

---

# The Role of Privilege as Identity in Adolescents' Beliefs About Homelessness, Opportunity, and Inequality

Youth & Society  
43(1) 333–364  
© 2011 SAGE Publications  
Reprints and permission:  
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0044118X10366673  
<http://yas.sagepub.com>



Scott Seider<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This mixed methods study investigated the impact of learning about homelessness on the civic development of privileged adolescents. Pre–post surveys, classroom observations, and qualitative interviews revealed that the participating adolescents developed a more complex understanding of the factors that contribute to homelessness; however, this deeper understanding of homelessness was not accompanied by a reconfiguring of participants' beliefs about America's opportunity structure. Instead, this study's privileged adolescents defended their own positions within the existing class structure by invoking legitimizing, and naturalizing ideological frames. This resistance to social justice content impeded participating teens' development of civic responsibility for fellow citizens contending with poverty and homelessness.

## Keywords

adolescence, inequality, privilege

The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that on any given night 744,000 people go homeless in the United States (Cunningham & Henry, 2007). An additional 39 million Americans are living below the poverty line,

---

<sup>1</sup>Boston University, Boston

### Corresponding Author:

Scott Seider, Boston University SED Room 240, 2 Silber Way, Boston, MA 02215  
Email: [seider@bu.edu](mailto:seider@bu.edu)

and 14 million of those poor Americans are children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Such a state of affairs in the world's wealthiest nation is deeply concerning if one agrees with Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (1937) assertion that "the test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have enough; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." In this study, we investigated the impact of learning about homelessness on the civic development of privileged adolescents. Our goal in this endeavor was to offer insights to educators, policy makers, and researchers about the processes by which such adolescents develop (or fail to develop) a sense of responsibility for society's least fortunate members.

Several scholars have noted the paucity of scholarship on the civic development of individuals from privileged backgrounds (Howard, 2008; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Watts et al. (2003) define *critical consciousness* as a heightened awareness of social inequity and its history; they assert that deepening the critical consciousness of privileged young adults would entail engaging these young people in reflection and analysis of their own privileged status in comparison to their marginalized fellow citizens. Howard has added that "affluent students need educators committed to working toward critical consciousness as much as do poor students" (p. 11). In this study, we considered the impact of an academic experience that sought to raise the critical consciousness of privileged teenagers through analysis and reflection on the issue of homelessness.

## Research Context

French historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) famously characterized Americans as balancing a deep belief in individualism with a commitment to the common good. However, in their study of commitment in middle-class America, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) reported that Americans now speak a first language of individualism and only a second language of community and the common good. They characterized as cancerous America's deepening emphasis on individual rights at the expense of social responsibility.

In the 20 years since Bellah et al.'s (1985) research, the American focus on individualism has only intensified. Compared to other wealthy countries, the United States spends a small fraction of its GDP on social programs to reduce poverty (Smeeding, Rainwater, & Burtless, 2001). Differences in health care and life span continue to widen between poor and affluent Americans, and income inequality between these two groups is now wider than at any period since the Great Depression (Scott & Leonhardt, 2005). In this review

of literature, we first consider the perspectives through which Americans consider these widening gaps between the affluent and poor and then focus specifically on scholarship characterizing privileged adolescents' conceptions of these disparities.

### *Americans' Beliefs About Poverty, Affluence, and Inequality*

The scholarship on Americans' beliefs about economic inequality offer two competing attributions for this inequality: individualistic explanations and structural explanations (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Individualistic explanations offer character traits, such as laziness, perseverance, and intelligence, to account for differences between affluent and poor citizens, whereas structural explanations point to societal factors, such as job shortages, low wages, discrimination, and unequal schooling opportunities.

A substantial body of scholarship has demonstrated that the majority of Americans consider individualistic factors to be the primary causes of economic inequality (Cozzarelli et al, 2001; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Ladd & Bowman, 1998; Schwarz & Volgy, 1992). Schwarz and Volgy (1992) reported that the majority of Americans believe that poverty is caused by lack of effort on the part of the poor. On the 2006 World Values Survey, 71% of Americans asserted that the poor could escape poverty if they worked hard enough (Gudrais, 2008). In considering Americans' attitudes toward inequality, Kluegel and Smith concluded that the majority of Americans believe that (a) economic inequality is caused by individual differences in ability and talent, (b) economic inequality motivates people to work hard, and (c) those who achieve economic success are superior to their fellow citizens in ability, effort, or initiative.

Although the majority of Americans offer individualistic explanations for affluence, poverty, and inequality, Kluegel and Smith (1986) also reported a positive relationship between income level and individualistic attributions for poverty and wealth. In other words, the wealthier an individual, the more likely he or she is to regard economic inequality as caused by differences in intelligence, talent, perseverance, and so on. Moreover, Cozzarelli et al. (2001) have found that White Americans are more likely than non-White Americans to attribute economic inequality to individualistic factors. In considering these findings, Kluegel and Smith speculated that, for individuals at (or near) the top of America's class structure, individualistic attributions for inequality absolve them of any responsibility for fellow citizens struggling with poverty and frame their own positions of privilege as merited.

## *Privileged Adolescents and Beliefs About Poverty, Affluence, and Inequality*

A number of researchers have focused explicitly on adolescents' perceptions of poverty and inequality. Jensen (1995) reported that, although an ethic of individualism has grown increasingly dominant in the United States, only among young adults has it dramatically superseded an ethic of community responsibility. Likewise, Leahy (1990) found that as children reach adolescence they grow more likely to offer individualistic explanations for poverty and inequality and to assert that there should be differences between the rich and poor. A number of scholars have found middle-class and affluent adolescents to be more likely than adolescents from poor and working-class backgrounds to characterize individuals as responsible for their economic status (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005; Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Skafte, 1989). In considering these findings, Flanagan and colleagues (2003) have asserted that adolescents' attributions for inequality are highly dependent on how "the social contract works for people 'like them.'"

In short, then, the affluent, predominantly White adolescents, on whom this study focused, may represent the demographic of Americans most likely to attribute poverty, affluence, and inequality to individualistic factors. One might argue that such a state of affairs increases both the importance and challenge of engaging privileged teens in reflection on the justness of poverty and inequality. In support of the potential for such reflection, Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, and Stephens (2003) have asserted that educators and educational institutions "can transform students' interpretive frames, for better or worse, through traditional academic coursework . . . A powerful course can open students' eyes to global economic interdependence or the influence of opportunity structures on individual achievement" (p. 109). Likewise, Ladson-Billings (1995) has called for educators to help young Americans develop "a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (p. 62). With this study, we sought to consider the levers by which secondary level educators can and cannot influence privileged adolescents' conceptions of homelessness, opportunity, and inequality.

## **Method**

### *Site*

Glenview, Massachusetts,<sup>1</sup> is an upper-middle-class suburban community located 15 miles outside Boston with a population of 14,000 people. The

median family income in Glenview is US\$98,600, the median home value is US\$670,800, and the public school system spends more than US\$9,000 per student per year. Glenview is 96% White, 3% Asian, and .5% Black.

