

Reprint

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Poverty and self-indulgence: a critique of the non-deferred gratification pattern. In L.A. Ferman, Joyce L. Kornbluh, and A. Haber (Eds.), Poverty in America. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965. Pp. 285-302.

The history of this article is an interesting commentary on the development and dissemination of ideas. The basic outline of its concerns first appeared in Frank Riessman's unpublished doctoral dissertation. Class Differences in Attitudes Towards Participation and Leadership. Columbia University, 1955. Miller and Riessman developed the ideas in a series of papers; one "The Critique of the Non-Deferred Gratification Image of the Worker" (1956) was exclusively devoted to the non-deferred gratification pattern. They were never able to find an academic journal willing to publish it. The article was privately circulated until the editors of this volume asked to publish it. Meanwhile, Arthur A. Seagull had worked with Miller and did his dissertation. The ability to Delay Gratification, Syracuse University, 1964, on an experiment involving a test of the deferred pattern. Consequently, we were able to expand the article. One moral of this tale is that not only has the interest in poverty led to new work but that it also has disinterred neglected studies.

THE OUTPOURING OF SOCIAL SCIENCE LITERATURE on social class differences has led to efforts to develop general themes which codify the scattered data and provide ways of thinking about class dynamics. One such theme is that of the deferred gratification pattern, which is thought to provide the basis for the social and economic advance of the middle classes. Its presumed absence in the non-middle classes is regarded as a barrier to improvement among this population, and, for some, an explanation of why the poor are poor.

In the absence of competing explanations of the varied data, the deferred gratification pattern (DGP) has been in the first rank of principles explaining "lower class behavior." Indeed, it is probably the most frequently used element in discussion of lower class life. The recent attention to poverty has renewed interest in the DGP. Our feeling is that it is a thin reed on which to hang analyses of behavior and that logical examination of the concept and appraisal of empirical materials do not confirm its usefulness as an all-explanatory theme.

While we believe that the DGP concern does point to some important problem areas, we do not have confidence that it is a satisfactory summation of the data, nor that it can be mechanically applied to interpret low income life. Since it affects social policy we believe it must be closely appraised.

The Concept of the DGP

The DGP is frequently discussed in the negative--that is, the characteristics which result from its absence in low income life. Schneider and Lysgaard¹ have provided the most compact summation of the non-deferred gratification pattern. They have concluded that in contrast with middle class life, lower class life is characterized by an inability to defer gratification by "impulse following" rather than "impulse renunciation." The catalogue of lower class, "impulse-following" non-deferred gratification behavior includes: "relative readiness to engage in physical violence, free sexual expression (as through intercourse), minimum pursuit of education, low aspiration level, failure of parents to identify the class of their children's playmates, free spending, little emphasis on being 'well-mannered and obedient,' and short time dependence of parents."

On the other hand, "middle class persons feel that they should save, postpone, and renounce a variety of gratifications."²

Allison Davis' approach³ is central to the notion of ability to delay, or its concomitant, "impulse renunciation." Davis felt that starting with early child rearing practices there was less emphasis on impulse control among lower class parents than middle class parents. He felt that, "Generalizing from the evidence . . . we would say the middle class children are subjected earlier and more consistently to the influences which make a child an orderly, conscientious, responsible and tame person."⁴

Considering the behavior of lower income adults, Davis stated that their propensity for choosing immediate reward was an adaptive response to the slum environment. "The lower class people look upon life as a recurrent series of depressions and peaks with regard to gratification of their basic needs. In their lives it is all or nothing. . . . The learned fears of deprivation drive lower class people to get all they can of other physical gratification, 'while the getting is good.'⁵

The middle classes are believed to be distinguished by the presence and significant operation of the ability to defer gratification, to accept later rewards instead of immediate satisfactions, to bank their impulses, and to plan effectively for the future. The non-middle classes are believed to be characterized by the absence of these abilities. To some extent, then, the DGP statements are relative statements: the middle classes have more of the deferred patterns than do other classes (the upper classes are usually ignored in these discussions). Consequently, an examination must not only weigh the existence of these patterns among the poor but the degree of deficiency when compared with the middle classes.⁶

It is important to realize that an undertone of the DGP analysis is that the pattern is not temporary nor easily overcome. Indeed, the assumption is that the ability or inability to defer gratification is deeply embedded in the personality dynamics of the individual, performing an important role in the psychodynamic economy. The picture seems to be that the DGP or the non-DGP are developed through early life experience; they become incorporated in the personality and are relatively impervious to situational factors. We hasten to add that not all who espouse the DGP approach share the psychodynamic orientation or the notion of relative fixity. Perhaps, it is only ambiguous presentations which lead us to believe that most do.

