at differently for a job or based on their social standings or financial standings?

Issues related to social justice were often raised in conjunction with course activities not specifically focused on social justice. This happened more frequently as the semester progressed and students gained more information to include in their meaning-making. For example, observation of a current event discussion about people who were homeless being fined for sleeping in a park. A student stated: "There is no reason whatsoever to give a \$2,000.00 fine to

homeless people to be in the park. Where do homeless people would get the money to pay the fine.” Another student said: “If homeless people cannot pay a fine, they will get arrested and that is an easy way to imprison homeless people.” Another student added: “Homeless people do not have a job and as long as that cycle continues, nothing will change.” The discussion expanded to the social justice implications of removing members of the public from public property and the jailing of citizens for minor offenses.

As an observer and interviewer, I noted that in the fall semester of 2021, several students came to class with an awareness of social justice issues related to lack of equity and bias against those who were impoverished. They were aware of issues related to the connections between poverty & race, policing health, and several other issues. More importantly, they were willing to speak of these issues. These students were sometimes able to encourage class discussion by making statements that resonated with their peers. In addition, the peer-to-peer communication seemed to allow more comfort as students were not faced with the possibility of disagreeing with the instructor. Students showcased their awareness and acknowledgment which was reflected in society during 2021.

Other students indicated that awareness was needed to educate people about poverty because not everyone knew enough. For example, a student said: “I feel like, towards the poor, I have more awareness. And where like, I would like to spread more awareness so people can know about it more. Because that's like a lot of people just don't know enough.”

For example, Zoey alluded to the idea that her recent and potential influence on individuals in need of becoming a social worker and standing on her toes while maintaining her position as an advocate, offers the means, makes, and motivation to create the necessary changes. She acknowledged:

Being a social worker and advocate for poverty means that you have to be on your toes, you need to fight back. So, I'm interested in like working as a social worker because you have the power to be there and provide you are inspired to look at yourself in certain situations, and just do something to change. What hasn't been changed thus far?

Sophia also tried to do her best conversing with others and being a part of organizations to raise money for poor communities and being a full advocate. She admitted:

For impoverished people? Definitely. I think I need to do more, but I try my best whenever it does come up in conversation, or whenever I do hear like there's an organization that's raising money for the impoverished community or if there's something that I could do ... Hopefully I can be a full advocate of the impoverishment.

### ***Going beyond Advocacy***

Some students involved in the study stated the intent and need to move beyond advocacy to address issues related to poverty. Though no one discounted the importance of advocacy or the work involved in advocacy, many felt the need. Some undergraduates were willing to work differently than just advocate for the poor and do more than just promote what they had learned in class. The participants thought that one thing is to inform others and another thing is to get involved and 'get their hands dirty. For example, Layla wanted to work harder and be more engaged in her future. She envisioned belonging to a fundraiser and volunteering with a non-profit organization. She planned to implement new programs and make recommendations. Layla also intended to help those organizations to spread the word and even though she would not be able to change the world to eradicate poverty, she would at minimum, help those individuals in her community. She stated:

I think in the future, ... I would like to get more involved. I want to join ... fundraising ... a lot of like Greek organizations, ... I can most definitely tell them that hey, like, there's like this A you can do. And then these are these programs that you can do the swim can recommend this ... And word spreading awareness. Like it makes it easier because you can spread that 100 people spread that ... And although I won't change the whole world and award eliminate poverty, it would at least help the people around your community.

For students like Victoria, engagement with places that help impoverished people begins with volunteering and helping others to make meaning. She said:

I think it's just ... volunteering, figuring out ways you can help in your community ... I have a friend ... who works for ... health department. She worked at a homeless shelter beforehand. And she still volunteers at the shelter. So, I think Little things like that.

Other students wanted to do more than just advocate. They loved helping people understand the struggle of those in poverty and what they were going through. For example, Abigail had stated, “to work harder and be more than just an advocate meant making sure people understood the conditions of the poor.” For her, it was important to inform people about what she had learned in class because she was convinced that many people did not understand that poor individuals often were without food and water. Many of those people thought that the poor were just lazy. Abigail expressed how sharing what she knew with her roommates and her mom was just a starting point. She stated:

I'm saying that I could be more of an advocate for them. Just like people I know, if they don't know anything about them. Or if they're interested in learning, I can take the information that I learned from this class and give it to them. Some people might, again

may not understand the exact challenges that they go through every day, and like, you know, not being able to get food and water. Like they may not, they may think that oh, again, they're lazy. They don't want to get a job. But there's there are things that come into it. So, I can def that I could have become a stronger advocate.

Abigail went a step beyond advocacy by sharing the information learned in class with her roommates and her mom. After she understood better what she learned from the class activities, she took them to her microsystem, her room, and her house. She felt that sharing the news with the microsystem was a start.

This section highlighted the development of how students were gathering more information about impoverishment, deprivation-connected concerns, and individuals in poverty. The class material helped students generate their attitudes relating to impoverishment and individuals in deprivation. After I examined the answers given by 44 students, I realized how the class was affected overall, and how much progress undergraduates had made regarding making meaning to hardship. This was accomplished by learning the material submitted and maintaining an open way of thinking about new evidence learned. The results gave light to the four areas centered on the research question.

### **Participant Profiles**

These profiles are included as an indication of the progression of particular students as they came to develop a deeper or different understanding of those living in poverty. The experiences of those in the profiles seem indicative of the experiences of other students in in the class.

The criteria for the selection of the students to be included in the participant profiles were;

- a. The participants are among those who were interviewe at the end of class (Fall 2021);



- b. The student provided some information regarding their attitude/understanding of poverty prior to class. This may have been for the initial thoughts assignment or as part of their reflections at other data collection points
1. The participation in the written responses of the SPENT simulation exercise With the inclusion of this section, I wanted to present a stronger view of the development as it happened for single undergraduate students.
2. The aim of the data details selected in this section was to give examples that reflected the views of the entire class.

Here we are looking at Victoria, Alexis, Zoe, and Layla who changed or did not change their attitudes toward poverty and those in poverty.

### ***Victoria***

Initially, Victoria did not articulate a strong attitude toward the poor. However, her response showed signs that she did not want to fully express all of her thoughts and feelings about the subject. She stated:

*I never really thought about my attitude towards people in poverty, but I think it's tough to get out of and every little good thing is a big win for those who struggle. I think the cause of poverty is just not being able to make ends meet with the environment you are in ... being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for is the greatest poverty. People...were poor not because they were stupid or lazy. There are a lot of people still out with nothing ... As a society we don't feel responsible to help or provide support for those ... I think if there's the option to send some money forward people will but not a lot*

Her responses to the SPENT simulation exercise indicated the development of some understanding about how difficult it was for people to live in poverty. Being in the shoes of the poor she was forced to buy cheap items to get through the month. She acknowledged:

*I think it highlights what slippery slope poverty is and how easy it is to find yourself in poverty. It's shocking how circumstances played a role in poverty and how the smallest thing or purchase can set someone back ... I chose some of the cheaper options at the moment knowing and understanding that the most important thing for this month is getting through it, I can worry about some of the other stuff later.*

At the end of the semester, Victoria recalled not being exposed to poverty before coming to class. It was the class that made her realize how valuable self-esteem really was and unfortunately, that was not for poor individuals. For her, the question was how would be possible for the poor to recover their self-esteem. In addition, she was talking about poverty and people in poverty outside of the class. She indicated:

*I didn't have a lot of exposure to it. I guess I never really thought about how much because I don't know. I've never guessed it honestly, I've never really thought about it ... It (the class) made me understand how important self-esteem is. And that's probably very lacking. When we think about how to help people in poverty we don't always think about how they can help their self-esteem... I talk about it with my co-workers a lot. And then I have a lot of friends who work in social work in that field. So I talked about it with them. A lot, but it was pretty often ever, like, Thursdays I would go into work. Oh, my God, guess what I learned today? I guess I learned yesterday*

**Alexis**

Before coming to class, she showed to have some knowledge about poverty and poor individuals. Her initial concern was the stigma attached to those in poverty; then she spoke about wages, dependence, and deprivation of health care. For her, the government spent additional money on defense than on people in need. There was a need to educate people and she acknowledged:

*Causes of poverty can include low wage income, addiction, lack of healthcare, etc ... I have always noticed growing up the stigmas around people in poverty. Things such as they are lazy or they are using their money for drugs. I never understood why it was looked at so negatively in society. We spend more money on defense than we do on getting people off the streets. I think as a society the most important thing is to change this stigma on poverty. Why must it be looked down upon? I think we should educate ourselves more so that we can find ways to help. As a society, we should stand by those in need instead of putting them down. It shouldn't be ignored*

During the semester, Alexis came to realize that it was difficult living in poverty especially managing money because making a wrong decision could ruin the lives of those people to buy basic items. As result, it could cause extreme stress. For Alexis, it was difficult for the poor to make financial decisions because they did have not enough money. She stated:

*After doing this exercise, it made me realize how incredibly hard it is to be in poverty. All the decision-making stresses you out because you could be doomed if you make the wrong decision once with your money. It also made me think about how people in poverty feel how more and more problems keep adding up, which is incredibly stressful ... This game helped me understand what people in poverty have to go through. It is overwhelming and stressful because there are so many decisions to make, and you never*

*know if you are making the right decision. Everything costs money, and it is hard to decide where you want to put the little money you have.*

At the end of the semester, Alexis affirmed that the media influenced her attitude before coming to class and now she felt to have more knowledge about the poor and a better understanding of their struggle. She wanted to be a mentor and begin by educating her family. Also, she was thinking to go and help social agencies with the hope that others would do the same. She said:

*I didn't know a lot about poverty ... I would see some stuff on media ... I learned more and I think that's like better that I know all this now ... I don't feel like I feel for like people who are in poverty now like much more and I would definitely like stick up for them if I ever see something ... I don't think a lot of people understand the way you feel the way you interacted with them. How that influences others ... attitude towards the poor brings you to become a mentor, or a representative ... educating like my family on it. And just so they could like see different ways and then they could tell more people about it ... I think by just people talking about it more ... I would go to a food bank and help out and then like, making sure other people are helping out too*

### **Zoe**

At the beginning of the class, Zoe thought that being female, black, without high education, or disabled and without support, people would be poor. She felt that that kinds of individuals needed to have a high education because with the right support people would become motivated to work and not be poor.