Glenview High School enrolls 750 students, and more than 90% go on to enroll in 4-year colleges. Seniors at Glenview High School fulfill their English/language arts requirement by choosing two semester-long courses from among the English department's five course offerings: creative writing, humanities, youth in contemporary literature, African American literature, and literature and justice. Students are randomly assigned to take one of their selected courses during the fall semester and the other during the spring semester.

### *Literature and Justice*

The 2006-2007, Glenview High School course catalog offered the following description of the literature and justice course:

In this course students will examine the question, "How do we determine what is just and unjust in the world in which we live?" Topics will include prison policy, juvenile justice, issues of poverty such as homelessness and hunger, and illegal immigration. Students will explore issues of ethics, justice, and obligation to others through various fictional and nonfiction works.

As is evident from this short course description, literature and justice introduced students to a number of complex social issues, such as global poverty and undocumented immigration.<sup>2</sup> However, the course did not explicitly advocate a particular philosophy, ideology, or worldview. Rather, literature and justice sought to expose participating Glenview students to multiple political and philosophical perspectives to allow students to draw their own conclusions about these complex social issues. In the following paragraphs, we offer a closer look at the curricular content of the literature and justice course. The effectiveness of the course and its instructor at maintaining a position of pedagogical neutrality is considered later in the article.

The goal of an evenhanded presentation of the social issues that were raised in literature and justice was evident in the course's unit on global poverty. Within this unit, literature and justice participants read essays by philosophers Peter Singer and Ayn Rand that espoused opposing perspectives on the issue of humanitarian aid. These philosophical perspectives were supplemented by a *60 Minutes* documentary on malaria in Tanzania and an online exploration of the efforts of an antipoverty nongovernmental organization called Heifer

International. Likewise, in the unit on undocumented immigration, students read articles by Jerry Seper (2002) entitled “Caring for Illegal Immigrants Taxes Facilities in Border States” and by Laurie Goodstein (2001) entitled “Church Group Provides Oasis for Illegal Migrants to the U.S.” These opposing perspectives on the care afforded to undocumented workers were supplemented by two ethnographies of the undocumented worker experience—Perez’s (1991) *Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* and Conover’s (1987) *Coyotes: A Journey Across Borders With America’s Illegal Migrants*.

In the course’s unit on homelessness—the curricular unit of particular interest to this study—Glenview students participated in a variety of activities that included studying profiles of men and women living at a Boston homeless shelter, a debate about forcing medical treatment on the homeless mentally ill, a case study about affordable housing shortages, and a town-hall simulation that involved a fictional community with a surging homeless population. Students also read a homeless teenager’s memoir by Jamie Bolnick (2000) entitled *Living at the Edge of the World* (2000) and reporter Barbara Ehrenreich’s (2002) *Nickel and Dime: On Not Getting by in America*—a journalistic account of trying to survive on minimum wage. Finally, students watched a documentary about homeless men and women residing in abandoned New York City subway tunnels.

As is evident in these descriptions of three units within the literature and justice curriculum, the course primarily focused outward on the challenges facing various marginalized groups. However, embedded within several of these units were assignments in which Glenview students considered their own privilege in comparison to individuals from these marginalized groups. For example, in the juvenile justice unit, students discussed their own childhood and schooling experiences in comparison to children raised in a low-income Chicago housing development (see the Results section for field notes from this discussion). Likewise, in the global poverty unit, students wrote essays in which they drew on the writings of Singer and Rand to express their own beliefs about the responsibility of affluent Americans like themselves for struggling individuals in the developing world. A syllabus for the literature and justice course is presented as Appendix A.

## Participants

This study’s participants consisted of 83 Glenview High students in their final year of high school: 40 in the experimental group and 43 in the control group. The 40 students in the experimental group were the Glenview High seniors enrolled in literature and justice for the fall semester of the 2006-2007

school year. The 43 students in the control group were the Glenview High seniors randomly assigned to literature and justice for the spring semester of the 2006-2007 school year. During the fall semester, these 43 members of the control group were enrolled in the three other English courses: humanities, African American literature, and creative writing.

The students in the experimental and control groups were highly similar in terms of gender, religion, class status, and academic performance. Specifically, the experimental group was composed of 21 male and 19 female students, whereas the control group was composed of 23 male and 20 female students. In both the experimental and control groups, there were two students who identified as upper class, whereas the rest identified as either middle class or upper-middle class. Finally, 25 members of the experimental group and 26 members of the control group identified as Catholic, with the rest of the students in each group identifying as Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and unaffiliated in similar proportions.

A demographic difference between the two groups was that all 40 members of the experimental group identified as White, whereas the control group included 40 students who identified as White, 1 who identified as African American, and 2 who identified as Lebanese American. A number of researchers have found that the presence of students of color within a classroom can impact the topics raised and avoided during class discussions (Antonio et al., 2004; Howard, Zoeller, & Pratt, 2006). However, recall that during this study's data-collection period, the students who composed the control group were not grouped together in the literature and justice course. Rather, these students (who were randomly assigned to take literature and justice during the spring semester of the 2006-2007 academic year) were distributed across three other English courses. As a result, data presented in this study from the control group were not influenced by a cohort effect.

### *The Literature and Justice Instructor*

All 40 students participating in literature and justice were taught by a single instructor, Ms. Nancy Allington. Ms. Allington was a White woman of Jewish descent in her mid-30s. She had earned an undergraduate degree in English from a highly competitive private university outside Boston and received a master's degree in English education from another highly competitive university in the Boston area. The 2006-2007 academic year was her sixth year as a teacher at Glenview High School.

As noted above, literature and justice sought to expose participating students to multiple perspectives on the social issues raised in the course without

privileging any particular perspective. One might reasonably argue that a course with the term *justice* in its title is already demonstrating a particular orientation toward the issues raised in the course.<sup>3</sup> In an interview about the literature and justice course, Ms. Allington acknowledged the possibility of bias embedded in her teaching and curricular choices:

It's my intention to keep my views to myself as they relate to these issues. Does the class have a liberal agenda? Possibly . . . I think it's my first instinct to say it feels liberal. And then I feel that there are balanced perspectives, and there's room for kids to have varying opinions and get varying things that support those opinions out of the class. But it's something I think about. I do think about that, and occasionally I feel concerned.

In these words, Allington described her intention of teaching with an approach that Simon (2001) referred to as *pedagogical neutrality*, but Allington also admitted to having concerns about the course's liberal bias.

In interviews conducted with 10 literature and justice participants at the conclusion of the fall semester, 9 out of 10 rejected the possibility that the course had attempted to push a particular viewpoint on them. For example, 1 student, Jonny, explained that "Ms. Allington never once said this is how you are supposed to feel or this is how I feel, and that is what is good about the class." Likewise, another student, Brendan, noted, "She would never really tell us her opinion. She'd always just play devil's advocate."

Our field notes from 13 different observations of literature and justice suggested that Ms. Allington generally maintained a neutral tone during in-class discussions but that sometimes her own perspective on issues raised in the course could be detected. For example, in our field notes from a classroom observation on November 20, 2006, Ms. Allington led the following discussion about the profiles of homeless men and women staying at a Boston homeless shelter:

Allington: A lot of you were absent on Friday. Could someone summarize?

Student No. 1 (female): We read short bios about folks who were homeless and who were staying at the Pine Street Inn. And we were using the profiles to add to our Causes of Homelessness sheet.