Who Are the Non-Deferrers?

One of the difficulties in the discussion of the DGP is that the world is divided frequently into the middle classes and the non-middle classes. All in the middle classes are possessors of the ability to defer gratification, and those of the non-middle classes are bereft of this ability. Obviously, even among those who believe strongly in the dichotomous distribution of the deferring attributes, it is recognized at some level that it is not a 100 percent against a 0 percent distribution problem. Central tendencies are what are basically assumed--although some writing does not imply this--so that some middle class individuals do not possess the DGP and some non-middle class persons do.

Beyond the blurring of the distribution problem is the lumping of all who do not possess middle-level income or white collar jobs into the non-middle classes, frequently called "lower class." We have previously indicated the inadequacy of lumping together regularly employed, skilled, blue-collar workers with irregularly employed, low-skill service workers.⁷

More recently it has been pointed out that there is considerable internal differentiation among those at the lower-income end of the lower class. Four sub-groups among the newly rediscovered poor have been denoted: the stable poor, the strained poor, the copers/skidders, and the unstable poor.⁸ It is our suspicion that the kinds of attitudes and behavior which have been subsumed under the DGP term are most likely to be found among the unstable poor. It is misleading, then, to write as though all the poor have the same outlook as the unstable poor and will be benefited by the same social policies as might aid the unstable poor.

Since most analyses of attitudes and behaviors do not make fine distinctions within the poor or the lower classes, what might be real differences between the unstable poor and other groups of poor, near-poor and the middle classes do not appear in the available data.⁹ Nevertheless, while we believe that some DGP elements may be more characteristic¹⁰ of the unstable poor, we do not find the DGP concept a fully adequate way of understanding the behavior of the poor and of other non-middle class groups.

In investigations with no immediate middle-class comparison groups or in more general statements about the absence of the DGP among the poor, the middle classes are frequently explicitly or implicitly imaged in an out-moded way. They are regarded as delighting in hard work, frugally and carefully planning and budgeting every activity and expenditure, abjuring debt, and constantly foregoing the indulgence of present gain in order to reap future rewards. It is hard to recognize this "Protestant Ethic" pattern in the new middle classes possessed by "other direction" and pursuing the consumption euphoria of today. The rise of consumer debt among the middle classes, the refrain of "not being able to make ends meet" despite affluent income levels, the competition between work and the coffee break, suggest that important changes have taken place in many sections of the middle classes, or that the middle classes were never quite as described. Consequently, the comparisons with the middle classes are frequently of the actual behavior of the poor with "official norms rather than actual practice" of the better-off.¹¹ Some official middle class norms may have changed as well, compounding the irreality of the comparison.

The Logical Basis of the DGP

Before proceeding to evaluate research on the class distribution of the DGP, it is important to note some problems in the formulation of this mode of analysis. In order for a valid interclass comparison to be made, certain conditions must be met:

1. The two class groups must equally value the satisfaction that is being deferred. If the object is less valued by the low income group, then obviously the interest in making immediate sacrifices is less.

2. The two class groups must have an equal understanding and opportunity to defer an immediate gain for a future reward. If one group is not presented with or is not aware of the opportunities of future gain, then we cannot infer from the fact that it has not deferred that it is unwilling to do so.

3. The two class groups must suffer equally from the deferment. If one class has many more other satisfactions, then it is difficult to equate the impact of the deferment. Or, if the penalty of postponement is greater for one of the groups, the comparison falls down.

4. The two class groups must have the same probability of achieving the gratification at the end of the deferment period. If one group has less risk than the other or has more confidence that the gratification will be forthcoming, then the comparison is not valid. Objective and subjective risk must be comparable.

Clearly, no research meets these conditions. Indeed, it is probably impossible in real life to find circumstances under which these conditions prevail in groups differently situated in the social structure. It was these doubts that made us first ponder the usefulness of the DGP. In most situations talked about in relation to the DGP, middle class or higher income groupings are more likely than lower-income groupings to value the object that is deferred (sometimes because they know more about it; sometimes because of value choices); or they are likely to suffer less from a deferment of gratification (largely because they have alternative rewards), or they are much more likely to be sure of getting the reward at the end of the deferment period.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the same act can have quite different meanings and implications in the different settings of middle class and working class life. Deferment or non-deferment in the same situation may have different motivations in different groups. Caution must be exercised in order to avoid analyzing the behavior of the poor in terms of middle class experience without consideration of alternative explanations.