*I feel that there are many different causes of poverty. There are social reasons like your sex, race, and education ... There are also medical reasons like disability and many others ... I feel that people in poverty just need some support from others... I feel that*

*more money should be going to these programs so that we can help more people ... I feel that it should at least be equal to schools because giving people a good education can help them stay out of poverty ... It is a huge responsibility for society to help support those in poverty ... If we give them the support they need then they may be even more motivated to work hard and get out of poverty*

During the semester and after doing the SPENT simulation exercise, Zoe realized that being in poverty meant feeling disadvantaged compared to others. The exercise, for her, was an eye-opening event and she thought that poor individuals must be strong-minded. She asserted:

*My participation in this exercise taught me that every day is a sacrifice when you live in Poverty ... Overall, a very eye-opening experience and a reminder that these types of sacrifices are made daily in families living in poverty ... One needs to be mentally strong for this.*

At the end of class Zoe recognized that before taking the class, she did not try to be in the poor shoes, and only after taking the class, did she feel that it was necessary to help those in need. She realized that the class affected her to be conscious and utilize her position to help other people. She acknowledged:

*I never really tried to put myself as a person that lives in poverty in those shoes ... But after taking the class, I know, more about the specific issue that they go through, and it's not okay. You know, it's like, okay, we could do something to help ... So the class gave me a lot of clarity ... And it's like I apply that to my life when it comes to being thankful and saving up and like appreciating what I have. So the class influenced me and gave me a lot of awareness in regards to how to use my privilege to help others.*

**Layla**

At the beginning of class, Layla like Zoe believed that there was more than just one kind of poverty and there are many ways of circumstances people can get trapped in the circle of poverty. For Layla to be in poverty could be a matter of choices people take in their life circle or natural disasters in which individuals lose everything they had. In addition, Layla felt that many individuals in the population did not feel any obligation to assist those in need. She stated:

*I believe that there is not just one cause of poverty ... Many families in poverty have different stories as to why they are poor ... I feel that not everyone in poverty is to blame ... not everyone poor, is in poverty because of choices they have made ... Sometimes people become poor because of natural disasters that took everything from them ... I feel that most people on society do not hold any responsibility to help those in need.*

During the class, Layla thought that the SPENT exercise gave her a new way of thinking especially on how to manage money. After taking this exercise she altered her attitude and she recalled when she was younger taking 2.00 dollars a day from her mother's belonging. She affirmed:

*It (SPENT) has given me a new perspective on how I view those who were or are in poverty ...something as little as 3 dollars a day could easily be phone bill money by the end of the month ... Something as little as 3 dollars a day can be the reason why you could not pay either your groceries or phone bill ... This changed my attitude to certain things because I would remember how much my mother would get mad when my sister and I was taking 2 dollars a day from my mother's dresser*

At the end of the class, Layla felt that the class helped her in many ways especially when she watched the movie 'Who Moved My Cheese?' which is a funny story but very significant in life.

The moral of the story is that people should not complain at any job and instead keep calm and informed of discoveries.

*It helped me like see that there's just like poverty everywhere, not just in one area ... Like, there's different types of poverty and like what even like, gets you there, like, when he was discussing, like, Pete like the cheese being moved, like, although it was like a funny story. It's true. Like I did, like think that you can apply that to like real life like poverty, like how it starts and where it comes from. And so like, I feel like that's something Moses was gonna do learn that was different*

Participant profiles intend to show what the student knew before coming to class, and how the students made meaning of the material presented in class. They told us what their attitudes were, spoke of the the process of learning during the class, and with whom they shared their knowledge after class. The profiled students used the interview experience to further reflect on the meaning they made of the material from the class and the way it shaped their thinking. As part of this process, they articulated the change in their attitudes.

## Chapter V: Discussion

Qualitative methodology was primarily used to investigate how the participants made meaning of the material presented in the ‘*Poverty and Families*’ class, and whether or not it changed their beliefs, attitudes, and interactions with those in poverty. For this study, to make meaning is to explain the process of how participants determine, realize, or make sense of the material presented in class and how they understand what they knew before taking the class (Clayton et al., 2020; Mackie et al., 2021). For these students, the idea of making meaning was presented as gaining a deeper understanding of the real-life implications of poverty. This understanding is shaped by a combination of information, experience, and interactive experiences.

### Research Question:

How do undergraduate students taking a class focused on issues related to poverty and impoverished individuals, make meaning of the information gained during the class?

Data collection and analysis were guided by a grounded theory approach. This section will begin with the presentation of the Theoretical model developed from the analysis of these data. This will provide context for the discussion of those data. The discussion from that point on will be organized around the features of the Model which contains aspects of Ecological Systems Theory and is framed in terms of Input, Process, and Output. The section will conclude with the study’s limitations and future implications.

### Theoretical Considerations

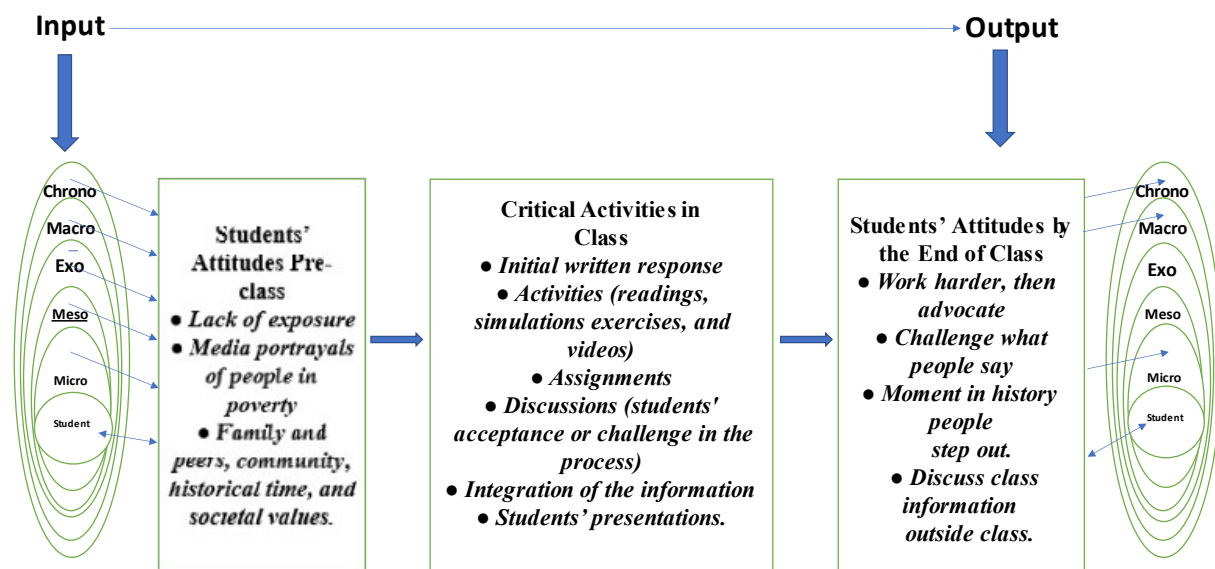


The Meaning Making Towards Social Change (Model 1) based on the analysis of these data, showcased the development of a person's shifting understanding of poverty and how those understandings or the actions resulting from those understandings influenced other microsystems (Arnold et al., 2012; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ceci, 2006). This classroom became a place where students interacted with their peers and instructors and negotiated a deeper understanding of poverty (Head et al., 2019). Discussions, assignments, class activities, and video content, contributed to changing many students' attitudes by providing information, experiences and opportunities to making meaning of poverty. Sword et al. (2004) stated that when students participate in social interaction, experiential work, and school activities that revolve around poverty, there can be changes in their attitudes. Though one cannot make the claim of attitude transformation for all students, these data indicated that some students gained a deeper understanding of the lives of those in living poverty. Likewise, this is what happened in the 'Poverty and Families' course; some students transformed their attitudes about poverty and people in poverty. In this model, Input is defined as the meaning/understanding participants attached to poverty before class; Process represents the tools and strategies used in class that facilitated the students in making meaning or gaining understanding about poverty and the lives of those living in poverty; and Output encompasses students' understanding of poverty at the end of class as well as their attempts and intent to influence microsystem and, macrosystem outside class in the current point in historical time (chronosystem).

To explain the workings of the model, I will utilize the language of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). In brief, EST envisions an individual's environmental system as containing five nested levels (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) with the individual at the center (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). The relationship

between the individual and those levels rests on several assumptions that are particularly relevant to this study. Those assumptions are: individuals and their interactions with the environment are dynamic and mutually dependent; individuals generate judgments that influence the environment, and the environment affects social judgments (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993).