Allington: What surprised you from the profiles?

Student No. 2 (female): Divorce.

Student No. 3 (female): Lack of support.

Student No. 4 (female): Some seem like choices, like it was their fault.

Others, it seems unfair.



Student No. 5 (male): All of them [surprised me]. No, I'm serious. Probably divorce. Because you hear about natural disasters.

Student No. 6 (female): Immigration surprised me. Because they're like leaving their homes to get a better situation.

Allington: So it's really ironic.

Student No. 7 (male): I saw this thing on MSNBC talking about how insurance companies can underbid so they don't have to make full payouts to people, and folks were going homeless because they weren't getting enough money to rebuild their homes after [Hurricane] Katrina.

Student No. 8 (male): When I went down to Mississippi, I met a lot of people who had insurance, but the companies just pulled it from them because they were poor.

Allington: Interesting. So people were taken advantage of because they were poor. Are you equally sympathetic to all the people profiled who are homeless?

Student No. 5 (male): No. I feel bad for the lack-of-support people but not the addiction people. And I feel bad for the lack-of-affordable-housing people because of the price just jumping up on them.

Student No. 9 (female): I agree about the addiction. It's their choice.

Student No. 10 (female): I don't have any sympathy for addiction obviously.

Allington: Why obviously?

Student No. 10 (female): To me it's obvious.

Student No. 7 (male): I'm not sympathetic about immigrants either. Because they come here and think it will be easy.

Student No. 1 (female): I know the addicted homeless brought it upon themselves, but I still think you should help them get out of it. I feel bad about a lot of them—lack of education, loss of jobs.

In this and other class discussions, Ms. Allington asked guiding questions but generally stepped back to allow her students to reflect on the issue being discussed. However, there were moments in these discussions where Ms. Allington tipped her hand regarding her own perspectives. For example, in response to a student's comment about the actions of insurance companies following Hurricane Katrina, Ms. Allington offered the statement, "So people were taken advantage of because they were poor." This statement seemed to indicate a liberal bias that intruded on Ms. Allington's attempts at pedagogical neutrality. However, in field notes from another classroom observation, reported in the Results section, Ms. Allington's comments seemed to

**Table 1.** Attitudes About Homelessness Survey Items

Item	Statement
1	Some people say the homeless themselves are primarily to blame for homelessness. Do you . . .
2	Some people say society is primarily to blame for homelessness. Do you . . .
3	Some people say society has no obligation to provide shelter to people without homes. Do you . . .
4	When you think about homeless people, you feel sadness and compassion
5	It makes you angry to think that so many people are homeless in a country as rich as the United States
6	Programs for the homeless cost too much money
7	You would be willing to increase your yearly taxes to reduce homelessness
8	Laziness and irresponsibility on the part of homeless people are the primary causes of homelessness
9	You would be willing to have a homeless shelter located near your home
10	The federal government should spend more money to build affordable housing for poor people

indicate a conservative bias. In short, then, despite her stated goal of remaining pedagogically neutral, at times Ms. Allington's own beliefs intruded on her students' discussion (see Seider, 2008b, for additional field notes from classroom discussions).

### *Data Collection*

All 83 participants completed surveys at the start of the fall semester in September of 2006 and again at the conclusion of the fall semester in January of 2007. The survey consisted of items adapted from existing measures that were intended to ascertain students' attitudes on the various social issues considered in literature and justice. The survey items about the issue of homelessness are presented in Table 1.

A diverse group of 10 students from the experimental group and 11 students from the control group also participated in in-depth interviews. In selecting these 21 students, we strove to achieve maximum variation by constructing an interview pool that was diverse in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and religion (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). To achieve such diversity, we utilized the demographic information collected in the initial survey to invite students from both the experimental and control groups to participate in qualitative interviews about their beliefs on a variety of social issues. Interview participants received US\$10 gift certificates to a local cinema.

Each student was interviewed twice to allow for prolonged engagement with each participant (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The first interview took place at the start of the fall semester in mid-September, and the second interview took place at the conclusion of the fall semester in late January. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. In the first interview, students described their beliefs about the opportunity structure in America, the responsibility of affluent citizens for less fortunate fellow citizens, and the most significant problems at the local, national, and global levels. In the second interview, students reflected on how the framework through which they view themselves and their community had or had not changed over the course of the fall semester.

Finally, copies of all written assignment were collected from students participating in the fall semester literature and justice course, and 25 classroom observations were conducted of three of the four senior English courses offered at Glenview High School during the fall semester (the instructor of the African American Literature course declined our request to observe the class in session).

## *Measures*

This article focuses on students' shifts in attitude about homelessness (see Seider, 2008a, 2009, for analyses of students' changing beliefs about education and humanitarian aid, the other two course topics for which significant findings emerged). The Attitudes About Homelessness portion of the survey consisted of 10 survey items adapted from prior scales on attitudes toward homelessness developed by Lee, Jones, and Lewis (1990); Toro and McDonnell (1992); and Kingree and Daves (1997). These 10 survey items are presented in Table 1. Each of the survey items utilized 7-point Likert scales to gauge participants' level of agreement or disagreement with the given statement.

A principal components analysis (PCA) of this study's pretreatment survey data regarding attitudes toward homelessness indicated that one key construct was measured by these items, with the first component accounting for 48% of the standardized units of variance (eigenvalue = 4.83) and showing good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ).

## *Quantitative Data Analysis*

A one-way, between-groups analysis of covariance strategy was utilized to consider the impact of literature and justice on Glenview seniors' beliefs

about homelessness. In this analysis, participation in literature and justice represented the independent variable, students' postsemester attitudes on the homeless composite represented the dependent variable, and students' pre-semester attitudes on the homeless composite were treated as a covariate to control for any preexisting differences between the experimental and control groups. Effect size was determined using Cohen's *d*. Finally, 2 by 2 between-groups analyses of covariance were conducted to consider the influence of several demographic moderators on the treatment variable.

### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

The transcripts from all 21 interviews with Glenview High seniors were coded using etic and emic codes drawn from the scholarship on adolescent development, emerging adulthood, civic engagement, social justice education, and changing minds. The reliability of the codebook and coding process were checked by enlisting a colleague from the Harvard Graduate School of Education trained in qualitative methods to code 20% of the interview transcripts. A comparison of interrater reliability achieved a Cohen's Kappa (unweighted) of .85, which is considered to be a very good strength of agreement (Fleiss, 1981).

On completing the coding and categorizing of the transcribed interviews, matrices were constructed that juxtaposed the themes and patterns emerging from the data with the relevant scholarship (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Narrative profiles were also developed for all 21 students who participated in qualitative interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A similar coding and analytic process were carried out with the transcribed field notes of classroom observations as well as student work collected from literature and justice participants.

It should be noted that this study's author worked as an English teacher at Glenview High School and taught several sections of literature and justice from 1999 to 2003. That said, the author's work at Glenview High School was sufficiently in the past that none of the students participating in the study knew the author as a teacher at Glenview High School. Nonetheless, to reduce the threat of researcher bias to interpretive validity, the author reflected on his own biases and impact by writing analytic memos on these subjects throughout the data-collection and data-analysis process. He also shared code lists, transcripts, analytic memos, and data analysis with colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and solicited their feedback both to cross-check his coding and to offer alternatives to his conclusions (Maxwell, 1996). As a result of these various measures, we believe the findings and analyses described below can be regarded as valid and verifiable.