Nevertheless, class differences do exist. That one would expect differences between classes in their approach to life would seem incontrovertible, given differences in income, housing, education, and opportunities for upward mobility. It remains to be seen whether viewing these differences from a framework of "the ability to defer or to delay gratification," is helpful.

In our limited space, we cannot review every study that touches upon the DGP. We shall cite studies which question the appropriateness of the non-DGP for describing the behavior and attitudes of the poor. In a few studies, the investigators do not conclude that their data support the self-indulgence theme; in others, the investigators do conclude that their results support the non-DGP idea, but their data can be differently interpreted.¹²

We believe that data have been fairly consistently interpreted as supporting the non-DGP even where the results have been ambiguous. One purpose of this paper, therefore, is to free us to look in a more rounded way at the data and studies. By raising questions of interpretation, perhaps we shall begin to think of other alternative modes of analysis.

Spending and Savings

The ability to save--"to put money away for that rainy day," to forego the satisfactions of the immediate purchase, to resist "impulse buying"--are important elements in the DGP.¹³ Schneider and Lysgaard studied the DGP by asking 2,500 high school students whether they thought that their parents had saved money to give them a start in life. In the middle class, over 80 percent thought that their parents had saved for them, as contrasted to over 70 percent in the non-middle class groups, because differences were not controlled in the study. Although statistically significant, this difference between the upper and lower groups is not great when differences in income and hence available amounts for saving are considered. The non-middle class families--at least in the eyes of their children--were making efforts to help their children. And such efforts may have required more organization than in the middle class families of higher income.¹⁴

These findings of Schneider and Lysgaard are presented by them, however, to buttress the position that workers cannot defer gratifications as evidenced by the lower percentage reporting savings. Yet the same findings can be interpreted as indicating a restriction of consumption in order to save despite the obstacles of comparatively lower incomes.

Schneider and Lysgaard also observed class differences in response to the question, "If you won a big prize, say two thousand dollars, what would you do with it?" Again there is a small difference in the percentages of non-middle class and middle class students who indicate that they would "save most of it." They report this difference as indicative of less deferred gratification ability on the part of the worker. But over 65 percent of both class groups state that they would "save most of it," and the absolute class difference is less than 5 percent. Certainly, this small difference could be expected in terms of the likelihood that a larger proportion of the lower income group would need to spend more of its funds on direct economic necessities.

The difficulties of interpreting data are well revealed in William F. Whyte's findings that the corner boy shares his money with his friends.¹⁵ Schneider and Lysgaard infer that ". . . the corner boys must share their money with others and avoid middle class thrift." (Italics ours.) This is considered to be an illustration of a negative attitude toward deferring gratifications. But since money shared with others is unavailable for personal gratification, sharing might be considered under the rubric of "renunciation," and hence a delay of gratification, although there may be some gain in status.

To infer a distinctive value or attitude pattern from this kind of data seems somewhat questionable. Particularly is this so in the light of the report of McConnell who described the "savings" orientation of the blue-collar worker as "defensive savings" for a "rainy day" rather than as one focused toward status ascent.¹⁶ This observation suggests that the savings practices of workers may fit into a different pattern than that of middle class individuals. Therefore, their low rate of savings may not be affected by the same psychological focus which would presumably be important among non-saving middle class individuals.

School

Schneider and Lysgaard interpret the fact that working class and lower class adolescents leave school earlier as evidence of their inability to defer gratification. Ely Chinoy has well expressed this point of view:

The quick surrender of working class youth to the difficulties they face is not necessarily forced or unwilling. Although they are encouraged to focus their aspirations into a long future and to make present sacrifices for the sake of eventual rewards, they are chiefly concerned with immediate gratifications. They may verbally profess to be concerned with occupational success and advancement (as did fourteen working class boys who were interviewed), but they are likely to be more interested in "having a good time" or "having fun." They want to "go out," to have girl friends, to travel, to own a car or a motorcycle.¹⁷

