

The Stigmatization of Poverty in America: A Look at International Public Perceptions of the Poor

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Abstract

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As poverty is defined by a unique set of standards in each country, the perception of those living in poverty also differs within each culture.

In America, poverty is not only defined by failure to meet an income parameter as defined by the government, by lack of a home, or by the inability to obtain vital necessities. Stereotypes are prevalent and define those experiencing poverty as having a ‘look’, an untreated disease or disorder, a flaw of character, or even a lifestyle deserving of destitution. As confirmed by modern literature and historical media, such stereotypes and stigma are engrained in American society. The existence of this commonplace stigma can even be considered responsible for further perpetuating the issue of extreme poverty in America.

The implications of stigma are vast and include—increased tension in communities with wealth disparity, prevalent stereotypes that lead to profiling and injustice, decreased private contributions to nonprofit organizations serving the homeless and poor—and lack of public support for tax-funded welfare programs and of organizations providing service for issues commonly associated with poverty, such as substance abuse or mental illness. Inevitably, stigmatized issues are underfunded, advocacy efforts are silenced by indifference, and the nation’s limited resources are more heavily distributed towards those problems that are backed by public support.

It is critical to alleviating extreme poverty in America that we understand how stigma is developed and then associated with an issue. Gaining a deeper understanding of what factors impact public opinion internationally will empower policy makers, social change advocates and nonprofit agencies to rid people experiencing poverty of social stigma.

The goals of this paper are to prove the existence of social stigma associated with poverty in America, compare it to public opinion in other developed countries internationally, draw conclusions about which factors may correlate with stigma, and identify the implications of negative public opinion on the issue of poverty.

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Introduction

According to the US Census Bureau in 2012, 46.5 million Americans are considered at the poverty rate or below. This number accounts for 15% of the total population. On a daily basis many of these Americans rely on government assistance to meet basic needs, such as the 47, 305, 667 citizens using the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) as of 2013 to feed themselves and their families. It is also estimated by the Congressional Research Service that there are 664, 414 identifiably homeless individuals in America on any given week. According to the US Housing and Urban Development agency, over one year's time 1,593,794 people relied on shelters due to chronic homelessness (HUD, 2007). Due to lack of precise and prolonged measurements though, it is likely that this estimate is exponentially higher.

Based on my experiences working at a local daytime homeless shelter in Bloomington, Indiana I became fascinated by the local culture that I felt clearly divided the rich and poor and, at times, unfairly perpetuated the association of homeless people with crime and flaws of character.

With such large numbers of citizens experiencing poverty in every state and major city in America, it is critical to gain public support for solving this issue through tax dollars and private contributions. Inherent stigmatization of the poor is intangible and difficult to prove; however, understanding public perceptions of the poor is critical to gauging how difficult the climate is for gaining support of tax-funded government welfare and similar nonprofit services. It is also beneficial to understand the rationale behind public stigmatization of the poor in order to one day work towards changing

perceptions, and for this reason, I will be analyzing social survey questions regarding causes of poverty and success. It is necessary for our country to utilize modern data in order to validate the presence of discrimination, alienation and stigmatization of the poor in this country—opposed to just referencing isolated incidents of intolerance.

A goal of this paper is also to examine American perceptions of poverty as compared to other developed nations internationally. Perhaps when compared to other country's data it will be apparent that there is a heightened level of public disapproval for helping the poor in America, which could provide citizens with insight about the harshness and ramifications of their majority's set of beliefs.

In the following document I intend to utilize international survey data to prove the existence of stigmatization of the poor around the world, most specifically in America, and to conclude how this may affect America's ability to solve the issue of poverty. The research question that will guide my analysis is: *What factors indicate that poverty is stigmatized in America and how does negative public perception impact the public and nonprofit sectors' ability to solve the issue?*

In addition to proving the existence of stigma and to drawing conclusions about how America compares internationally, I will determine if there is any correlation between public perception and a set of hypothesized factors. Understanding if these factors are related to increased or decreased levels of negative public perception could assist nonprofit organizations and the government trying to rid the poor of their stigma by providing insight as to what may be causal factors. This could be done in future research.