### Model 1: Meaning Making Towards Social Change



#### Input: Poverty Meaning on Arrival

Input consists of the understanding of poverty shaped by student environments before beginning the class. In this case that understanding was shaped mainly by family, personal experience, media portrayals, historical time, and societal values. Most of these students acknowledge a lack of actual contact or experience with those in poverty.

Since part of the purpose of this study was to explore how/if and in what way students' understanding of poverty was influenced by the class, it was necessary to have some

understanding of student attitudes when they began the class. This section begins with a review of student attitudes/understandings of poverty before arrival in the class with preretrieval referring to the time before having contact or exposure to course material. This is followed by a discussion of how microsystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems shaped those understandings related to individuals in poverty.

Since the focus of this study was student attitudes toward poverty, students were asked to communicate, in writing, their attitudes about poverty, issues related to poverty, and people living in poverty, before being exposed to any course content or other members of the class. In this study, the term *attitude* implies reactions, beliefs, and behaviors toward an object, person-situation, or event (Cozzarelli et al., 2001). Based upon those initial responses, the idea of attitudes came to be linked to their understanding of the lives of those living in poverty. A significant number of the participants were unwilling or unable to articulate attitudes or thoughts about those in poverty, saying that their knowledge of poverty was insufficient to have attitudes or thoughts. Those who did respond to the question were able to speak of their feelings about those in situations of poverty. Typical responses focused on the students' feelings of sadness about impoverished people. Some students described negative societal attitudes toward and assumptions about those who are impoverished. Some students openly rejected those societal attitudes and thought them unjust but were still unwilling to define their attitudes.

When students spoke about the cause(s) of poverty, they again defaulted to societal beliefs about personal/individual responsibility. They stated that people who had individualistic points of view tended to have negative attitudes towards the poor describing them as lazy, dangerous, engaging in illegal activities, and responsible for their situation. They tried to be distancing this from themselves. Frank et al. (2020) also indicated that negative perspectives

related to poverty prevented students from tapping into their empathy for those struggling in poverty. At this point in the study, students saw themselves as reporters of events rather than as active participants. Since class observations and interviews revealed that at least some students held to the personal responsibility aspect of these societal beliefs, this may have been an attempt to distance themselves from the potential for negative feedback from peers or instructors.

Observations of class discussion and activities over the initial 2 weeks of class supported the students' written assertion of having limited knowledge of poverty or individuals living in poverty. One specific example of the lack of knowledge about issues related to poverty was found in student responses to a question about the level of federal funding allotted to programs aimed specifically at meeting the needs of those living in poverty. Students estimated that the percentage of the federal budget to be significantly higher than was truly the actual case. The percentage given by the participants was between five and forty percent, but it was about three percent (Moses, 2011). The misinformation that drives the belief in higher percentages is related to the inclusion of programs that serve populations other than those living in poverty (Shaefer et al., 2019). These inflated estimates form part of the rationale for the negative societal attitudes toward those in poverty as they are seen as drawing from public resources while contributing little or nothing (FitzGerald & Hust, 2017; Katz, 1990; Lavender-Bratcher et al., 2017; Weaver & Yun, 2011).

The student's initial thoughts about attitudes towards poverty demonstrated a lack of knowledge and exposure. Students stated they did not learn about poverty during their K-12 education and many specifically stated they had not been exposed to it in everyday life. This is consistent with the work of Engler et al. (2020) and Jessup (2001) who found that undergraduate students, even those whose aim was to work with impoverished populations often knew little

about or had no exposure to the implications of poverty in the lives of those with whom they would work. It is notable that among those students were students who had themselves lived in poverty at some point. Such stigmatization of those living in poverty by others in an analogous situation was noted in a study examining the usage of food banks (Swales et al., 2020). In that study, participants using the resource (food bank) shamed other recipients by identifying themselves as worthy or truly in need while the others were viewed as unwilling to provide for themselves. Other participants in that study, shamed themselves for accessing the resource and masked (Hamilton & Catterall, 2006) their reciprocity even from members of their family microsystem by traveling to a different community to access food. Flanagan et al. (2014) spoke about young people being aware of the stigma linked with individuals in poverty and how it might be applied to those who present as impoverished. Those attitudes came to be developed as a result of the interactions and messaging between families and other ecological systems and were demonstrated by some students in the study

### *Attitudes Shaped by Micro/Macro/Chrono Systems*

Students in this study acknowledged that they began class with a meaning/understanding attached to the concept of poverty. For most, that meaning was based on a lack of knowledge or misinformation from a variety of sources. For other students, either the source of their understanding of poverty was various experiences that brought them into contact with people living in poverty. It was clear that the dynamic interaction between them and their ecological systems was at the heart of their understanding. In terms of Model 2, those interactions formed the Input (e.g., the knowledge and understanding of poverty) that students had upon their entry into the class. While all levels remained present, the data supplied by the participants focused on the microsystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem

**Microsystem.** Though several microsystems influenced the initial understanding of poverty, for these students, the influence of family was the one most often mentioned. The actions and attitudes of family members (e.g., microsystem) had a considerable impact on students' attitudes toward poverty and individuals living in poverty. The family is among the most proximal of microsystems and has been demonstrated to transmit attitudes, values, and beliefs intergenerationally (Gauly, 2017; Silverstein & Lendon, 2012; Ron, 2015). This transmission typically occurs over time but can also be the result of specific situations. For example, one student recalled specific incidents while growing up, when their parents issued verbal admonitions to avoid revealing details of their home and family situation. They were living in poverty and sharing living space with multiple extended family members family. Their parents taught them that being poor was shameful and a reflection of character. According to Hamilton and Catterall (2006), the stigma of poverty can be related to shame which can be developed from the person's perception of falling short of what one could be. Swales 2020) also found evidence of this. Parents also told their children to take their time when eating in public so that people would not think they were famished. This statement was made because this kind of behavior (eating quickly) was considered to be an indication of poverty. These messages delivered both situationally and over time, left the student with the idea that being impoverished is a source of individual shame. In other words, the parents who are part of the microsystem influenced their children to feel embarrassed and different from others, which means they are them and we (in poverty) are us.

Some messages about poverty were direct while others were not. For example, students reported their parents not speaking negatively about the poor, but they still sent negative messages. Students reported that even if they wanted to help poor individuals, parents chose to

be protective suggesting that poor individuals could be threatening and could waste money on damaging substances. Gauly (2017) and Min et al. (2012) spoke about socialization strategies that permit communication to be direct or not implicit. Regardless of the transmission methods, some students chose to reject the meaning parents attached to those who were impoverished (danger, wasteful) because they what information on or experiences that equaled a different meaning for/ understanding of poverty.

**Macrosystem.** In describing their initial thoughts about poverty, students often referred to ‘society’ and “societal attitudes”. It was noteworthy that those participants spoke of society as if they were not part of it and/or that it had no power to shape their thinking. Similar to Sue et al. (1992) and Sue and Sue (2007) who described concepts related to society and poverty, these participants spoke about societal assumptions about individuals in poverty, including the assumptions that they were addicts, lazy, and unenthusiastic about going to work. This led to stigmatization and ridicule of poor individuals. Individualistic attitudes reflect the idea that individuals are personally responsible for causing their situation and are therefore responsible for the consequences. As Blair et al. (2014) indicated, these individualistic attitudes originated from long-standing beliefs that the U.S. is a place in which a person’s success is based on personal choices. Structuralist attitudes place responsibility on systems and decision-makers over which the individual has no control. Research consistently demonstrates U.S. attitudes toward those living in poverty are largely individualistic (Bradshaw, 2007; Campbell et al., 2001; Davids & Gouws, 2013; Hunt, 2004; Kleugel & Smith, 1986).

The macrosystem shapes the belief system that individuals hold in the context of the surrounding culture, social structures, and systems (Arnold et al., 2012). Particularly pertinent in this study were societal-level beliefs about social stratification, poverty, capitalism, racism, and

social justice. Macrosystem ideology and beliefs can change in response to pressure from other levels of the environment and in this way those levels are mutually dependent (Arnold et al.). In this study, the chronosystem refers to the ongoing impact that Time (historical, contextual, and developmental) had on students' beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies (Arnold et al., 2012).

Historical time encompasses social movements, global events such as the COVID -19 pandemic, cultural events and values, and economic conditions; all of which impact an individual's development of attitudes about a variety of topics (Kitchen, 2019; Rawal, 2020). Time was also relevant concerning the chronological age and the developmental stage of these participants (Arnold, 2012; Kitchen, 2019). All participants in this study met the age criteria for Emerging Adulthood. This developmental stage is marked by a level of openness to the potential for transformation of their purview.

**Chronosystem.** The time (historical) and timing (developmental) of this study played a role in the shaping of attitudes and understanding of poverty. Charmaz (2006) spoke of the need to acknowledge the importance of historical time in analysis of data and the development of theory. Current social movements, the advent of the COVID -19 pandemic, and current economic conditions had both individual and cumulative influences on attitudes in a variety of ways. Another area in which the importance of historical time is indicated by the pervasive use of digital media and its influence on all aspects of life. Consider, for example, the influence of public figures who use social media as a form of self-promotion or as a means to promote a particular agenda. The power of such figures to shape beliefs and behavior is unprecedented as they have access to such a wide scope of individuals.