**Table 2.** Summary Statistics for Mean Attitudes of Glenview Students on the Composite of Attitudes Toward the Homeless ( $N = 83$ )

	Number	Descriptive statistics for homeless composite		
		Pretest	Posttest	Adjusted means of posttest after ANCOVA
		<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	
Literature and justice participants	40	4.3 (1.16)	3.94 (1.18)	3.89
Control-group participants	43	4.16 (1.04)	4.23 (.98)	4.41

## Results

### *Composite on Attitudes Toward Homelessness*

The descriptive statistics related to total and estimated mean scores of Glenview students in the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 2. There were no statistically significant differences among the initial mean scores of these two groups of students prior to the intervention; however, analyses of covariance revealed statistically significant differences in these two groups' shifts in attitude toward the homeless over the course of the semester.

A one-way, between-groups ANCOVA with students' initial attitudes toward homelessness as a covariate was performed to test for associations between students' postsemester attitudes toward homelessness and their participation in literature and justice. As can be seen in Table 3, after adjusting for preintervention scores, there was a significant difference between the literature and justice participants and the control-group participants on postintervention scores on the composite of attitudes toward homelessness and a medium effect size,  $F(1, 79) = 10.48, p = .001$ , Cohen's  $d = .54$ .

The adjusted mean postintervention scores for the two groups on the composite of homeless attitudes indicated that the control group had an adjusted mean of 4.41 units, whereas the literature and justice participants had an adjusted mean score of 3.89 units. These results demonstrated that Glenview seniors in the literature and justice course expressed decreased levels of support for the homeless over the course of the semester in comparison to their peers in the control group.

### *Considering Causes of Homelessness*

This study's survey data revealed a decline in support for the homeless on the part of literature and justice participants in comparison to their peers in the

**Table 3.** Analysis of Covariance Describing the Relationship Between a Students' Postintervention Beliefs on the Homeless Composite and Participation in Literature and Justice ( $N = 83$ )

Variable	<i>df</i>	Type III sum of squares	<i>F</i> value	<i>p</i> value	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Corrected model	2	53.71	51.57	<.0001	
Prehomeless composite	1	50.10	96.23	<.0001	
Literature and justice	1	5.46	10.48	.0018	.54
Error	79	41.13			
Total	81				
Corrected total	81				

Note:  $R^2 = .566$ .

**Table 4.** Glenview Students' Preintervention and Postintervention Beliefs About the Causes of Poverty ( $n = 21$ )

Group	Number	Attributions for poverty, homelessness, and inequality		
		Individualistic factors	Situational factors	Both situational and individualistic factors
Preintervention beliefs				
Literature and justice students	10	5	2	3
Control-group students	11	6	1	4
Postintervention beliefs				
Literature and justice students	10	1	6	3
Control-group students	11	5	1	5

control group. One might reasonably conclude from these findings that literature and justice increased participants' reliance on individualistic attributions for poverty and inequality; however, such a conclusion is not borne out by the study's qualitative data. In both preintervention and postintervention interviews, Glenview students from both the experimental and control groups were asked about their beliefs concerning the causes of poverty and homelessness. Table 4 categorizes their preintervention and postintervention responses in terms of individualistic explanations for inequality, situational explanations for inequality, and explanations that relied on both individualistic and situational factors.

## *Causes of Homelessness and the Control Group*

As is evident in Table 4, the 10 Glenview students interviewed from the control group demonstrated little change in their beliefs about the causes of poverty and homelessness. For example, in her initial interview from the fall of 2006, 1 student, Tina, offered an explanation for why poor people are poor, which focused exclusively on individualistic factors:

I think it could be (a) because they have way too many kids that they can't handle or (b) because they're lazy . . . I just think that there has to be some job that you can get. I really do believe that. I don't understand how someone just like can't get a job anywhere.

When Tina was interviewed again in January of 2007, her response to this same question about the causes of poverty remained focused on individualistic factors. As she explained, "Because either you don't have the education; maybe you have like a drug problem, you have too many kids, you are lazy possibly, you don't have enough work experience. Those factors, I think." In short, Tina did not demonstrate substantial changes in her attributions for poverty.

Another student in the control group, Joanna, demonstrated a similar stability in her attributions for poverty. In her initial interview in September of 2006, Joanna explained,

I feel like homeless people should be able to help themselves. There are so many different kinds of opportunities that they could have. Like, even if they went and worked in a fast-food place or anywhere and just tried to make some money, they could have somewhere that's affordable.

Like many of her classmates, Joanna demonstrated a conception of poverty that focused primarily on individualistic causes. In her follow-up interview in January of 2007, Joanna continued to focus on these individualistic factors. As she explained,

If you're born into a poor family, it can either make you want to grow out of that someday or it can make you just fall into the same pattern that everyone else in your family has fallen into. That's definitely a way to be poor. A lot of it goes back to laziness and not wanting to be wealthy enough or not wanting to have a stable life.

At both the beginning and conclusion of the fall semester, Joanna's explanations for poverty focused primarily on the role of laziness in contributing to poverty—an individualistic factor.

Finally, a third student, Albert, attributed poverty to both individualistic and situational factors. In his initial interview, Albert explained,

Every homeless person has a different story. Like they could be there by choice [or] because they're addicted to alcohol or drugs, but they could also have grown up in a bad home where they just had to get away from it.

In this explanation, Albert cited an individualistic factor, drug abuse, but also noted that some individuals are born into circumstances beyond their control. Likewise, he explained in his follow-up interview,

There could be someone that you just give them money, and they just go out and spend it on alcohol and drugs, and there could also be people who are just living with their family where the family just broke down and it wasn't their fault.

In the comments of all three of these students from the control group, one can see evidence of stability in their beliefs about poverty that was representative of the control group as a whole.

### *Causes of Homelessness and Literature and Justice*

In contrast to the control group, Table 4 reveals that Glenview students in literature and justice attributed poverty and homelessness to situational factors with much greater frequency in their postintervention interviews than they had in their preintervention interviews. In fact, in their postintervention interviews, 9 out of 10 literature and justice participants attributed homelessness and poverty, in whole or in part, to situational factors. Consider, for example, the following perspectives offered by Andrew, a literature and justice participant. In his initial interview in September of 2006, Andrew explained,

I don't really know a lot of stories of poor people, but they're normal people, and then they get addicted to drugs, and drugs just take over their lives, and that's how they end up poor . . . Obviously, people get chances in life, and they didn't like capitalize on them.



In contrast, at the conclusion of literature and justice, Andrew offered a very different explanation for poverty and homelessness. He explained,

I guess a lot of people at first thought it was the homeless people's fault. And like we could see, as we learned about the topic, well maybe it's not their fault. Maybe they're really trying. But the country just makes it so hard to climb out of poverty.