The hypotheses are as follows:

1. Public Spending

The amount of public spending devoted to public services, such as welfare, influences the public opinion on poverty.

2. Religion

A country's relationship and affiliation with a centralized religion influences the public opinion of those experiencing extreme poverty.

3. Race and Ethnic Makeup

The racial and ethnic makeup of a country influences the public perception of those experiencing extreme poverty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The economic climate in the US perpetuates poverty at rates that are disproportionate to other developed and westernized nations—to generalize, “no European city has experienced the level of poverty and racial and ethnic segregation that is typical of American metropolises [and] there is no real European equivalent to the plight of American ghettos, as physically isolated, deteriorated, and prone to violence as the inner-city ghettos” (Wilson, 1997, 149). Despite alarming rates of homelessness and poverty, in comparison to its total overall wealth, “social citizenship rights in the United States are less developed and less intertwined with rights of political and civil citizenship” (Wilson, 1997, 155) than in other parts of the world. It is commonplace in American society to encounter the beliefs that “economic outcomes are determined by an individual’s efforts and talents (or their lack) and that general economic inequality is fair” (Wilson, 1997, 159). Such little support to help those in desperate need of basic quality of life and high levels of tension between those at the top and bottom of society indicate the existence of a unique set of beliefs and values in the United States, which historically have further perpetuated the issue of poverty.

The Welfare System

The recipients of modern-day government assistance are inherently divided from the rest of America, as a result of welfare stigma. As noted by Simmel, a recipient of assistance becomes an outsider and “an object of the community’s actions, rather than a member of that community” (Simmel, 1908; Rogers-Dillon, 1995, p. 441). Taxpayer resentment is prevalent in the media and the notion of social-citizenship exists within

American culture (Goffman, 1986; Roger-Dillon, 1995, p. 443). A system facing prolonged and ever-increasing distrust from the public cannot continue indefinitely. Both the successful survival of a tax-funded welfare system and the willingness of citizens to receive its services are jeopardized by the stigmatization of poverty (Besley, 1992, p. 1).

Impacts of Stigma

There is a causal relationship between stigma and discrimination (Newell, 2007, p. 1). It is valuable to consider how discrimination and self-discrimination impacts those living in poverty. The cycle of poverty is perpetuated by the effects of self-discrimination (Mai, 2004) “where an individual feels unworthy or guilty, leading to a lack of self-worth and depression and abnormal behavior such as self-isolation, avoidance behavior and introversion” (Mai, 2006; Newell 2007). Lack of confidence, negative self-perception and a heightened self-awareness deter individuals to take action necessary in changing their lives, and cause a distrust and avoidance of institutions designed to solve their very problems (Newell, 2007, p.1; Iceland, 2012).

Known risk factors associated with a lack of self-confidence, caused by discrimination and self-discrimination, also include substance usage and abuse, higher dropout rates, and unsafe sexual behaviors. It is hypothesized that the poor’s division from mainstreamed society has caused a high concentration of poverty in urban areas and the development of so-called ‘ghettos’ and ‘urban slums’. Evidence supporting this claim further connects stigma to the risk factors found in these areas—such as crime, violence, gang activity, adolescent pregnancy, and high incarceration rates.

Stigma also causes racial tension in communities. Misconceptions perpetuated by

racial stereotypes of minorities “increase white American’s opposition to welfare and perpetuate longstanding stereotypes of African Americans as poor and lazy” (Gilens, 1996, pp. 517-18; Katz and Braley 1933). Violence is an additional risk factor for areas with considerable racial and wealth disparity.

Underfunding of social service organizations has a causal relationship to stigma as well. The collapse in funding for Aid for Families with Dependent Children “is related to fundamental assumptions about the nature of welfare and welfare families, including beliefs that most welfare families are long-term recipients and that most are black women with many children” (Wilson, 1997, p.166).