While of course it is true that working class adolescents as a whole leave school earlier than do middle class youth, the question is whether the interpretation of this behavior is adequate. In addition to the school leaving statistics, at least three other items have to be considered:

1. The school situation, less enjoyable for the non-middle class youth than for the middle class youth because of its middle class structuring, teacher expectations, and utilization of class biased intelligence tests, is not comparable for the two--the strain of school is probably greater on the working class youth;¹⁸

2. Economic necessity undoubtedly contributes to the disproportionate withdrawal from school;

3. Lower income youth are, at least implicitly, being contrasted with the presumably deferred gratification middle class adolescent. A question therefore has to be raised as to whether today the latter typically give up spending money, good times, girl friends, travel, or a car in order to go to school or college. Stern has asserted that certain schools are "fountains of knowledge where the students come to drink," i.e., enjoy themselves.¹⁹

The motivation of the behavior of an individual cannot be fully understood unless attention is paid to the particular pressures on him and to the means and resources available to him in a physical, financial and cultural sense. The imputed contrast between middle class and working class youth has to be studied in terms of these factors. For example, Beilin concludes that college education was the culmination of a desire of the working class student, and hence a gratification rather than a postponement. In his questionnaire study, he found no relationship between ability to delay gratification and upward mobility in his lower class sample.²⁰

It is important to gather objective data concerning class differences in the area of education. Without a doubt, real class differences exist in attitude, dropout rate, and college attendance. One must be cautious, however, in ascribing a solitary motivation to a particular behavior, since individuals may react in an identical manner for very different reasons.

Sexual Experience

It is widely believed that differences between social classes in the amount of pre-marital sexual intercourse mirror differing ability to postpone immediate gratification and control "impulse following." The free and unrestrained sexual activity of non-middle class adolescents and adults is contrasted with that of their middle class counterparts. Allison Davis has presented a concise portrait:

Like physical aggression, sexual relationships and motivation are far more direct and uninhibited in lower class adolescents. The most striking departure from the usual middle class motivation is that in much lower class life, sexual drive and behavior in children are not regarded as inherently taboo and evil.

At an early age the child learns of common-law marriages, and extra-marital relationships by men and women in his own family. He sees his father disappear to live with other women, or he sees other men visit his mother or married sisters. Although none of his siblings may be illegitimate, the chances are very high that sooner or later his father and mother will accuse each other of having illegitimate children, or that at least one of his brothers or sisters will have a child outside of marriage. In his play group, girls and boys discuss sexual relations frankly at the age of eleven or twelve, and he gains status with them by beginning intercourse early.²¹

The Kinsey data are often cited to support the notion that the worker is sexually promiscuous and unable to defer gratifications.²² While there are many limitations to the Kinsey studies which we cannot enter into here, it is worth noting, if the Kinsey material is to be offered in evidence, that much of it is self-contradictory, and that much of it does not support the usual interpretation of workers' sexual behavior.

For example, Schneider and Lysgaard cite the Kinsey reports as supporting the conclusion that "relatively 'lower' class persons indulge considerably in premarital intercourse; 'upper' class persons show relative deferment of gratification in this section of behavior."²³ Schneider and Lysgaard omit, however, from the Kinsey reference the report that middle class males pet and masturbate more. Apparently, Schneider and Lysgaard do not consider the middle class premarital pattern of erotic involvement without intercourse as a sexual experience, although Kinsey emphasized that this is itself a middle class attitude:

The conflict (about sexual morality) is obviously one between two systems of mores, between two cultural patterns, only one of which seems right to a person who accepts the tradition of the group in which he has been raised. With the better educated groups, intercourse versus petting is a question of morals. For the lower level, it is a problem of understanding how a mentally normal individual can engage in such highly erotic activity as petting and still refrain from actual intercourse.²⁴

The investigator's definition of what constitutes sexual experience is a crucial variable in determining whether a difference will be noted in the ability of either class to delay, and not the subject's behavior per se. Non-middle class and middle class males differ more in their manner of achieving sexual gratification than in the amount of sexual experience achieved, considering all sources.²⁵

Even when using intercourse as the only criterion for sexual gratification, much of the data is contradictory and does not support the usual interpretation of the sexual behavior of the low income population:

1. While Kinsey reports that non-middle class males engaged in considerably more pre-marital intercourse than middle class males, no such class difference is reported for the females.