A comparison of earlier work with this class in a different semester (Placenti, 2016) and the current study indicated some changes in students' entry attitudes that may be related to



historical timing. It is better to hope than to despair. As an observer and interviewer, I had the unique opportunity to speak with students who experienced this class at two points in history, Spring/Summer 2015 (Placenti, 2016) and Fall 2021. These time frames were separated by 6 years chronologically but more importantly by significant historical events and trends which brought attention to issues in the macrosystem that influenced awareness of and interest in the experiences and needs of those in poverty. For example, in the current study, several White, non-Hispanic students came to the class with an awareness of social justice issues related to poverty and race and were willing to speak openly about it. In this historical period, students were able to reflect on issues of bias and racism and how those played out in economics, health, and policing as such issues were widely covered by the media, both traditional and social, and various perspectives were presented. The debate about raising the minimum wage was also in evidence as there were both grassroots protests and Congressional conflict over the subject. These are a few protests that were indicative of wider social movements: the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Global Network movement, Alicia Garza's *The Purpose of Power* called Love as an Act of Recovery, and the movement focused on the death of George Floyd (Laudig, 2022).

The developmental stage (Timing) of these participants was also important. This study used EST to examine attitude change in emerging adults. Demographic analysis showed students with a mean age of 21.8 years. Arnett (2000) and Gutierrez and Park (2015) defined these students to be emerging adults which is a unique phase in human development. Boylston and O'Rourke (2013) suggested that undergraduates reach college with established attitudes about a diverse range of topics, but for Arnett (2000) and Gutierrez and Park (2015), given undergraduates' distinctive period of growth (emerging adulthood), the attitudes might be disposed to transformation as the undergraduate are exposed to different worldviews and

information that contradicts that which formed their initial understanding of poverty, on the journey to creating a personal self. For instance, students only had broad ideas of what poverty could have been. They were cautious and had the idea that poverty was a crisis that impoverished individuals faced every day of the week. Wikle and Hoagland (2019) indicated that students may not have accepted their prior negative attitudes toward people in poverty if they had such knowledge about the poor.

For college students in the emerging adulthood phase, worldviews are not stable; this provides certain malleability to their identity and decision-making, (Gutierrez & Park, 2015). According to Booker and Dunsmore (2016), in a case study that specifically focused on undergraduate students in the phase of emerging adulthood, the accumulation of wisdom was only partially attained in young adults. This unique position allows for these emerging adults to be especially open to the application of more mature emotional reactions (especially gratitude, empathy, and forgiveness) toward more unfavorable life situations, including poverty (Booker & Dunsmore, 2016). Development has been characterized as a person's shifting perception of their ecological environment and one's increasing potential to find, manage, or change them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ceci, 2006).

### **Media**

Issues of age cohort were also relevant concerning timing in the chromosphere as these students view access to digital media as the norm. Three-quarters of students in the age range of these participants use such digital media to access news or other information (Head et al, 2019). They are comfortable using it to gather or access information and as a tool for learning (Head et al., 2019). Emerging adults' attitudes were also influenced by more traditional media in the form of journals and TV as visual interpretations of impoverishment (Hopkins, 2009). Similarly, in

this study, students mentioned that poverty and those in poverty as they were characterized on TV, in pictures, and major news, influenced their ideas about the identity, location, and character of those in poverty. This supported scholars who suggested that the news broadcast distorted the poor as being mostly Black and being implicated in undesirable behaviors when in reality, White non-Hispanics were the top indicators of individuals in poverty (Lively, 2020; Martin, 1996). Some researchers advised that the newscasts hosted by well-known or highly visible news presenters predisposed the expectations, attitudes, and performances of people in every household in the U.S. (Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014).

The results of this study showed that Emerging adults (e.g., college students), follow social media (e.g., YouTube). Social media is progressively applied as an instrument for training in traditional surroundings. Students' attitudes and beliefs about poverty before transformational learning often come from the news, minimal personal exposure/experiences, and academic courses (Sword et al., 2004; Terry & Lockwood, 2020). As Bonnevie et al. (2020) suggested, social media programs progressively served as a source of information and as a standard of attitudes and conduct, but those resources were frequently not fact-verified subject matters (Martin, 1996; Rose & Baumgartner, 2013). Studies also illuminated a connection between the classroom time of the undergraduates with the consumption of Twitter as social media and Facebook for studying updates (Flores Vizcaya-Moreno and Perez-Canaveras, 2020). However, participants in this study did not mention using Twitter and Facebook to gather information, they did mention YouTube clips that they had seen in class and had asserted how the clips were useful to them and helped them to understand the condition of poor individuals.

First, the individual and their environment continually interact, which causes subsequent changes in the individual's life (Robinson & Werblow, 2012). Students in this study

demonstrated such interactions with their classmates during class discussions and activities and with their families and peers outside of the classroom. Second, the individual has the power to influence and change their environment as well (Robinson & Werblow, 2012). The students in the class also demonstrated their ability to impact and change the attitudes of their families and outside peers by sharing information and insight. In addition, students reported having roommates and other peers complete the online poverty simulation. Interaction among individuals and systems levels are bidirectional in that changes that occur in the ecological system impact the individual and vice versa (Robinson & Werblow, 2012). In this study, students showed the bidirectional changes that occurred among themselves in the process of learning new ideas.

### **Process: How Students Made Meaning**

The second part of Model is referred to as the class process. In this study, the term “process” indicated efforts to make meaning and describes how participants establish, recognize, or make a good judge of the information offered in class and how they realize what they understood before taking the class (Clayton et al., 2020; Mackie et al., 2021). This area of interest established a variety of subareas: In class discussion, targeted reading and video material, and exercises/simulations.

The class represented a space in which and a process by which students in this study made meaning and gained an understanding of poverty. For this study, *the class* can also be considered a microsystem as it is comprised of reciprocal interactions between the student and “persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment” (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020 p. 322). In addition, the class, and the interactions within it occurred over a significant period and met regularly. These interactions were facilitated using a variety of tools and strategies which

according to the participants, stimulated empathy, awareness, and critical thinking (Davis, 2013). The specific focus of this microsystem was to provide information and opportunities to interact around the issue of poverty. It is important to mention that the class was occurring during a global pandemic which limited the ability to have students perform service-learning or live face-to-face interactions with those living in poverty, as is typical for the class. Thus, other techniques were utilized to provide experiential learning possibilities. Also, critical to this process was the developmental stage at which students entered the class. All were emerging adults and therefore, according to Gutierrez & Park (2015), likely to be open to new ideas and the transformation of worldview. Bowman et al. (2003), Dickinson (2015), and Sigelman (2012) spoke about the necessity of speaking such attitudes at critical points throughout students' education and the college years have been defined as just such a point.

For a number of these students, this class became an experience in transformational learning. As indicated by Slavich and Zimbardo (2012), the classroom world, as in this study, and the responsibility of the professor in establishing a place for discussion, questioning, and attitudinal variation is essential for transformational learning to happen. Boylston and O'Rourke (2013) specified that while real attitudinal change requires some time to grow, educators with courses of study who deliberately focus on poverty and poverty-related issues have a distinct opportunity to influence the direction of a student's thinking or the ability to think critically. According to Felten and Clayton (2011) and Roll and Browne (2020), transformational learning is when students' attitudes and beliefs change as a result of exposure to new knowledge. Transformational learning is named as the type of cognitive restructuring required for a deep understanding of issues and an increasing awareness (Kuechler & Stedham, 2018). Students explained how exposure to experiences and material delivered in the context of this specific

microsystem influenced their thinking about poverty as they were provided with opportunities to think critically about and process information in-class discussion. The content of those discussions sometimes challenged the messages delivered by their families and other microsystems and what they “knew” about poverty previously. After exposure to poverty in Zygmunt-Fillwalk’s (2009) study, students realized that their beliefs and attitudes did not reflect the truth about what it means to live or be in poverty. Similar realizations were apparent for some students in the study following participation in certain experiential exercises.

Here we have the Critical Activities connected with the Class. These included Initial written responses, Activities (readings, current events, simulations exercises, and videos), and Assignments, and a discussion emerged as an essential feature of the class. It was part of all other activities in the class. It allowed for the dynamic sharing of ideas as appropriate within a microsystem. It supported critical thinking as students were required to process and integrate information, and to accept questions or challenge information provided by others. The poverty simulations were also important as they provided students who would otherwise have no opportunity to experience or understand poverty a glimpse into decision-making based on severely limited economic resources. According to (King (2011), such exercises gave rise to greater levels of empathy for those who are impoverished.

### ***In-Class Discussion***

Through various activities contained in the curriculum were important factors in shaping student attitudes, a class discussion emerged as a particularly salient feature of the class. Whether the focus of discussion was a particular reading, an active, ty or indeed, a topic raised spontaneously by a student, classroom discussion provided students opportunities to share their thoughts, and hear the thoughts of others who may have had different experiences. Several

students were particularly clear about the importance of hearing different perspectives. Among participants, there was widespread agreement that class discussion played a significant role in understanding poverty, and it was part of each session and activity. Engagement in these interactions encouraged critical thinking and allowed for the development of a more nuanced understanding of poverty and its implications for the lives of those living in poverty. This is consistent with the findings of Smith, Wood, Krauter, & Knight (2011). These discussions were crucial since the course content sometimes challenged knowledge and truths that had guided students' worldview up to that point and allowed students to process information about amounts of peers. As Lehesvuori et al. (2013) advocated, class discussion is necessary and useful when it originates to monitor students' production of awareness. The targeted readings and exercises helped to stimulate this initial awareness. Subsequent discussions that addressed student questions and assisted students in processing their feelings about those readings and exercises seemed to move students toward an understanding of poverty, the development of empathy, and thoughts of advocacy.