In order to confront the notion that Americans blame the poor for their destitution and associate particular diseases, traits, races and lifestyles with the population, further investigation is needed through data analysis. Proving that these beliefs are not universal will require data from international nations as well, especially those that through comparison will rule out western-values, geographical region, race distribution and religious makeup as causes for this set of beliefs.

Process and Methodology

To determine each country's public perception of poverty I utilized reputable social survey research with relevant questions. In order to attribute the findings of each survey to the general population I weighted each sample based on the particular survey's guidelines and then analyzed the data in IBM's SPSS Software. I also only included a comparison of numbers that were statistically significant based upon a T-test.

First, I conducted research to find large-scale national social surveys from any country that asked questions about perceptions of the poor, the causes of poverty, and its government's response. Unfortunately, there is not one social survey administered in each country around the world so it was necessary to compare surveys administered by different research groups, using different methods and in different nations. In order to narrow my scope I identified the following criteria for selecting surveys and deeming them to be comparable:

Criteria for Selection

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Wording | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The same question and answer options, but if distinct: virtually interchangeable and fundamentally equivalent in wording |
| Time of Administration | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Administered within a close range of each other (ideally, the same year)• Administered as recently as possible in year |
| Scale and Validity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distributed on a large enough scale for the results to represent the national population• Distributed by a survey research group reputable enough to produce results from a national sample, over a span of years |

Wording

Although each survey has different questions relevant to public perceptions of the poor, I only selected research groups that asked virtually interchangeable questions fitting in to at least two or more of the following categories of questions:

- Reasons for success
- Reasons for failure
- Perception of welfare and government assistance
- Perceived conflict between rich and poor

Timing

Since timing was also a crucial factor to maintaining the validity of my results, I decided to select 2000 as the target year for each survey. While there have been relevant social surveys administered more recently than this, and even by some of the same research groups that I utilized, I opted to look at data that was slightly older in order to get the largest possible range of comparable surveys. Five out of the seven surveys that I used were administered in the year 1999 or 2000, which means that I was able to capture public perceptions in virtually the same time period in up to 30 countries, since one of the surveys (the ISSP) conducts research in 26 nations. In total, I used data from 43 nations, so this is a large proportion.

Although the Mexican survey selected (the Encuesta de Movilidad Social) strayed from the target year, as it was administered more recently in 2006, I thought it was critical to include it regardless because it serves as a second nation in North America to compare with the United States, a comparator for Chile as another Spanish-speaking and heavily Catholic country, and because its questions were essentially identical to a number of the other survey groups'. Similarly, the European survey (the Euro-barometer) that I

selected does not match the target year either. Although it is a slightly more outdated version than others in its own social survey series, the questions asked exclusively in the 1993 version “4.0 Poverty and Social Exclusion” were most interchangeable with those in the other selected surveys. I also determined that a slightly outdated version of this particular survey was worth the timing limitation because it captured perceptions of poverty in an additional 12 countries, in Europe, and with increased accuracy, as the questions were all asked in an identical manner across all nations.

Scale and Validity

While I did not place a target number on the sample size or number of respondents, I did only use data collected by national research groups that was intended to represent the national demographics. Scale and validity stuck out as important during my preliminary literature review when I determined that there were a number of individuals administering small-scale, very localized, one-time surveys for school projects or other research projects. Although these surveys may have captured relevant and even valid public perceptions, I wanted to maintain the validity of my results by only including national research groups that had conducted social surveys over a span of at least ten years.

The Surveys

The following chart specifies the characteristics of each of the different surveys. While they all incorporate an interviewer, this is carried out in different ways. All research groups have different scripts, probes, or policies that specify the freedom in which an interviewer can interact with the respondent. Additionally, although the number

of respondents differs vastly, each of these surveys is representative of the entire population, once weights were applied. From top to bottom the chart provides: the name of the research group and survey, the year it was administered, the country it was given in, the number of used responses, and the style of administration.