2. Kinsey finds that the middle class engaged in fellatio and cunnilingus to a much greater extent than did the non-middle class. He reported the latter as expressing disgust at these practices which are also violations of professed middle class mores. Thus, lower-income people avoided and condemned sexual practices which were not infrequent among middle class males, although they are counter to the usual middle class prescriptions.

3. Kinsey's data on nudity show that working class people are less likely to have intercourse without clothes than is true of middle class males.

Furthermore, according to McCoby and Gibbs, lower class parents are much less likely to permit their children to walk around naked in the house, and they are also less likely to appear unclothed before their children.²⁶ That this means is not entirely clear, but we may tentatively hypothesize that it is related to problems of crowded living conditions and to some concern for the development of children's ideas with regard to sex.

The data on masturbation, to some extent, lend support to this hypothesis. The studies of McCoby and Gibbs reveal that non-middle class families, far from encouraging indulgence of the child's sexual play with himself, are more concerned than are middle class parents to prevent sexual play. Now, this effort may be undesirable, but it certainly does not indicate any easy indulgence of the impulses of the child. The low-income child is much more likely to be punished for masturbatory acts than is the middle class child (whose parents may be more attuned to the contemporary demands of permissive up-bringing).

Kinsey's data on adolescents and adults, which indicate less masturbation on the part of the lower class, could be interpreted in terms of the latter's greater outlet in sexual intercourse. The definite inhibition of masturbatory behavior in childhood on the part of the lower class cannot, however, be as easily explained in terms of the usual image of sexual "freedom." Moreover, the attitudes toward masturbation developed in childhood may provide a more adequate explanation of adolescent and adult rates of masturbation in the lower class.

Further evidence of the intricate regulation of working class sexual life rather than its unrestricted "freedom" is found in Whyte's analysis of the slum sex code of Cornerville.²⁷ Some have taken his study to reveal sexual licentiousness on the part of the Italian working class youth whom he describes. Yet, as the term "the slum sex code" suggests, their sexual behavior is strongly regulated by codes and traditions. As Whyte points out, it is clearly taboo to have intercourse with "good girls," i.e., virgins and relatives of friends. What kind of intimacy is acceptable and with whom is governed by strong community norms.

The data on illegitimacy have also been misunderstood. The presumption is that non-middle class populations have higher rates than middle class; this empirical observation is used by some to support the notion of easy sexual indulgence by the lower classes. Both the reports of data and their interpretation are questionable.

Early research sampled only public clinics and hospitals; the conclusion was that unwed mothers tended to come from lower socio-economic levels and from broken homes. When a more representative sample was employed, including private physicians and hospitals, Vincent concluded that, contrary to earlier beliefs, "the unwed mothers. . . were not predominantly of low socio-economic status, nor even predominantly of any particular socio-economic status, nor even predominantly of any particular socio-economic stratum."²⁸

Furthermore, the illegitimacy rate by itself cannot be considered a behavioral measure of inability to delay, without controlling for "rate of illicit coitus"²⁹ and differential knowledge of contraceptive methods between classes.³⁰

Knowledge of class-linked sexual behavior does not lend itself to an easy summary. But the limited evidence that we have brought together should question the facile acceptance of the notion that the sexual practices and outlook of the non-middle classes clearly support the DGP interpretation.³¹

Ability to Delay

We have examined some of the case studies and questionnaire investigations on the ability to delay gratification. We shall now survey some of the relevant experimental literature on class differences in the ability to delay gratification.³²

Mahrer found that the expectancy that the "social agent" (S) actually would keep his word about bringing a delayed reward was an important cue for the choice of delayed or immediate reward.³³ His subjects were working class grade school children. He manipulated the level of their expectancy for reward in three different experimental groups by promising a delayed reward on each of four training trials, though keeping his promise none of the time in one group (low expectancy); twice in the second group (moderate expectancy); and all four times in the third group (high expectancy). The fifth trial (test trial) was a choice between two toys--a less valued toy to be had immediately or a more valued one obtainable after a day's delay.

He found that the "high expectancy" group differed significantly from the other two groups in choice of "delayed reinforcement." His results supported the position, at least for working class children, that it was the situation rather than the personality which determined whether they chose delayed or immediate reward.