Here, Andrew shifted from attributing poverty and homelessness to individualistic factors to a worldview that emphasized situational factors. Another student, Annie, described a similar evolution. In her postintervention interview, she explained of homeless people as follows:

I was originally more of the opinion that it's their own fault. Most of them have drug and alcohol problems, and if they didn't get into that, they wouldn't be homeless, and they should just work harder. But there were a lot of stories we read that it was really completely out of their control, and lots of bad things happen. I guess I took away from that like it could happen to anyone. Like after I go to college or whatever, what if I can't find a job, and then what if my parents can't help me? And then I could be homeless.

In these words, Annie seemed to go even further than Andrew in considering the events that could lead her, personally, to contend with the challenges about which she was learning.

A third student, Liza, began the semester by attributing homelessness to "either laziness or no incentive to get a job." As she explained, she felt sympathy for struggling Americans but also believed "there are ways to earn money to get them[selves] out of homelessness." In her follow-up interview at the conclusion of literature and justice, however, Liza referenced one of the course's assigned texts, *Nickel and Dime*, to offer a somewhat different perspective. Liza still cited laziness and drugs as contributors to poverty and homelessness, but she also observed,

I understand that minimum wage is very low and that people who are living on minimum wage cannot make enough money even if they work the same or more hours . . . In *Nickel and Dime*, she (the author) goes to a couple different cities and tries to work on minimum wage, and she basically can't survive. She has to work at least two minimum wage jobs. It's very difficult for her to get any kind of housing, and

she's just exhausted by the end of the day because she's worked such long hours.

Liza shifted from a perspective focused entirely on individualistic causes of poverty and homelessness to one that acknowledged the role of both individualistic and situational factors.

In their postintervention interviews, only one literature and justice student, Brendan, offered exclusively individualistic attributions for poverty and homelessness. According to Brendan, "It's a little crazy to think that someone who was born here can't go out and get a job for a little money and then work their way up." Although Brendan continued to attribute poverty and homelessness exclusively to individualistic factors, the other 9 literature and justice students all cited situational factors in their postintervention attributions for poverty and homelessness.

### *Legitimizing and Naturalizing Ideological Modes*

As noted above, 9 out of 10 literature and justice participants ultimately offered attributions for poverty that acknowledged the role of situational factors; however, in these same follow-up interviews, 7 literature and justice participants also justified the existing social structure and their own privileged position within this structure. Howard (2008) defines a *legitimizing ideological mode* as one that represents privilege as the result of deliberate decisions, attitudes, and actions on the part of the affluent and a *naturalizing ideological mode* as one that characterizes economic inequity as natural and unavoidable. In their follow-up interviews, 2 literature and justice participants described worldviews that invoked a legitimizing ideological mode, 1 participant invoked a naturalizing ideological mode, and 4 participants described worldviews that incorporated both legitimizing and naturalizing ideological modes. For example, in his pre-post interviews, 1 student, Frank, shifted from offering individualistic attributions for poverty and homelessness to offering situational attributions for these conditions. Specifically, in his postintervention interview, Frank described poor people as poor "because of education. They can't get good educations and therefore can't move up in the way that everyone else does." However, in this same interview, Frank also sought to justify the existing social structure with the following explanation:

A lot of times the way things are is unjust. And people sort of have to come to terms with things that some people will be better off than

others. And that's sort of the way it's always been. Like even with cavemen. Some were built better, and they survived longer.

In these words, Frank invoked both legitimizing and naturalizing ideological modes by characterizing economic inequality as inevitable and also the result of differences in ability. This is the same student who, earlier in this same interview, had described a clear link between poverty and the absence of educational opportunity.

Another literature and justice participant, Michelle, offered similar justifications for inequality despite her acknowledgment of the situational factors that contribute to poverty and homelessness. In her postintervention interview, Michelle described as unfair "a single mom working two jobs who still lives in an apartment in like a ghetto . . . She's probably putting more work in than some big business guy, but just because it's not as high up of a job she's not making as much money." Here, Michelle explicitly characterized poverty as due to low wages rather than lack of effort or initiative; however, she then concluded this thought by explaining, "But I guess that's just the way the world works because someone has got to work those jobs." In short, Michelle identified a situational factor that contributes to poverty but then applied a naturalizing ideological frame to justify this economic inequality. Later in this same interview, Michelle offered a legitimizing ideological mode to justify her own family's affluence. Specifically, she characterized her father who grew up in a poor Boston neighborhood as more motivated and hard-working than the other young people from that neighborhood:

There's so many guys who are still hanging out in the same bars doing the same thing they did 30 years ago. And it's like when are they going to grow up? And it's like he (Michelle's father) was successful because he had the motivation to make it out.

Here, despite her earlier description of the "single mom working two jobs," Michelle invoked a legitimizing ideological mode to differentiate her own family from poorer families whom she perceived to be lacking her father's perseverance and motivation.

A third example of a student utilizing legitimizing and naturalizing ideological modes to justify inequality can be found in the postintervention interview with Dan. Regarding poverty and homelessness, Dan explained that, prior to literature and justice, "I never really thought about it. And now I realize . . . there's people living in different ways and in different situations

who don't have these opportunities that we have." Nonetheless, in describing his own family's affluence, Dan invoked a legitimizing ideological mode by characterizing America as "this land of opportunities." He then invoked a naturalizing mode to justify economic inequality:

Well, I don't know. It's just the way life is, I guess. Like some people are more fortunate than others. But I don't know. Sometimes there's something you can do; sometimes there isn't. Like it's just, I guess, lucky or not.

Like Frank and Michelle, Dan explicitly acknowledged situational factors that contribute to poverty and homelessness but also offered legitimizing and naturalizing modes to justify the existing social structure and his own family's place within that structure.

### *Legitimizing Ideological Modes and Class Discussions*

In field notes taken during observations of the literature and justice course, one can see Glenview students invoking legitimizing ideological modes during class discussions as well. Take, for example, the following class discussion from November 21, 2006, about the role of substance abuse in contributing to poverty and homelessness:

Student No. 1 (male): I think a lot of people who use drugs are coming up with excuses. Why don't they just sober up?

Student No. 2 (female): It's an addiction. The definition of an addiction is that you can't stop.

Student No. 1 (male): So those drugs walked up to them and made them do it?

Student No. 3 (female): It's their fault they got involved with drugs in the first place. Now it's their job to get themselves out of trouble.

In this discussion, Students No. 1 and 3 justified their own privilege by asserting that differences between affluent individuals and homeless individuals can be attributed to poor decisions and lack of resolve on the part of the homeless. In so doing, these students invoked a legitimizing ideological model to suggest that the economic struggles of these homeless men and women are the result of their own conscious decisions and actions. Student No. 2, in contrast, questioned the notion that addiction represents a deliberate decision or action.

A second example of literature and justice participants invoking legitimizing ideological modes was evident in a class discussion on October 26, 2006, during a unit on America's juvenile justice system. In the excerpt that follows, students were engaged in discussion of a case study about two 10-year-olds from Chicago's Ida B. Wells housing development who, in the mid-1990s, killed another child living in the development:

Student No. 1 (female): That's not always the case that a father goes to jail and the kid commits a crime.

Allington: So you're saying that there are people who make better choices in bad situations?

Student No. 2 (male): I'm sure there are parents in the inner city who don't take responsibility for their kids. In Glenview, parents usually take responsibility.

Student No. 3 (female): Did the father know his son was into drugs and gangs and guns?