(see Appendix A for entire list of ISSP and Euro-barometer Countries)

| <i>Euro-barometer: 4.0 Poverty and Social Exclusion</i> | <i>Polish General Social Survey</i> | <i>Int'l Social Survey Program: Social Inequality</i> | <i>NatCen Social Research: British Social Attitudes Survey</i> | <i>Encuesta Centro De Estudios Publicos</i> | <i>US General Social Survey</i> | <i>Encuesta ESRU de Movilidad Social</i> |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|---|
| 1993 | 1999 | 1999 | 1999 | 2000 | 2000 | 2006 |
| 12 Countries | Poland | 26 Countries | Great Britain | Chile | USA | Mexico |
| Approx. 1000 per country | 11,192 | Approx. 1000-4000 by country | 3,287 | 1,500 | 4,026 | 10,000 |
| Interview administered | Interview and questionnaire | Oral and written survey | Interview administered | Interview administered | Interview administered | Interview administered |

In terms of analysis I downloaded all of the survey data from public sites or was granted access through the research institution due to my affiliation with Indiana University. I imported the raw data from all survey respondents to all questions asked, isolated the relevant questions identified from the questionnaires, and created Frequency Tables. These tables illustrated the percentages of people who selected each answer and I then consolidated many of the answer choices in Microsoft Excel for analysis—for example “strongly disagree” with “disagree”.

Limitations

Despite efforts to minimize errors in conducting research and drawing conclusions, limitations inevitably arise. Based on the nature of my project, there were a

number of foreseeable limitations; specifically, because I was comparing different surveys the validity of my result could have been affected by a variety of factors. Distinctions in seemingly interchangeable questions and answers could cause for different responses, as similar words can sometimes carry unique connotations, especially cross-culturally and after being translated. Similarly, differences in the survey administration can affect the honesty of responses, especially when it comes to sensitive perception questions. The difference in years for the surveys must also be addressed as a limitation, as well as the fact I did not test the countries over time. Not testing them over time means that results could have been skewed, if the survey was given after a period of particular turmoil or an isolated incident that influenced public perception.

When compiling a list of these survey research groups, it became apparent that the vast majority of countries with such specific social analysis were OECD member nations and other developed countries. It is logical to assume that developing countries have less social science research, related to the sociology behind social mobility and perceptions, because they are nations more focused on meeting the basic needs of their citizens. Other research is more beneficial in these developing nations than in developed countries that have researchers considering more abstract concepts—and also surveys may not be fundamental in these cultures. This lack of social science survey research and language translation barriers prevented me from comparing US perceptions mainly with Asian and African developing countries. Thus, a limitation of my research is that the United States is not compared to all nations, providing an incomplete representation of US rankings and comparisons.

Results

The results of my data analysis show prevalent stigmatization of the American poor through evidence of widely-perceived conflict between rich and poor citizens, lack of public support for poverty-alleviation by the government, and prevailing beliefs that personal flaws and choices determine economic failure and success, opposed to impacts from external factors. Additionally, America ranks as one of the least polarized countries regarding these sentiments, in comparison to other countries with smaller minorities indicating conflict and stigmatization. The following sections speak to the specific indicators of heightened stigmatization in the United States.

Causes of Poverty

The General Social Survey and five of the other surveys asked a question about what causes poverty to occur in society, providing answers that included both external circumstances and factors beyond a person's control, and also personal characteristics and choices that are at fault. As seen in Appendix B, nearly half of Americans (51%) cited "lack of will" as a reason for the existence of poverty. By comparison, a stronger majority of Polish citizens responded with the same and Mexico actually cited "laziness and lack of initiative" as their top cause of poverty. That said, all the countries in Europe responded with vastly lower responses of selecting "laziness" as a top-three cause— with the highest country's percentage still being nearly 60% less than America's. The difference between a strong American majority believing that the poor are lazy, whereas in Europe this is only a marginal minority, indicates a clear difference in public sympathy. These kind of responses also indicate that there would logically be a difference

in public support of the poor through welfare services and personal monetary contributions, between the US and Europe.