He also found that neither the low, moderate, or high expectancy groups generalized from their experience with the E of the training trials (Ea) to a different E (Eb). "... the effects of training with Ea failed to generalize to Eb. Instead there were uniform reactions to Eb independent of the kind of training with Ea.... The implication is that delayed reinforcement behavior in general depends not only on the value of the reinforcements, but also on the expectancy for the occurrence of delayed reinforcement as related to the social agent involved."³⁴

Such a position militates against uniform interpretations of the ability to delay as a class-linked personality variable, since it was clear that the choice of reward was determined by the particular interaction with the experimenter.

Shybut used a composite measure to explore the relationship between the ability to delay and certain psychological and demographic variables, including several measures relating to social class.³⁵ The first two components were behavioral measures--a vote for a "record hop" within a week, or a "band dance" with a well-known and much-liked band a month from the testing; and a "thank you ticket" worth 25c, 35c, or 50c in merchandise at a store, depending on how long the subject delayed cashing in the ticket. The third, a projective measure, was an essay about their personal reaction to obtaining a large windfall of money. A "Delayed Gratification Index" (DGI) was constructed from the responses to the three measures.

There was no significant relationship between the DGI and socio-economic level as defined by any of the following criteria: paternal occupation, family income, an index of the number of people per room at home, or paternal education. Thus, on a well constructed, composite measure there was no indication that socio-economic classes differed in ability to delay. Ethnic groups, "Anglos" and "Non-Anglos" (Indians) did, however, differ, the Non-Anglos having a significantly higher DGI than the Anglos.

Seagull³⁶ investigated Mischel's hypothesis that the choice of delayed gratification might depend on the degree of trust the subject has for the E, rather than on the class affiliation. Children were given Mischel's choice between one bar of candy now or two bars in a week.³⁷ For the second and third sessions, however, the classrooms were randomly assigned to a trust condition (that E kept his promise about bringing the candy) and a mistrust condition (where E did not). After the promise was kept or broken, the children again chose to delay or not.

The results were clear cut. The first week, when there was no experimental manipulation, no differences appeared between children from any social classes, or between white or Negro children. The second and third session, there was a large and significant difference between the Trust and Mistrust conditions in choice of delayed reward in the expected direction. It should be noted that there was no indication of a differential rate of sensitivity to trust or mistrust, since the rate of change was the same to or from a delay reward choice for the different social groups.

Thus, for those children whose socio-economic level was definable, there were no differences in ability to delay on the choice presented, while the differences in choice when they could trust the E or not were very large and significant.

The situational variable, then, rather than class affiliation determined the ability to delay. Though there are many other populations and choice stimuli to be sampled, the data do not support the hypothesis that the ability to delay is class-linked at least over the whole range of subjects and situations.

Conclusion

The studies that we have reviewed do not instill confidence in the sweeping conclusions of the DGP. Obviously, our interpretations of data can be questioned. Our intention is not to foreclose discussion on the usefulness of the DGP concept, but to encourage study of it and competing explanations.

We do feel that many lower-income people have a shorter time perspective than do many middle-income persons. The shorter time outlook may handicap many of the poor. But we are not sure that the shorter time perspective is always linked with an inability to defer gratification. More importantly, we do not view all those who seem to be unable to defer gratification as so psychodynamically constrained that the ability to delay is unavailable to them. For some, this is undoubtedly true. But for others, situations which offer perceived hope do lead to postponement and planning.³⁸ They may not be able to overcome all the obstacles which face them, but they are not locked into self-indulgence.

The experimental studies on the importance of trust underline the significance of situational rather than psychodynamic variables. The former perspective leads us to provide situations which do, in truth, offer chances of payoff for possibilities of helping individuals to learn the kinds of patterns that may be important for their well-being. We do not doubt, for example, that lower income youth could have school experiences which work toward expanding the time in which the youth expect to get a return for their activities.

Many studies show that educational level is the major variable explaining different social class behavioral/attitudinal patterns. This conclusion suggests that we are not dealing with outlooks that have an immutable quality; rather, they are affected by knowledge, and understanding. They are subject, consequently, to influences and change.

The DGP emphasis leads to social policies which emphasize "rehabilitation" rather than expanding opportunity. Some of the poor obviously need "rehabilitation" in order to take advantage of opportunity. For others, opportunity may reduce the need for "rehabilitation."

Our objections to the DGP emphasis do not rest with its social policy implications. At the level of social science analysis, the verdict on the DGP is "not proved." It is not adequate as the major, and sometimes sole, variable in explanations of the behavior of the poor. By recognizing the limitations as well as the insights of DGP approach, we might move to search for alternative or supplementary explanations of the attitudes and behavior of that large slice of the American population who are not in the middle classes.