For these students, class discussion allowed them to see topics related to poverty from a variety of interconnected levels. For example, certain discussion driving assignments began by examining issues on an individual level (e.g., low rates of COVID-19 vaccination among impoverished populations). This was followed by a discussion of the initial lack of vaccination sites at the community level. After that came questions about why states with higher rates of poverty had lower vaccination rates and finally the realization that on a global level, wealthier countries could purchase vaccines for their general public when less wealthy countries had no such capacity. These discussions sparked awareness of the implications of, and inequities attached to poverty.

Among the assignments and material that influenced meaning-makings were those that allowed students to relate to poverty on a personal level. Several of these undergraduates independently described the class material and especially the exercises as eye-opening because they presented them with clearer knowledge and a new way of feeling toward those in poverty. A good example of this concept is when students did an exercise that allowed students to see the level of poverty in counties where they and their families lived. As a result of that distinct realization, they became more aware of people's suffering in spaces with which they were familiar. Therefore, through experiential learning or direct contact with poor individuals, students felt more compassionate and caring about people in poverty and students changed their prior attitudes (De Luca & Benden, 2019). Some students named these discussions as instrumental in helping them to articulate their thoughts and in giving them the confidence to challenge negative assumptions and statements about those living in poverty.

### ***Targeted Reading, and Video Material***

The Poverty and Family course's composite parts--that is, class discussion, targeted readings, simulation exercises, current events, and video materials, provide students with a deeper, richer understanding of poverty by encouraging students to see poverty from a sensitive rather than objective standpoint.

While the importance of discussion was evident, the choice of material that produced those discussions was critical. In-class techniques such as content-specific readings and poverty simulation exercises followed by class discussions were highlighted in the results section since they were often mentioned by participants. Those techniques helped students understand poverty as it related to them, their experiences, and their developing worldview. For example, Parker (1971), was highlighted as it provided a pathway to reflection for several students. In some cases,



the student related to it based upon similarity of experience. She thought back to her childhood and began to see the experience of poverty with greater empathy. Other students related to the narrative of being a single mother and being concerned about the welfare of the children.

The readings and the order in which those readings were assigned may have played a role in the changing attitudes as some readings and material set the stage for a deeper understanding of later topics. For example, the decision instructors made in the course to combine older materials (e.g. Parker, 1971) with more recent material (Lalee's Kin, Froemke, 2001) may have provided an opportunity for students to in which the lived experience of poverty and our interventions related to poverty have or have not changed over time. Both materials focused on rural poverty, yet even with a 30-year interval, many of the infrastructural issues such as transportation, substandard housing, and educational access remained. Both were first-person accounts of the lived experiences of 'real' people. As Rudnick et al. (2011) indicated, writing a first-person account could address the desire to remove or reduce societal stigma other desire to help themselves and others. In this study, that is the case of Parker speaking about herself with the intent also to help other poor individuals.

Students reported feelings of empathy and frustration on behalf of poor people. Only a limited amount of the reading emphasized macrolevel thinking. Instead, the focus was on making poverty "real" for students who had never experienced it and on helping students to see people living in poverty as more than stereotypes. To this end, reading material often reflected real-real-life counts to illustrate how larger issues and policy decisions influence the lives of impoverished individuals and families. For example, in Spring 2020, when the researcher was a Teaching Assistant for the class, much of the student-driven discussions centered on the impact of the COVID -19 Pandemic on toonhe lives of impoverished people. Similarly, the influence of the

pandemic continued to be an issue raised by the students in Fall 2021. Davis (2013) spoke to the need to link course material to the lives of students outside of the class and to encourage students to discuss and experience these links for themselves.

Video material in various forms proved to be useful in engaging these participants. Recent research has explored the topic of Emerging Adults and found them to be frequent users of digital media and sites such as YouTube and Facebook to gather news and other information (Head et al, 2019). In this study, participants spoke about YouTube clips they had watched in the classroom, and they thought the clips were useful in understanding the poor conditions people in poverty live in. Students increased interest, critical thinking, and participation in learning by using social media websites like YouTube, and video clips (Jena et al., 2017; June et al., 2014; Kosterelioglu, 2016). June et al. (2014) found that students had a positive attitude toward using videos and interactive activities to generate further discussion. They also indicated that YouTube videos were found by students to be fun and interesting; in fact, these videos improved not only the participation of students but also their engagement and increased their critical thinking abilities. In this class, the material was sometimes meant to be before class to allow students time for personal reflection before ore in-class discussion. At other times the material was watched together as a group during class in which students had the opportunity to share their thoughts in smaller groups before sharing them with the entire class.

The audiovisual materials presented were targeted to address specific issues related to poverty. For example, the movie “Pursuit of Happiness” was chosen to address homelessness among the urban population in poverty, and the documentary (Lalee’s Kin) to address rural rather than urban poverty. Undergraduates felt that in the movie “Pursuit of Happiness” the father was able to decide the best approach to be moral and justifiable (McMullin & Dilger,

2021) while at the same time he was forced to sleep in a shared bathroom with his son. “Lalee’s Kin” (Froemke, 2001) is a documentary that narrates the lives and relationships of an underprivileged, multigenerational, African American household living in a disadvantaged rural, Southern community. For example, Lalee’s Kin talks about how social and societal attitudes towards Black people influenced how they were treated in their geographic conduct. The movie talks about how they took the kids out of school to work in fields, and how poverty is intergenerational. Children were talking about going to school or going to jail and they preferred jail because everything was related to poverty. The undergraduates felt sad and inspired when watching the movies, but it was sadder to realize that there are tons of individuals in those same circumstances with no way out. Accordingly, several students had concerns about people blaming those living in poverty because no individual would deliberately live-in underprivileged conditions. Students thought those in poverty did not obtain adequate provisions from the state and/or government. These concerns highlighted by the audiovisual materials made students more aware of poverty as a systemic/structural issue and may have increased the desire to engage in advocacy.

### ***Exercises/Simulations***

Poverty simulation exercises were also used as a part of the students’ attitude development. Simulations exercises have been acknowledged as promising methods for teaching about poverty (Cox et al., 2012; Roll & Browne, 2020). As Simones (2008) indicated, simulations have been utilized to educate, understand, and disseminate concrete world practices in schools and additionally established ecosystems. Simulation exercises increased awareness, improve self-confidence (Turk & Colbert, 2018), and make students prepared for unanticipated considerations. A significant feature of the Spent Exercise involved having the student react to

and adjust for unexpected setbacks. Such exercises, like the Minimum Wage Budget Exercise, and the SPENT Poverty Simulation in this study, were utilized in the *'Family and Poverty'* course as a means for the class instructor to expand students' awareness about poverty; and what I found was that these very exercises were often mentioned by the students as pivotal moments of understanding for them when taking the class. In completing these exercises students became aware that while impoverished people can meet basic needs, it is not done without sacrifice. Garou. e and Bobbitt-Zeber (2011) indicated that to study the outcome of the budget exercise, it is required to consider the traditional way of the learning process. They also suggested that in the discussion after students completed the budget exercise students had to consider the possibility for people in poverty to achieve upward mobility which can lead students to consider individualistic or structural explanations related to those in poverty. The Minimum Wage Exercise required students to collaborate in groups of 3 or 4 to create a monthly budget based on the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 /hr. The small group experience allows for the combined sharing of experiences and knowledge from personal experience. For example, Kosterelioglu (2016) spoke about group discussions achieving an elevated level of reasoning abilities. Similar to the McKinney (2011) study, in this study, students also showed frustration by conducting the Minimum Wage budget and SPENT exercises. As a result, I noticed the connection between the literature and the simulation experiential exercise in which students achieved a high degree of rational skills and emotional understanding. After students conducted these exercises, students expressed outrage when they learned that a parent had to survive with the little money earned from working one or two jobs with \$7.25/hr.; their emotional reactions suggested they were becoming aware of the sacrifices required to survive in poverty. One group stated that a parent with three babies could not live receiving a minimum wage job. Another

group specified that childcare and renting an apartment were expensive and would be impossible to pay bills with a minimum wage salary. Therefore, the students realized that living on a Minimum Wage budget almost made it impossible to survive and they became conscious of the money that people spend. Smith-Campbell (2005) indicated that engaging participation with people in poverty could help undergraduates to develop awareness that individuals in poverty are not so much dust as those who are not poor. Roll and Browne (2020) suggested that the fundamental advantage of this type of simulation was that individuals of different social classes could be exposed to poor conditions, thus an advanced interpretation of poverty could be attained. In addition, Garoutte and Bobbitt-Zeber (2011) spoke about the significance of simulation exercises such as budget exercises in altering students' opinions and supporting socio-perspectives.

Another simulation utilized a virtual format to expose students to decision-making in the context of poverty. McKinney (2011), Reid and Evanson (2016), and the Urban Ministries of Durham (2014) suggested the online simulation exercise, SPENT, teaches individuals how people in poverty have to manage money to survive. The results of Smith et al.'s (2016) study suggested that many students found the practice of SPENT exercise was valuable for themselves and/or for the other student in their class. Undergraduates discovered that a definite unwanted deviation in life could trigger a series of devastating events which could cause people to become poor. For all 44 students, this online exercise provided them with a better interpretation and a new sense of the struggle involved in living in poverty. For example: after this exercise, students became mindful of the sacrifice needed to survive the month with an inadequate amount of cash. These exercises were appropriate to study the value of money and understand what \$10.00 might represent for people in poverty. The choices these people were required to make for their

families and the effort to stay alive was truly effective for these students. In addition, students considered what ways individuals in distress use their income and the other opinions which they cannot keep under control. The Minimum Wage budget exercise and the SPENT exercise were a part of that eye-opening experience for students as they experienced what life on a minimal income meant.