Another indication of Americans believing that flawed personal choices, reckless lifestyles and poor character result in poverty is the even stronger majority, nearly 75%, selecting “loose morals and drunkenness” as a cause when surveyed. This evoked the highest number of responses in the US in comparison to the other response options. This question also illustrated an increased number of Europeans associating substance abuse with the poor because of the inflated numbers that selected “drunkenness” as a top-three cause. Across Europe it seems that there may be some presence of an assumption that poverty is related to alcohol abuse. It may also be noteworthy to consider that both Chile and Mexico had numbers three-times as high for laziness as a cause, in comparison to “alcoholism”. This is an interesting distinction because poverty is clearly stigmatized in Mexico, as “laziness and lack of initiative” was marked as its top cause for poverty, yet there is not the same increased association of substance abuse with the poor there, as seen in Europe and the US. See Appendix C for visual representation of the data.

Causes of Success

In order to provide a balanced perspective of what the public thought it took to be successful, I also examined its thoughts on education, a well-referenced factor impacting economic success and failure. Although the US had 45.7% of Americans citing lack of education as a reason for poverty, they differed from Poland and Chile, which selected this as their answer with the highest number of respondents. The United States had the most respondents select “drunkenness” as a cause of poverty, which illustrates the belief

that poor personal choices, more so than poor circumstances, cause economic hardship. See Appendix D for a chart of America's overall responses.

Perceived Conflict

Another theme that presented itself through out my search for national social surveys was 'perceived conflict' between rich and poor within countries. More than some other questions, this really gets at the center of what the experience is like within a country between the people at the top and bottom of society. My rationale for selecting this question was that if people could express why they believe others are poor, especially if their beliefs are considered socially unacceptable or offensive, they may be able to better report on the dynamic that the poor experience culturally, in a matter-of-fact manner. I believe that the existence of reported conflict between rich and poor shows that there must be stigmatization, discrimination, and alienation of the poor within a nation—whatever the reasoning and rationale is behind this.

The US ranked second behind Chile in terms of highest perceived conflict, but with numbers quite similar to Poland. More than half of Americans (57.8%) reported very strong and strong conflict between the rich and poor. When compared to the European countries however, it is clear the United States is experiencing a higher level of palpable conflict than most countries—more specifically, the US reported the 6th highest perceived conflict out of 22 countries, putting its rates in the top third. This is an indication of heightened tensions correlated to those experiencing poverty and in need of help, again proving that there is an uphill battle specifically facing the US government and nonprofit industry in gaining public support. It is also notable that when phrased

slightly differently, 72% of Americans reported strong conflict between people at the “top and bottom of society”, whereas Poland’s reported rates did not fluctuate very much (56% to 48%). This is an indication that the US could potentially have even higher rates of strong conflict between rich and poor, but that the wording of the original question caused fewer people to report so. (Appendix E)

Perception of Government Assistance

The most striking result that I found was that the US ranks absolutely last in public support for government “reduction of income differences between rich and poor” out of 23 countries (Appendix F). This, logically, confirms that Americans are not in favor of supporting people who they consider to be responsible for their own destitution. It is clear that the extent to which American’s distrust or disapprove of the government’s ability to solve the problem of poverty is not occurring across the board internationally. This could indicate that Americans feel the people receiving welfare are not worthy of it, that they disapprove of the American welfare system in terms of functionality, or perhaps that there is widespread perceived abuse of the system.

Theses and Findings

Gaining an understanding of what factors may be correlated to public perceptions is key to promoting future research on the causation of stigma within society.

Determining causation would be important to preventing the development of stigma within a society and to gaining public support for stigmatized issues. For this reason, I examined three potential factors in relation to public perception by country.