Footnotes

¹Louis Schneider and Sverre Lysgaard, "The Deferred Gratification Patterns: A Preliminary Study," American Sociological Review, 18 (April, 1953), pp. 142-49. We place a heavy emphasis on this article because it is a thoughtful effort to integrate a variety of studies.

²Sverre Lysgaard, "Social Stratification and the Deferred Pattern," Proceedings, World Congress of Sociology, Liege, International Sociological Association, 1953. p. 142

³Allison Davis, Social Class Influences Upon Learning, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949; Allison Davis and Robert J. Havighurst, "Social Class and Color Differences in Child-Rearing," American Sociological Review, II, 1946, pp. 698-710; Allison Davis, "Child Rearing and the Class Structure of American Society," in The Family in Democratic Society, Anniversary Papers of the Community Service Society of New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1949.

⁴Davis and Havighurst, op. cit., p.707.

⁵Davis, Social-Class Influence Upon Learning, p. 27.

⁶We shall not discuss the social value of the deferred gratification patterns and the possible individual and social prices exacted by them. The avidly melancholy voice of Paul Goodman has been raised in question of the pain of impulse-renunciation. Indeed, some of those who pioneered the concept of deferred gratification like Allison Davis, were extremely critical of the price the middle classes paid for their impulse-renunciation, though feeling that it would be well for the less affluent to pay this price in order to advance. Nor do we question whether the DGP is a sine qua non for the development of occupational skills although we doubt that it is. See S. H. Miller, "Dropouts--A Political Problem," in David Schreiber, ed., The School Dropout, Washington: National Education Association, 1964.

⁷S. M. Miller and Frank Riessman, "The Working-Class Subculture: A New View," Social Problems, 1961. Reprinted in Arthur Shostak and William Gomberg, eds., Blue Collar World, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964, and in Frank Riessman, The Culturally Deprived Child, New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

⁸S. H. Miller, "The American Lower Classes: A Typological Approach," Social Research, 1964. Reprinted in Frank Riessman, Jerome Cohen and Arthur Pearl, eds., Mental Health of the Poor, New York: Free Press, 1964; in Shostak and Gomberg, op. cit.; in Shostak and Gomberg, eds., Perspectives on Urban Poverty, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

⁹Unfortunately the absence of refined social-class categories means that data on "the lower class" may in some studies we cite refer mainly to the upper working classes. We reluctantly and tacitly accept this group in the discussion of "the poor," because of difficulties in developing principles to include or exclude studies. Since the cited studies are used in buttressing the DGP position, we feel it important to raise questions about them.

We have used interchangeably terms like the non-middle classes, "the poor," "the lower classes" to refer to the groups which are being contrasted with the middle classes.

¹⁰By using "more" we mean to imply that the comparison is with the middle classes and that the unstable poor may not be "typically" characterized by these attributes. While more of the unstable may have these attributes, these practices may not characterize the overwhelming majority.

¹¹S.M. Miller and Frank Riessman, op. cit., p. 90. For changes in child-rearing practices in the middle classes, see Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Socialization and Social Class through Time and Space," in Eleanor E. Maccoby, Theodore M. Newcomb, and Eugene L. Hartley, eds., Readings in Social Psychology, New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1958.

¹²In citing studies we do not wish to imply that the investigator himself necessarily believes in the value of the DGP analyses. Rather, his work has been interpreted as supporting evidence.

¹³This paragraph and the two following are based on Frank Riessman, Workers' Attitude Towards Participation and Leadership, op. cit., pp. 94-96. In this analysis we have refrained from making methodological criticisms of studies.

¹⁴The importance of impulse-buying among the middle classes suggests that the propensity to defer and save receives great competition from the propensity to consume even among the better off.

¹⁵William F. Whyte, Street Corner Society, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

¹⁶John McConnell, The Evolution of Social Classes, Washington: American Council on Public Affairs, 1942, pp. 144 ff.

¹⁷Ely Chinoy, Automobile Workers and the American Dream, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1955, p. 113.

¹⁸Riessman, The Culturally Deprived Child, passim.

¹⁹G.G. Stern, "Characteristics of the Intellectual Climate in College Environments," Harvard Educational Review, 33, 1963, pp. 5-41.