For the students in this study, these exercises began the process of developing compassion and empathy. Similarly, several scholars spoke about poverty simulation experiences and found empathy for the underprivileged population (Alexander et al., 2020; Hernández-Ramos et al., 2019; Nickols & Nielsen, 2011). For example, the students in the Nickols and Nielsen's (2011) study spoke about the development of empathy for individuals in poverty after students experienced poverty simulation. The exercises forced students to think about how people function in the world and how they need to make decisions differently because of their lack of financial resources; the meaning students made of those exercises were part of the procedure. As a mechanism for changing attitudes, the in-class discussion of this exercise centered as much on the process of arriving at a budget as on the content of the budget. Similar comments of this sort made during a class discussion led to an over acknowledgment that though the exercise was stressful for the students, the need to produce and adhere to such a budget in 'real-life' would be stressful at a level that, over time, could produce mental and physical health issues

### **Output: Attitude Change & Moving Forward**

The third aspect of Model is referred to as Output. Concerning this study, the term "output" speaks to how individuals could impact their ecological systems after learning the material in a classroom setting. As a result, output two consisted of two areas for discussion.

Area one is a description of the attitude study change while area two relates to the attempts and the intent to influence attitudes and behaviors of those in microsystems beyond the class.

### *Attitude did not Change*

For example, in the initial written response, Leah began with the mindset that people become impoverished because they were irresponsible at the end of the class, in her interview, Leah's attitude did not change because even though she understood that individuals become poor due to reasons outside of their control, she still felt that most impoverished individuals were to blame for their conditions."

Another example was Emma who in her initial response thought that poor people remained poor because that was the only way they knew. She did not believe in handouts because there were so many chances out there, mainly with the internet where individuals can educate themselves and find good jobs to make a living. She had compassion for those who grew up in poverty and that was all they have ever known. Then, in the interview, she acknowledged that *she liked* the discussions we had of these types, but for her, nothing seemed to be changed.

### *Attitude Change*

Though students arrived in class unable or unwilling to speak of anything other than feelings about situations of poverty, by the end of class many expressed feelings of empathy toward those in poverty and an awareness of the need to act on behalf of those living in poverty. Students also saw themselves as individuals who could utilize their newly acquired knowledge and understanding to become agents of change in various levels of their ecological systems rather than passive reporters of societal attitudes. The material learned in class also directed participants to be mindful of those in poverty who also struggled to improve their living

conditions (Rice et al., 2017). Through empathy, the ability to see and feel the world from another person's perspective, the students better understood poor individuals' situations (King, 2011). For the undergraduates of this study, the knowledge achieved in the course through movies, open discussions, research presentations, and dealing with poverty influenced their attitudes toward poor individuals. Students thought that they ought to help the poor; they also revealed new compassion for people in the circle of poverty.

Arnett (2016), Constance-Huggins et al. (2020), and Seider et al. (2011) each spoke of the influence of education on students who enter college at a stage when they were open to new knowledge and practices which could change their earlier initial attitudes and beliefs (e.g., about poverty). While some students acknowledged and demonstrated the truth of this, some considered their education to be one step. Those students advocated for greater societal education that would bring awareness and accurate information to issues related to poverty.

### ***Giving Back***

Several students wanted to give back what they learned in class to their ecological system. They began that process within their microsystems. These sometimes-involved challenging people who were misinformed and providing more accurate information. Giving back was also something that could be accomplished beyond the microsystems to which they belonged.

**Challenging Misinformation.** Most students began the class seeing themselves as too uninformed in participating in the discussion of poverty. Students suggested the need to have more awareness and spread it to the general population to combat misinformation. A few students signaled that after changing their attitudes by the end of the semester, they were able to influence their relatives' attitudes. Students thought that providing information about poverty and



people in poverty to their microsystems was very significant and they also thought that it was a matter of social justice.

Students arrived with limited knowledge of issues related to poverty (Jessup, 2001) but by the end, they were able and willing to challenge misinformation. Many students admitted their initial lack of misinformation, especially in the interviews. When Kaley spoke about people in poverty being shown on 'TV, in movies, and on major news networks, this is an example of how students receive misinformation about poverty and lack proper education regarding poverty and those in poverty. They were already a trusted part of their family & peer microsystems and were part of a dynamic exchange of information within those systems. Bubolz and Sontag (1993) indicated that certain basic expectations of EST are built in such a way that people and their interactions with the natural environment are reciprocally dependent. In this case, the exchange was of information and knowledge. Students entered the class with an understanding of poverty that was engendered by their family's understanding of poverty. The students were now able to share an understanding of poverty based on their experience in class. Engler et al. (2020) suggested that the misconceptions and negative stereotypes about those living in poverty can be reduced with the provision of accurate information.

Some students spoke about having plans to share what they had learned with other members of non-familial microsystems outside the class. Some had already shared information with college roommates, college-based organizations, or other groups of peers. Undergraduates specified that they had discussed class material with their peers, and they were shocked at what they were learning about the condition of underprivileged people. These efforts outside their families spread the knowledge into the larger community. They intended to create awareness of the lived experience of those in poverty and perhaps encourage others to place themselves in the

poor circumstances. Students also wanted people to understand and appreciate not being poor.

Therefore, students sought to interact with their social environment so that they could ultimately change the way it interacts with the poor.

**Advocacy and Beyond.** For students, the intent to create support to generate change/social justice was apparent when students spoke of advocacy on behalf of those who are impoverished. For Garcia-Reid et al. (2016), advocating is a manner in which individuals coordinate in a dialogue of ideas and concepts that depend on the acting mutually beneficial goals between social partners. These students appear to have recognized the need for advocacy and to see themes as having the ability to be active partners in change. Engler et al. (2020) found evidence that certain teaching strategies used in this class (e.g., poverty simulations) set the stage for an understanding of the need for and desire to become advocates for those in poverty. they had so short terminals which included influencing their microsystem. Students thought to be advocates for impoverished individuals, they needed to disseminate into their environment what they had learned in class in the long run as well. Students also planned how to begin communicating what they had learned from the class with their roommates and their parents. Their established place within the interactions of those microsystems made this possible (Arnold et al., 2012; Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Students also had longer-term, future-oriented goals. Some students wanted to be part of organizations to raise money for poor communities and thus become full advocates. Some students proposed that it was necessary to go beyond that being an advocate for those in poverty. In the end, students were saying that rather than just advocating and speaking up for those who are impoverished, they want to get down in the trenches and get their hands dirty and do the work.

To be more specific, students sought to utilize what they learned in class in broader contexts. They wanted to accomplish this by having more direct contact or working to improve the condition of those who are impoverished. Some suggested volunteering in non-profit organizations. Bolger (2021) spoke about faith-based social service agencies recruiting volunteers to serve the urban impoverished. In this study, participants thought that individuals needed to consider it necessary to volunteer for any social agencies and be in contact with people in poverty. For example, some participants believed that individuals needed to volunteer one or a couple of days a week to nonprofit agencies such as soup kitchens and help communities to work with poor individuals even though they would not receive income

### ***Impact on Other System Levels***

Students moved beyond what they learned in class by articulating their desires for social justice and advocacy, which suggests that they wanted to impact their macro and Chrono systems.

**Social Justice.** The presentation of the notion of social justice as it interacts with poverty could be an appropriate addition to that changing worldview (Hill et al., 2016). Undergraduates felt that achieving some degree of social justice could offer new fundamentals, new regulations, and new ways to advocate for the poor. In seeking to modify or implement policy, these students were inadvertently seeking to influence the exosystem since that level of EST involves the creation of policy, and proposed programs (Arnold et al, 2012). To accomplish this change in attitudes for the large community would be helpful. As a result, it could impact their macrosystem, and considering the historical time, it can be related to their chronosystem. When forming a concept of social justice and its position in expanding attitudes and behaviors for students in a family study curriculum, researchers portrayed it as a course of action and a

purpose (Garcia-Reid et al., 2016). As part of the course of action, students would make certain individuals know the circumstances of poor people. It was essential to enlighten society on what they discovered in class because they were confident that a lot of individuals did not know that the poor every so often did not have anything to eat or drink. Given the minimal level of student understanding upon entering the class, students may well assume that others have a similar understanding of poverty, and that increased information might work to shift negative attitudes about those who are impoverished. For a few participants, social justice was a necessary tool to come up with new policies, rules, and regulations to alleviate the lives of people struggling to survive. Students thought that social justice could be the voice to care for those in need. They asserted that social justice should not proclaim generalized ideas, but it should be able to convince people to picture themselves in the shoes of those who are in poverty and be able to deliver factual services.

Sutton (2003) spoke about justice for all people or an individual, and he suggested that there were solid indications that SES was related to specific unfavorable attitudes and stereotypes. Moreover, they thought that fewer prospects existed for those mothers than they remembered in the food safety measures video they saw in class. They stated that, overall, individuals needed digital devices to search for jobs and to go for interviews; otherwise, individuals would possibly have to explore the city they reside in and would not know if there were any other places for obtaining a job. For some undergraduates, social justice was supposed to contend for equal chances, equal privileges, and gender prejudice in earnings. They were considering that even in the year 2021, there was discrimination on race/ethnicity and social standings, financial standings, or for obtaining employment. For instance, participants spoke about the right for females to obtain equivalent pay as males. They were stunned that females

were still given less than males in doing the identical job. Students also thought that interchange people's worldviews about poverty and people in poverty, they needed to work harder than advocate. advocates to Wiese et al. (2019), it is believed that by shifting collective attitudes toward those in poverty, people can start to debate about different behaviors that will promote specific reactions to poverty. Students offered an instance of parents not communicating negatively, but still providing negative messaging about the poor; they acted against the negative messaging.