Allington: Clearly, the home of Tyrone had some issues. I'm not sure if the father knew what was going on the way your parents might have.

In this excerpt, both Student No. 2 and Ms. Allington invoked a legitimizing ideological mode by suggesting that the parents of the children involved in this crime were not effective supervisors of their children's actions (in comparison to parents in Glenview). In so doing, they implicitly placed the blame for the crime that unfolded on these parents. This discussion also seemed to represent a moment when Ms. Allington's pedagogical neutrality once again slipped but this time in the direction of what might be characterized as a conservative bias.

### *Ideological Modes and the Control Group*

Certainly, invocations of legitimizing and naturalizing ideological modes were not limited to the Glenview students in the experimental group. Recall from the responses cited above that students in the control group, such as Tina and Joanna, offered attributions for poverty that included laziness, drug problems, too many children, and lack of work experience and education—all examples of legitimizing ideological modes. Moreover, other students in the control group offered naturalizing ideological modes in their attributions for poverty. For example, 1 student, Patricia, offered the following explanation for why poor people are poor: "They might not have a job, or they don't have a job that has good benefits, or something happened to them, like something

just happened.” In her explanation that for some individuals contending with poverty “something just happened,” Patricia characterized poverty as an affliction that is natural and unavoidable for some people.

Mark, another student in the control group, observed that “some of them are just down on their luck. Other ones might have drug problems or gambling problems.” Although the reference to drugs and gambling represents a legitimizing ideological mode, Mark, too, offered a naturalizing ideological mode in his observation that some poor people are poor due to bad luck—that is, events and circumstances beyond anyone’s control. In these students’ explanations, one can see that the invocation of legitimizing and naturalizing ideological modes are often accompanied by individualistic attributions for poverty. What was notable about the Glenview students in literature and justice—and what is taken up in this article’s Discussion—was that even the students who shifted to a conception of poverty that acknowledged the role of situational factors continued to offer a worldview that invoked legitimizing and naturalizing ideological modes.

## Discussion

In the Discussion section, we focus on the apparent incongruity between several of this study’s key findings. On one hand, this study’s quantitative survey data demonstrated that Glenview students in literature and justice experienced a significant decline over the course of the semester in their support and empathy for Americans contending with homelessness. At the same time, interviews with 10 literature and justice participants revealed virtually all of these participants to have achieved a greater recognition of the role that situational factors—low wages, job shortages, racism, lack of affordable housing, poor educational opportunities, and so on—can play in contributing to poverty and homelessness. These two sets of findings appear to be incongruous. One might reasonably expect adolescents learning about the factors that contribute to homelessness and poverty that are outside an individual’s control to demonstrate increased empathy and support for such individuals. However, the affluent adolescents in this study demonstrated attitudinal shifts in the opposite direction.

An explanation for this apparent incongruity may be found in this study’s third key finding, namely, that in their postintervention interviews the majority of literature and justice participants continued to justify the existing opportunity structure in America as either legitimate, inevitable, or a combination of the two. Acknowledging situational factors that contribute to poverty while simultaneously endorsing America’s opportunity structure may seem like an

additional incongruity; however, this response by literature and justice participants is actually predicted by the scholarship on beliefs about inequality (Hunt, 2004; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Specifically, Kluegel and Smith found that educating Americans about situational causes of inequality rarely led to a reorganization of those individuals' worldviews. Rather, individuals adopted what Kluegel and Smith refer to as *compromised images* in which they simply appended their newfound understanding of inequality to existing beliefs about the opportunity structure, rather than allowing this new understanding of inequality to supplant or reshape their existing worldview. In other words, even learning about the situational factors that contribute to inequality does not typically alter Americans' perception that economic status is indicative of ability, effort, and initiative. This study's qualitative data suggest that the affluent teenagers in literature and justice demonstrated precisely this possession of compromised images regarding fellow citizens struggling with homelessness.

Howard's (2008) work on privilege and Lerner's (1980) work on just world theory can provide insight into why this study's privileged adolescents offered such a response to their learning about homelessness and poverty. First, in his work on teenagers at elite private schools, Howard conceptualized privilege "more in terms of identity—a sense of self—than in terms of what advantages some people have over others" (p. 11). In other words, Howard found that the educational and economic privilege that affluent teenagers enjoy serves as a lens through which they understand themselves and their relationships to others. As a means of protecting this self-concept, Howard found that the affluent teenagers in his study responded to questions about their economic and educational advantages by invoking various ideological modes that characterized their privilege as merited. Maintaining such a perspective was crucial to these affluent teenagers' sense of self as well as their beliefs about their place in the world.

Howard's (2008) study focused on elite teenagers' beliefs about their own schooling; however, his findings parallel the response of literature and justice participants to learning about homelessness. Specifically, in learning about the situational factors that contribute to homelessness and poverty, the Glenview teenagers participating in literature and justice were exposed to an implicit critique of the existing class structure—a class structure on which the Glenview teenagers and their families are positioned near the top. Similar to the elite students in Howard's study, the Glenview teenagers in the literature and justice course responded to this critique by invoking legitimizing and naturalizing ideological modes that presented the existing class structure as merit based and inevitable. In so doing, they sought to justify the privilege

from which they benefit materially but which Howard has also characterized as central to their sense of self.

Here, then, lies an explanation for literature and justice participants' decrease in empathy for the homeless over the course of the semester. At the conclusion of the literature and justice course, participating students could recite the situational factors that contribute to homelessness, but this knowledge also led them to reassert their belief in the justness of the opportunity structure. For individuals who have had to defend their support for the existing social structure, a decline in empathy for the homeless is not surprising. Protecting their existing worldview and sense of self required these teenagers to characterize the position of the homeless at the bottom of the class structure as warranted. In short, then, we suggest here that learning about the situational factors that contribute to homelessness paradoxically catalyzed a decline in literature and justice participants' support for the homeless.

Lerner's (1980) just world theory supports this interpretation of the study's key findings. According to Lerner, individuals "want to believe they live in a just world where people get what they deserve" (p. 208). When individuals witness injustice but are unable or unwilling to aid the victim of the injustice, they often persuade themselves that, in fact, no injustice has been committed. Lerner found evidence for just world theory in a series of laboratory experiments; however, other scholars have theorized that just world theory also influences people's responses to societal injustices. According to Montada and Schneider (1991), when people consider large-scale social issues such as poverty, they maintain their belief in a just world by "interpreting the existing disadvantages as self-inflicted" or by "giving justifications for one's own advantages" (p. 63). In the case of the Glenview students in the literature and justice course, many chose to justify the existing class structure (and thus their own places atop this structure) by emphasizing the extraordinary motivation and efforts of their parents or by declaring the inevitability of economic inequality. Both ideological modes allowed these affluent teenagers to maintain their belief in a just world and, specifically, the equity of the existing opportunity structure for both themselves and those—like the homeless—at the bottom of this structure.

### *Limitations*

There are several limitations to this study that warrant further research to substantiate this study's findings. First, a relatively small sample size of American teenagers from a single affluent community is too limited to enable broad



generalizations about the beliefs of all affluent adolescents. This particular sample of adolescents, for example, possessed a disproportionate number of teenagers who identified as Catholic. Although Perl and McClintock (2001) report that Catholics do not differ significantly from Protestants on issues of foreign aid, welfare, euthanasia, or even capital punishment and abortion, a larger, multisite study could account for characteristics unique to a particular community.