²⁰Harry Beilin, "The Pattern of Postponability and Its Relation to Social Class and Mobility," Journal of Social Psychology, 44, 1956, pp. 33-48. Unfortunately, Beilin defined "lower socio-economic group as those subjects 'whose fathers were in the lower middle class or below' (in such classification schemes as Warner's." Cf. Murray Straus, "Deferred Gratification, Social Class, and the Achievement Syndrome," American Sociological Review, 27, 1962, pp. 326-335.

²¹Allison Davis, "Socialization and Adolescent Personality," in Guy E. Swanson and Theodore H. Newcomb and Eugene Hartley, eds., Readings in Social Psychology, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1955.

²²A.C. Kinsey and others, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948. A.C. Kinsey and others, Sexual Behavior in the Human Female, Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1953.

²³Schneider and Lysgaard, op. cit., p. 143.

²⁴Kinsey, et al., Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, p. 541.

²⁵In Kinsey's large sample, lower class males reported more premarital and extra-marital intercourse in the early years of marriage, and more intercourse with prostitutes, than did middle class males. Middle class males reported premarital petting and masturbation, and more extra-marital intercourse later in marriage. Can class-linked personality traits be legitimately inferred from these differences in sexual behavior when the definition of sexual experience is itself class related?

²⁶Eleanor Maccoby, Patricia K. Gibbs, et al., "Methods of Child-Rearing in Two Social Classes," in William E. Martin and Celia Burns Stendler, eds., Readings in Child Development, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954, pp. 386-96.

²⁷William F. Whyte, "A Slum Sex Code," American Journal of Sociology, XLIX, 1943, pp. 24-31, reprinted in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour M. Lipset, eds., Class, Status and Power, Glencoe: Free Press, 1953. We are indebted to David Matza for bringing to our attention the misleading interpretation of the Whyte data.

²⁸Clark E. Vincent, Unmarried Mothers. Glencoe: Free Press, 1961, p. 64.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰The importance of viewing alternative explanatory possibilities is shown in Cavan's explanation of why lower income groups have large families. (Ruth Cavan, The American Family, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1953, pp. 182 ff.) In a sophisticated sociological discussion she reviews the effects of the larger number of Catholics in the non-middle classes, the expense and self-discipline involved in using contraceptives, the asset value of children as early wage earners (which, incidentally, is quite a long range deferred gratification view), and the lesser financial burdens that low-income children impose upon their families compared to the funds expended on middle class children. Some of the reasons stated by Cavan for large, low-income families are undoubtedly correct, but other, unmentioned reasons also exist. For example, the significance of the family as a crucial cooperative unit for many low-income groups is overlooked or the possibility of a positive feeling towards children and a desire to have a "big family" as a way of life.

³¹Lee Rainwater, And the Poor Get Children, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960.

³²Because of space limitations, we do not discuss the experimental literature or temporal orientation. In any case, the connection between temporal orientation and ability to defer gratification is not clear-cut. Cf. Levon H. Melikian, "Preference for Delayed Reinforcement: An Experimental Study Among Palestinian Arab Refugee Children," Journal of Social Psychology, 50, 1959, pp. 81-86; Walter Mischel, "Preference for Delayed Reinforcement and Social Responsibility," Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology, 1961, pp. 1-7. The discussion borrows from Seagull, op.cit.

³³Mahrer, A.R., "The Role of Expectancy in Delayed Reinforcement," Journal of Experimental Psychology, 42, 1956, pp. 101-106.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Shybut, J., Delayed Gratification: A Study of Its Measurement and Its Relationship to Certain Behavioral, Psychological and Demographical Variables, Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Colorado, 1963.

³⁶Seagull, op. cit.

³⁷Walter Mischel's work has been influential. See his "Preference for Delayed Reinforcement: An Experimental Study of a Cultural Observation," Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology, 56, 1958, pp. 57-61; "Delay of Gratification, Need for Achievement and Acquiescence in Another Culture," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 62, 1961, pp. 543-552; "Father-absence and Delay of Gratification," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 63, 1961, pp. 116-124; "Reward as a Function of Age, Intelligence, and Length of Delay Interval," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 64, 1962, pp. 425-431.

³⁸For a sophisticated approach to a situational analysis see the important article by Louis Kriesberg, "The Relationship Between Socio-Economic Rank and Behavior," Social Problems, 10, 1963, pp. 334-53; also in the Reprint Series of Syracuse University Youth Development Center.