In this study, the ecological system is not just a dynamic interaction between the individual and the important members of the microsystem. It is the dynamic interaction between the levels of the ecosystem, also. This is alluding to the changes in the macrosystem, which means that there is currently a focus on social stratification, racism, and social justice. Right now, there is a more wide-reaching desire for an acknowledgment of the need for social justice because of where people are in this historical time. So right now, where individuals are as historical time (chronosystem) is driving the increased emphasis on social justice in the macro and Chronosystems.

In the end, after the students got the information from the class, they decided that they were going to start communicating with their families and peers who were part of their microsystem. Then, the students wanted to join organizations that were going to help with their other microsystems. Once they joined their organizations and started telling people outside of their close microservice about what they learned, they would be spreading the news to their communities. Students' goals were to make some rules so that social justice could happen; and with that mindset, advocacy would happen. Making rules signified their ecosystems; making policy material was at the exosystem level and that meant the impact on other systems. The plan

students had was to make rules to ascertain that people in Congress got the message that poverty was real, and they had the moral responsibility to do the right thing about it as a result. In other words, students intended to influence policy, which was the exosystem, and to influence policy, they needed to influence their macrosystems. Why? Because the policy was, at some level, dependent upon the attitudes and feelings of people in town. They needed to put enough pressure on people in power to bring changes through the macrosystem. In 2021 were at a place in history where people were looking at inequality and disparities of opportunity, that had to do with the historical time (chronosystem) we lived in.

Output consisted of students' attitudes by the end of class as well as their plans to share those attitudes and knowledge with their ecological systems outside the class by challenging negative perceptions or misinformation about those in poverty within their microsystems (families and peers),

By joining organizations or careers focused on this new interest they gain access to larger communities and increase their opportunities for greater exposure. Their aspirations toward advocacy provide opportunities to affect policy and thereby influence the exosystem. Why? Because the policy is, at some level, dependent upon the attitudes and feelings of people with the power to make policy. Finally, these students are at a unique moment in historical time, when issues of social justice, inequity, and disparities of opportunity are at the forefront and societal attitudes toward poverty might be ripe for change.

### **A Special Note on the Influence of Positionality in this Study**

The aspects of myself which proved to have the largest impact on this study were my commitment to social justice and my previous experience with the class. I was not particularly mindful of the influence of these aspects of my positionality, until the last draft of this document.

In considering how my commitment to social justice impacted my research, I returned to the social justice statement I prepared as part of my Ph.D. qualifying examination. In that document, my level of commitment was revealed with multiple statements such as “as students and educators we should show solidarity with and compassion for the poor”. Also, present was the clear idea of social justice as a human right and not simply an admonition that the more wealthy in society should be generous to the less wealthy with no regard to the long-term issue of equity. Because of this, it is possible that I initially did not see those whose attitudes did not change because my belief in social justice predisposed me to see only those whose viewpoints changed in ways that I considered to be positive.

In addition, since the intent of this study was to explore how students made meaning of poverty based on course content, this course seemed a particularly apt choice, however, I came to the course with prior experience of the course. I have previously worked as a Teaching Assistant and as a co-instructor of the course. During that time, I witnessed students who previously had negative or unknown attitudes about those living in poverty come to an understanding that poverty was not a personal, moral failing, though the reasons and the process leading to that understanding were not primary in my attention. Because of these experiences, I came into this research, unknowingly, predisposed to see *only what I perceived as a positive* change in student attitudes/understanding of poverty. I was entirely focused on finding evidence of that change. It was only with the repeated prodding of my critical friends and my committee that I reevaluated my data. As I spoke with my critical friends’ group, they pointed out that it seemed strange that all of the students in the findings were shifting their attitudes toward a greater understanding of poverty. I acknowledged their input but did little to address it. When my committee made similar observations, I went back to re-evaluate my data and see if I had overlooked something. Upon

this reevaluation and saw students for whom change was not evident or for whom change was more subtle or more complex. The addition of this material to the document provided a more complete picture of the influence of the class and the students taking it

As a researcher, this experience provided several lessons for me. First, it is not enough to say one is being guided by the data, one must be open to the entire story told by the data. Second, be aware of your positionality and honest with yourself about it's influence on your research throughout the study.

### **Limitations**

Even though this study presented clues as to how to introduce an interchange of concepts about undergraduates' attitudes towards underprivileged people and the communication with their ecological systems, there were various limitations to this study. To begin with, the sample size was modest, and it limited the general understanding of the information. Next, the proportion of females' contributions was much greater than males, therefore, there was not enough adequate data about male attitudes. Ethnic multiplicity was not the same, consequently, there was not an appropriate amount of information to assess. The research was also restricted by its support of the insights and skills of undergraduates. This was due to the single values of how data was being spread to their microsystems. Limits could occur inside the neighborhood of the university and occasionally might not be reflective of colleges that might or might not be analogous. Additional limitations consisted of my being considered an older student by those who participated in this study.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

There are many approaches from this study to expand upon for upcoming research implications. It could be beneficial to look at what outcomes this study could have had in various



courses of different departments and different regions. Potential studies could be developed if other tools from quantitative testing are utilized. Discovering if the statistical data endorses the results from this study could be a fascinating comparative and might either be sustained or contrasted to this study's viewpoint. Another approach could be to utilize this study to conduct further studies related to additional ethnic social classes and genders. The research also had implications for program improvement, evolution, and diversity at the current times.

Taking into consideration the plasticity of student individuality and understanding at this phase of growth, students' college years offer a capacity for sensible moments, but it must be considered that the development of attitudes starts considerably earlier (Sigelman, 2012). The practices considered here were intended for use with emerging adults (e.g., students).

Nevertheless, teaching students about poverty could begin in elementary school, as writings and models about societal positions could make learning about poverty more accessible or expand students' understanding of each age group. As Seider et al. (2011) indicated, if schools extended neighborhood resources for instructive prospects, their learners could show an improved perception of the fundamental elements of culture; consequently, generating the chance for more significant shifts in antipoverty social programs in the United States.

In conclusion, this research aimed to explore whether or not an undergraduate's learning of a course centered on poverty and people in poverty has had an impact on their behaviors and interactions in additional eco-responsive environments. By applying a qualitative approach, the researcher acknowledged the attitudes and beliefs of every single undergraduate at different times throughout the course. The researcher also investigated how undergraduates in the class were spreading their attitudes and beliefs in their societal ecosystems beyond the class (e.g., with families, colleagues, associates, and neighborhoods).

The examination of 44 undergraduates' observations, preliminary answers, class conversations, and 14 specific interviews underlined three definite areas of awareness: students' knowledge and attitudes toward poverty before the beginning of class, making meaning of the material presented in class, and the meaning students made at the end of the course. Specific quotations from undergraduates were offered for every foremost area to benefit the data. Findings had revealed that undergraduates enrolling in courses on poverty initially appeared to recognize people who are underprivileged from a self-responsible perception – that is, it was the responsibility of the individual to change their circumstances, but the process of learning in class about poverty changed students' attitudes to expand further than individualism witnessed in the United States to structuralism. Then, they went beyond advocacy to make a difference for those who live in poverty.

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## Appendix A

### Written Responses to the Questions at the beginning of the Class

This exercise consisted of providing the following descriptions:

- A) Describe your thoughts on the cause of poverty
- B) Describe your attitude toward people in poverty
- C) Describe your thoughts on how much you think the percentage of the federal budget is that is allocated to the poor.
- D) Describe your thoughts on the level of responsibility society has to help/provide support for those in poverty.

## Appendix B

### Videos, Movies, and YouTube Clip

#### *Who Moved My Cheese?*

It is a video made by Spencer Johnson and it is also based on the bestselling book by him. Johnson spoke about four characters who live in a maze and are also looking for cheese to nourish them to make them very happy. Two of the characters are mice named Sniff and Scurry. The other two are little human beings who appear to be the size of a mouse who act like normal people and their names are Hem and Haw. The cheese serves as a metaphor for what people want to have in life, such as having a good job, being in a loving relationship, and having money, material possessions, or good health. The maze represents what people want when employed and their ideal family/community. In the story, the characters are faced with unexpected changes. Eventually, one of them deals with it successfully and writes what he has learned from his experience on the maze walls. Reading the book takes less than an hour, but its insights can last a lifetime. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Txy6DwbwZ9g>

#### *The Pursuit of Happiness*

It is a movie in which life is a struggle for a single father dispossessed from his apartment. He and his young son find themselves abandoned with no place to go. Although he finally lands a job as an intern at a respected brokerage firm, the position does not pay any money. He and his son must live in shelters and sustain many adversities along their journey; however, he refuses to give in to despair as he struggles to create a better life for himself and his young son.

#### *Poverty in America – An Oprah Special Report*

This is a report conducted in 2005 and the same situation seems to continue today. Different contributors took part in this report, including Oprah Winfrey, Anderson Cooper, Maria Shriver, Harpo Production, and Burrell's Information Service. They spoke about the 37 million individuals who live in deprivation. They spoke about New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina blew across the Gulf Coast. They also spoke about Pembroke, Illinois, to understand the real situation of the poor. This is where 55 percent of people were living beneath the poverty line and 40 percent were living without running water. They also spoke about Detroit as being the poorest city in the country in which one in three individuals live under the poverty line. Furthermore, it was announced that 10,000 people live on the street every night and most of them are single mothers. Finally, they spoke about Appalachia, Knott County, Kentucky, and Hartford, Connecticut. This report is characterized as emotional and unhealthy.