A second limitation was the relatively short time frame of 6 months within which this study was conducted. It is possible that participants in the literature and justice course demonstrated an initial resistance to their learning about poverty and homelessness, but they will come to reflect on their learning more deeply in ensuing years. For this reason, we intend to contact and reinterview literature and justice participants in their final year of university (the 2010-2011 school year) to learn whether their beliefs about homelessness and inequality have shifted over a longer period of time.

Finally, a third limitation to this study was that all sections of the literature and justice course were taught by a single instructor. As a result, one could argue that the findings outlined in this article are the result of teacher effects rather than of students' reactions to social justice content. In the Methods section, we described the literature and justice instructor as endeavoring to practice pedagogical neutrality in her presentation of the literature and justice curriculum and presented field notes to demonstrate the extent to which the instructor did (and did not) present course material in a neutral manner. Certainly, future research in this domain would be well served by a study design involving multiple instructors that can reduce concerns about the difficulty of disentangling teacher effects from curricular effects.

## Conclusion

Privilege has typically been conceptualized in the education and psychology literature as the unearned entitlements granted to some individuals and withheld from others by virtue of their social category or status (Goodman, 2001; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003; McIntosh, 1988). In recent years, Howard (2008) and other scholars have supplemented this commodified conception of privilege by also considering the impact of privilege on identity. Specifically, in recent ethnographic studies of elite private schools, Howard (2008) and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009) have drawn on this privilege as identity

framework to describe the influence of privilege on the worldview and self-concept of affluent young adults.

This study of the Glenview High literature and justice course built on these previous efforts in two important ways. First, in this study, we sought to consider the impact of privilege on identity through a mixed methods approach involving pre–post surveys, qualitative interviews, and classroom observations. This mixed methods approach allowed for triangulation of our study’s quantitative and qualitative data and, thus, more robust findings and conclusions (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). For this reason, we believe our results make a significant contribution to the existing scholarship on the impact of privilege on adolescents’ worldviews.

Second, the ethnographic work described above investigated the impact of privilege on young adults as they went about their daily lives as students at elite private schools and as children in affluent families. In contrast, this study sought to understand the ways in which privilege influenced affluent teens’ response to a particular educational intervention—in this case, a social justice education course. Utilizing an experimental design with random assignment to an experimental and control group, we found that privileged teens learning about the causes of poverty and homelessness resisted feelings of empathy or responsibility for the homeless to protect their existing worldviews and sense of self. As a result, the literature and justice course failed—at least in the short term—to deepen participants’ commitment to helping Americans struggling with homelessness or to strengthen their support for policies aimed at combating homelessness. We believe that these findings are of great relevance to educators at both the secondary and post-secondary level seeking to deepen the civic commitments of their own students. Both researchers and educators must continue to explore the mechanisms that can (and cannot) engage adolescents in reflection on the responsibilities that accompany their roles as citizens of local, national, and global communities. Engaging adolescents in such reflection is crucial to the United States remaining a place that, in President Franklin Roosevelt’s (1937) words, measures progress by its ability to “provide enough for those who have too little.”

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

### **Financial Disclosure/Funding**

The author received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

## Appendix

### *Literature and Justice Syllabus*

---

**Literature and Justice: Course Outline and Expectations.** Literature and justice is a senior English course that explores a variety of social issues through novels, short stories, articles, essays, music, film, and art.

**Fundamental Course Question.** What rights do human beings deserve?

### Course Units and Selected Readings

#### *Defining justice and injustice.*

“The lifeboat scenario” by Garret Hardin (1974)

*A Theory of Justice* (excerpt) by John Rawls (1971)

*Libertarianism* (excerpt) by John Hospers (1971)

*Utilitarianism* (excerpt) by John Stuart Mill (1864)

*The Wealth of Nations* (excerpt) by Adam Smith (1776)

#### *Criminal justice*

*Newjack* by Ted Conover (2001)

“For the poor, a lawyer with 1,600 clients” by Jane Fritsch and David Rohde (2001)

“The uses of shame: Should nonviolent criminals be disgraced in their communities?” by June Tangney (2001)

“Inmate rehabilitation returns as prison goal” by Fox Butterfield (2001)

“Prison rape is no joke” by Vincent Schiraldi and Mariam Bell (2003)

“Swift justice: Acting governor pushes mandatory sentencing guidelines; governor wants to clamp down on lenient judges” by Franci Richardson (2001)

“California’s 3-strikes laws upheld; Supreme Court decides long prison terms legal” by Charles Lane (2003)

#### *Homelessness*

*Living at the Edge of the World: A Teenager’s Survival in the Tunnels of Grand Central Station* by Jamie Pastor Bolnick and S. Tina (2000)

*Grand Central Winter* (excerpt) by Lee Stringer (1998)

*Street Crazy: The Tragedy of the Homeless Mentally Ill* (excerpt) by Stephen Seager (2000)

---

(continued)

## Appendix (continued)

---

*Mole People: Life in the Tunnels Beneath New York City* (excerpt) by Jennifer Toth (1995)

“Farm vision for homeless gains foes” by David Abel (2002)

“Putting off the ritz” by Joan Vennoch (2001)

*Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich (2002)

### Poverty in America

*There Are No Children Here* by Alex Kotlowitz (1992)

*In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (excerpt) by Phillipe Bourgois (2002)

*Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago* (excerpt) by Jones, Newman, and Isay (1997)

“On the meaning of plumbing and poverty” by Melanie Scheller (2000)

“What is poverty?” by Jo Goodwin Parker (1971)

“From middle class to the shelter door: In a trend, New Yorkers face poverty after last unemployment check” by Leslie Eaton (2002)

### World hunger and global poverty

*Living High and Letting Die* (excerpts) by Peter Unger (1996)

“The aid debate: Helping hand or hardly helping” by Michael Weinstein (2002)

“Harvard economist urges aid for poor” by Jenna Russell (2002)

“World needs to pay more attention to poor nations” by Muhammad Ali (2001)

“The singer solution to world poverty” by Peter Singer (1999)

“Lifeboat ethics: The case against helping the poor” by Garrett Hardin (1974)

“The VIRTUE OF SELFISHNESS” by Ayn Rand (1961)

### Immigration

*Coyotes: A Journey Across Borders With America's Illegal Migrants* by Ted Conover (1987)

*Diary of an Undocumented Immigrant* (excerpt) by Ramon Perez (1991)

---

(continued)

---

## Appendix (continued)

---

- “Border patrol continues search for missing migrant: 14 died in Arizona desert after being abandoned by smugglers” by William Booth and Cheryl Thompson (2001)
- “We are overwhelmed: Caring for illegal immigrants taxes facilities in border states” by Jerry Seper (2002)
- “Church group provides oasis for illegal migrants to the U.S.” by Laurie Goodstein (2001)
- “Hispanic workers die at a higher rate” by Stephen Greenhouse (2001)
- “Will U.S. ever protect its borders?” by Diana Hull (2001)
- 

## Notes

1. All Glenview teachers and students in this article are referred to by pseudonyms.
2. The 2006-2007 literature and justice syllabus used the phrase *illegal immigration* in its description of the social issues raised in the course. Many readers would identify this phrase as an example of oppressive language, preferring instead the phrase *undocumented immigration* to refer to the issue of workers entering the United States without proper documentation. We have left the quotation from the literature and justice syllabus as is, but choose ourselves to utilize the phrase *undocumented immigration* or *undocumented worker* in the text.
3. Many thanks to an anonymous *Youth & Society* referee for raising this point.