***Having Children in Poverty by Kathryn Edin***

In a YouTube clip, Dr. Edin spoke about the history of policymakers who misunderstood poverty because they were middle class and did not know anything about poor individuals. She suggested that to have a good policy, policymakers must have in-depth research by getting their hands dirty. Dr. Edin moved to America's most dangerous and poor city, Camden, New Jersey. She learned that poor women did not have children to get more money from welfare, but rather, they lived in poverty because men had babies and run. She stated that women could not raise a child on \$75 a month. Women saw parenting as their highest calling and thought a child is an unconditional love and a reason to have meaning in life, but it is also difficult for the parents to raise a child in the long run because society gives them so little to hold onto and no future in the labor market. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KBaVVu46PI>

***John Q***

The narrative focuses on John Q. Archibald, whose nine-year-old son needs a heart transplant. Once he learns that his health insurance will not cover the expenses of the operation and that government assistance is unattainable, John Q. takes a hospital emergency area hostage in the last struggle to save his son.

### Appendix C

#### **In-Person Plea – Family Science and Human Development**

Hello class –

My name is Rocco Placenti, and you can call me Rocco. I am a doctoral candidate, and I am conducting a study on “How Exposure to Poverty Related Issues in the Classroom Affects Students’ Attitudes and Interactions with Their Social Environment.” I would like to invite all of you to participate in a face-to-face interview (*which will be Virtual during the COVID Pandemic*) related to the topic. It should take approximately 45-60 minutes and will take place during the semester, just before the end of this semester, or after graduation. Your participation in this study will help me and others to understand how students’ personal-environmental relationships help to foster positive attitudes toward the poor. I will send all of you an e-mail and you can let me know if you are willing to participate or you can let me know now and you do not have to reply to the e-mail. Interviewing will be established on an individual basis later.

*This study has been approved by Montclair State University Institutional Review Board #L-001658*

Thank you so much.

Do you have any questions? Would any of you like to give me your name right now for participation?

I will send the e-mail and I will talk to you soon.

Sincerely,

Rocco Placenti

Doctoral candidate

E-Mail: [placentir1@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:placentir1@mail.montclair.edu)

## Appendix D

### E-Mail Recruitment – Family Science and Human Development

The e-mail to be sent to all the students in the classes FSHD-445 and those who have already graduated:

Hello everyone –

My name is Rocco Placenti, and I am a doctoral candidate researching “How Exposure to Poverty Related Issues in the Classroom Affects Students’ Attitudes and Interactions with Their Social Environment.” I would like to invite you to participate in a face-to-face interview (*which will be Virtual during the COVID Pandemic*) relating to the topic. It should take approximately 45-60 minutes and will take place during the semester, just before the end of this semester, or after graduation. Your participation in this study will help me and others to understand how students’ personal-environmental relationships help to foster positive attitudes toward the poor. Please reply to this e-mail as soon as you can to let me know if you are willing to participate. Interviewing will be established on an individual basis later.

*This study has been approved by Montclair State University Institutional Review Board # L-001658*

Best regards,

Rocco Placenti

Doctoral candidate

E-Mail: [placentir1@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:placentir1@mail.montclair.edu)

## Appendix E

### Potential Interview Questions

The PI will ask students:

Do I have your permission to record this interview? Yes \_\_\_\_\_; No \_\_\_\_\_

Remember you do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering.

The time for each student should be approximately 45-60 minutes.

The questions will be asked face-to-face (*in a virtual format during the COVID Pandemic*)

The questions PI will ask students are analytically chosen:

### Before Class

1. What factors shaped your attitudes toward poverty before taking this class?
2. Did you discuss your attitudes towards the poor with your parents, teachers, peers, coworkers, and/or community members before you entered college?

### Ecological Systems – Family, Peers, Education, and (Dynamic Interactions & Influences)

3. How would you describe your parents' attitudes toward the poor?
4. How did the class influence your attitudes toward those in poverty?
  - a. A If asked about the amount spent on poverty today, is your response class/interaction different than it was at the beginning of class?
5. Under what circumstances do you discuss information from the class with others outside of the class? Please give examples.

### Influence of the Class (8 & 9 Focus on These Specifically for Graduates)

6. Can you talk to me about the Poverty and Families Class?

Prompt questions: Talk about something you learned? Is what you learned/heard in class different from what you knew/ believed /learned before the class? Talk about exercises, readings, videos, YouTube, and other materials.

7. Do you think it has impacted your beliefs and attitudes toward those living in poverty?  
Why or why not?
8. How has your changed attitude influenced your new behavior? Relationships?  
Interactions? At home? At work? With friends? With family?
9. How did course information influence your attitudes and beliefs toward people in  
poverty?
10. How did course information influence your interactions with your social environment  
about poverty?
11. How do you explain why some individuals are poor in the U. S. while others are not?
12. Do you see yourself as an advocate? If yes, why, and how? If not, why not?
13. Would you like to add anything?
14. May I contact you if I have a follow-up question?
15. Do you know of anyone who would also be interested in participating in this study?



## Appendix F

### Consent Form for Adults

#### Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Yes \_\_\_; No \_\_\_\_\_

#### Remember you do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering.

Please read below with care. You may ask questions at any time. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

#### Study Title: How Exposure to Poverty Related Issues in the Classroom Affects Students' Attitudes and Interactions with Their Social Environment.

**Why is this study being done?** The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how exposure to poverty in the classroom affects students' beliefs, attitudes, and interactions with their social environment.

#### What will happen while you are in the study?

You will participate in a one-on-one interview. Face-to-face (*through a virtual format during the COVID Pandemic*)

After the interview, the data recorded will be transcribed and I will look for similarities and differences between you and the other participants in the study.

**Time:** The individual interview will last 45-60 minutes.

**Risks:** There is no more than minimal risk involved while participating in this study. You may experience some inconvenience due to time commitments and scheduling issues. In addition, there may be some discomfort because of the discussion of details regarding your thoughts and feelings on people in poverty. Attached to the consent form you will find a copy of the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) contact information.

**Benefits:** Your contribution to this study will likely help to understand how students' personal-environmental relationships help to foster positive attitudes toward the poor.

**Who will know that you are in this study?** Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym for any presentation of this material. Your identity will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

**Do you have to be in the study?** Your participation in the study is voluntary. You can refuse to answer any question or stop participating at any time. Your refusal to participate or to discontinue will not result in any negative consequences for you. Your professor will not know whether you choose to participate, and your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your grades.

**Do you have any questions about this study?** If you have any questions about the study, feel free to contact:

Rocco Placenti - [placentir1@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:placentir1@mail.montclair.edu)

Pearl Stewart - [stewartp@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:stewartp@mail.montclair.edu)

**Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant?** Please call or email the IRB Chair, Dana Levitt, at 973-655-2097 or [reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:reviewboard@mail.montclair.edu)

### Future Studies

It is okay to use my data in other studies:

Please initial: Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_

As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape me:

Please initial: Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_

**One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.**

### Statement of Consent

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. The general purposes, the particulars of involvement, possible risks, and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

X \_\_\_\_\_  
Print your name here

X \_\_\_\_\_  
Sign your name here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date.

Rocco Placenti

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

DR. Pearl Stewart

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Faculty Sponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix G

### Student's and Family's Demographic Information

#### Student's Demographic Information

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: M \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your total annual income (including your spouse's earnings or any child support)?  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What is your marital status?  
Now married \_\_\_; widowed \_\_\_; divorced \_\_\_; separated \_\_\_; never married \_\_\_
5. How many persons are in your household? (Family size) # \_\_\_\_\_
6. Race/ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are you employed? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Whom do you live with? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How would you identify yourself (poor, working class, middle class, or upper class)?  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Family's Demographic Information

1. Age of Parents/Caretakers:  
Mother/Female Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_  
Father/Male Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Total annual income of Parents/Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your Parents'/Caretakers' marital status (single, married, widowed, and divorced)?  
Mother/Female Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_  
Father/Male Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Race/ethnicity:  
Mother/Female Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_  
Father/Male Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Education:  
Mother/Female Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_  
Father/Male Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Occupation:  
Mother/Female Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_  
Father/Male Caretakers: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H

### Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS offers short-term individual and group counseling to students, as well as a variety of educational and consultative services designed to promote wellness in the campus community.

*They are in Russ Hall, Side Entrance. The entrance to their office is on the west side of the building.*

All counseling services are free, voluntary, and confidential. Please call (973) 655-5211 or stop by Russ Hall for an appointment or video conference.

Office hours are:

Monday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Tuesday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Wednesday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Thursday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Friday 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

Saturday and Sunday – Closed

### Appendix I

Examples of taking field notes:

First, I wrote very brief notes in the class. Example:

- a. Become teach, soc work, cont. X master.
- b. Spoke pove, + import. Stig, choice, conseq, s/esteem, + suppor
- c. Spoke negat attit to poor, lazy, drug, + alcoh
- d. Init thougs, descr, cause, given, descry cause, attit, people pover

After class, before I went home, I turned from very brief to complete field notes in the computer lab. Example:

- a. Students want to become teachers, social workers, or proceed with their master's degree.
- b. They spoke about poverty and the importance of stigma, choices, consequences, self-esteem, and support.
- c. They also spoke about negative attitudes toward the poor for being lazy and addicted to drugs and alcohol.
- d. The initial thoughts were given to describe the cause of attitudes towards people in poverty.

After that, my field notes helped me to write up my observations which were part of the process I was making in understanding how students' attitudes were progressively changing or not.