## References

- Anfara, V., Brown, K., & Mangione, T. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher*, 31, 28-38.
- Antonio, A., Chang, M., Hakuta, K., Kenny, D., Levin, S., & Milem, J. (2004). Effects of racial diversity on complex thinking in college students. *Psychological Science*, 15, 507-510.
- Bellah, R., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Bolnick, J. (2000). *Living at the edge of the world*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Bullock, H., Williams, W., & Limbert, W. (2003). Predicting support for welfare policy. *Innovations on Social, Political and Economic Inequalities*, 7(3), 35-56.
- Chafel, J., & Neitzel, C. (2005). Young children's ideas about the nature, causes, justification, and alleviation of poverty. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 20, 433-450.
- Colby, A., Ehrlich, T., Beaumont, E., & Stephens, J. (2003). *Educating citizens: Preparing America's undergraduates for lives of moral and civic responsibility*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Conover, T. (1987). *Coyotes: A journey across borders with America's illegal migrants*. New York: Vintage.
- Cozzarelli, C., Wilkinson, A., & Tagler, M. (2001). Attitudes toward the poor and attributions for poverty. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*, 207-227.
- Cunningham, M., & Henry, M. (2007). *Homelessness counts*. Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness.
- Ehrenreich, B. (2002). *Nickel and dimed: On (not) getting by in America*. New York: Holt.
- Flanagan, C., Campbell, B., Botcheva, L., Bowes, J., Csapo, B., Macek, P., et al. (2003). Social class and adolescents' beliefs about the social contract. *Journal of Social Issues, 59*, 711-732.
- Fleiss, J. (1981). Balanced incomplete block designs for inter-rater reliability studies. *Applied Psychological Measurement, 5*(1), 105-112.
- Gaztambide-Fernandez, R. (2009). *The best of the best: Becoming elite at an American boarding school*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Goodman, D. (2001). *Promoting diversity and social justice: Educating people from privileged groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Goodstein, L. (2001, June 10). Church group provides oasis for illegal migrants to the U.S. *New York Times*. Available from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Gudrais, E. (2008, July-August, 22-29). Unequal America. *Harvard Magazine*. Retrieved March 9, 2010, from <http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/07/unequal-america>
- Howard, A. (2008). *Learning privilege: Lessons of power and identity in affluent schooling*. New York: Routledge.
- Howard, J., Zoeller, A., & Pratt, Y. (2006). Students' race and participation in sociology classroom discussion. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 5*(2), 14-38.
- Hunt, M. (2004). Race/ethnicity and beliefs about wealth and poverty. *Social Science Quarterly, 85*, (3), 827-853.
- Jensen, L. (1995). Habits of the heart revisited: Autonomy, community and divinity in adults' moral language. *Qualitative Sociology, 18*(1), 71-96.
- Kimmel, M., & Ferber, A. (2003). *Privilege: A reader*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Kingree, J., & Daves, W. (1997). Preliminary validation of the attitudes towards homelessness inventory. *Journal of Community Psychology, 25*, 265-288.
- Kluegel, J., & Smith, E. (1986). *Beliefs about inequality: Americans' views of what is and what ought to be*. New York: de Gruyter.
- Ladd, E., & Bowman, K. (1998). *Attitudes toward economic inequality*. New York: Aei.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*, 465-491.

- Leahy, R. (1990). The development of concepts of economic and social inequality. In V. McLoyd & C. Flanagan (Eds.), *Economic stress: Effects on family life and child development* (pp. 107-120). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lee, B., Jones, S., & Lewis, D. (1990). Public beliefs about the causes of homelessness. *Social Forces*, 69, 253-265.
- Lerner, M. (1980). *The belief in a just world: A fundamental delusion*. New York: Plenum.
- Maxwell, J. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. London: Sage.
- Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophical and practical guide*. London: Routledge Farmer.
- McIntosh, P. (1988). *White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies* (Working Paper No. 189). Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College Center for Research on Women.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. California: Sage.
- Montada, L., & Schneider, A. (1991). Justice and prosocial commitments. In L. Montada & H. Bierhoff (Eds.), *Altruism in social systems* (pp. 58-81). Lewiston: Hogrefe and Huber.
- Perez, R. (1991). *Diary of an undocumented immigrant*. Houston, TX: Arte Publico.
- Perl, P., & McClintock, J. (2001). The Catholic "consistent life ethic" and attitudes toward capital punishment and welfare reform. *Sociology of Religion*, 62, 275-299.
- Roosevelt, F. (1937). *Second inaugural address*. Retrieved March 31, 2008, from [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/froos2.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/froos2.asp)
- Schwarz, J., & Volgy, T. (1992). *The forgotten Americans*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Scott, J., & Leonhardt, D. (2005, May 15). Shadowy lines that still divide. *New York Times*. Retrieved March 9, 2010, from <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/national/class/index.html>
- Seider, S. (2008a). "Bad things could happen": How fear impedes the development of social responsibility in privileged adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 23, 647-666.
- Seider, S. (2008b). Resisting obligation: How privileged adolescents conceive of their responsibilities to others. *Journal of Research in Character Education*, 6(1), 3-19.
- Seider, S. (2009). Overwhelmed and immobilized: Raising the consciousness of privileged young adults about world hunger and poverty. *International Studies Perspectives*, 10(1), 60-76.
- Seper, J. (2002, September 24). We are overwhelmed: Caring for illegal immigrants taxes facilities in border states. *Washington Times*. Available from <http://washingtontimes.com>
- Simon, K. (2001). *Moral questions in the classroom: How to get kids to think deeply about real life and their schoolwork*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Skafté, D. (1989). The effect of perceived wealth and poverty on adolescents' character judgments. *Journal of Social Psychology, 129*, 93-99.
- Smeeding, T., Rainwater, L., & Burtless, G. (2001). United States poverty in a cross-national context. In S. Danziger & R. Haveman (Eds.), *Understanding poverty* (pp. 162-189). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory, procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- De Tocqueville, A. (1969). *Democracy in America*. New York: Harper. (Original work published 1835)
- Toro, P., & McDonnell, D. (1992). Beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about homelessness: A survey of the general public. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 20*(1), 53-80.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2009). *Poverty 2008*. Retrieved November 10, 2009, from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs>
- Watts, R., Williams, N., & Jagers, R. (2003). Sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31*, 185-194.

## Bio

**Scott Seider** is an assistant professor of education at Boston University where his research focuses on the civic development of adolescents and emerging adults. His work has been published in scholarly journals such as the *Journal of Adolescent Research* and *Journal of Moral Education* as well as practitioner journals such as *Educational Leadership* and *Edutopia*. He also serves as the contributing editor for civic engagement for the *Journal of College & Character*. A former high school English teacher, he earned his doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard University where he trained under Dr. Howard Gardner.