Race

When considering race as a factor potentially correlated to public perception, I focused on the homogeneity of a country. As shown in Appendix G, Poland is the least racially/ethnically diverse (96.9% White). I concluded that there is no correlation between homogeneity and levels of poverty stigmatization because the US is at the opposite end of the spectrum, with very little homogeneity (79% White), yet there is almost no distinction between Poland and the United States' perceived conflict and data overall. Similarly, much racial and ethnic diversity is unrelated to public perceptions, because France and the USA rank very closely in terms of diversity, but are polar opposites in terms of perceived conflict and other data. Only 27% of people in France reported conflict between rich and poor, whereas in the US, nearly 60% of people reported conflict. There was also no correlation to be drawn between particular races and public perceptions.

Religion

I looked at three factors when considering potential correlations between religion and public perceptions—homogeneity and strong centralized religion, particular religions, and percentages of unaffiliated or non-practicing. Again, the US and Poland

prove that while they both produced similar numbers in terms of perceived conflict, the nations are polar opposites in terms of homogeneity. The US is the most religiously diverse of the countries I focused on (51% Protestant), as seen in Appendix H. Great Britain ranked as the second least homogenous, but proves to have vastly more support for government reduction of income differences than the US. I determined that a nation's relationship with a centralized religion and/or its religious homogeneity has no correlation to particular public perceptions.

The United States reported the highest percentages of unaffiliated citizens and although they have heightened levels of perceived conflict, France ranks second (12% unaffiliated) and has the lowest reported perceived conflict between rich and poor. There appears to be no correlation between high percentages of non-believers and increased stigmatization of poverty. Similarly, no particular religion seemed to be correlated with particular public perceptions—high levels of Catholicism, Christianity, nor any other specific religions seem to impact beliefs about poverty.

Public Spending

There is a direct and positive correlation between public spending internationally and negative public perceptions of poverty, though the casual relationship is indeterminable. Chile and the US spend the lowest percentage of their GDPs on public expenditures and have the highest perceived conflict, while France has the lowest perceived conflict between rich and poor, and it spends the most on public services for the poor. Although it is not possible to determine the cause of this relationship with certainty, it is possible that either the public in certain cultures has historically looked

favorably upon services for the poor, which allows their governments to spend more money on public expenditures, or that the government's large spending on services for the poor has had an affect on the way people feel about helping each other, thus changing the culture and public perceptions as a result of spending. See Appendix I for a visual representation of this correlation.

One other factor to be considered when examining what factors impact public perception is poverty rates within countries. The following is a chart indicating my findings:

| Country | % Below the Poverty Line | % Perceiving 'strong conflict' between rich and poor |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Chile | 15.1% | 81.7% |
| USA | 15.1% | 57.8% |
| Poland | 10.6% | 56.9% |
| Great Britain | 14% | 49% |
| France | 7.8% | 27.2% |

While countries with higher poverty rates do positively correlate with higher levels of conflict between rich and poor, I do not definitively determine that high poverty rates cause higher conflict. This is because the poverty rate in US and Chile is identical, yet the perceived conflict in Chile is much higher. Similarly, the perceived conflict rate is nearly identical between the US and Poland but the poverty rates differ by 5%. Although the poverty rate in France is half of what Chile's is, the perceived conflict is disproportionate, as perceived conflict in Chile is nearly three-times what it is in France. Thus, although higher poverty rates are positively correlated to increased levels of conflict between rich and poor, I do not conclude that the numbers are directly proportionate or causally correlated. Further investigation would need to be conducted in order to determine the causality between this correlation.

Impacts

My compilation of findings has the opportunity to be used as a point of reference for sociologists investigating stigma and others doing research in both poverty studies and international studies. Understanding what causes poverty to be stigmatized could provide insight as to why other social issues are stigmatized—such as substance abuse, mental illness and rare disease. Stigma is also a relevant topic for those trying to alleviate poverty because it creates additional problems for the poor, as mentioned in the Literature Review. Highlighting the role that the media plays in misrepresenting the poor may also bring awareness of this to the public, and thus, impact their decision to heavily rely on news sources in forming their opinions.

Impacts on Policy

Policy-makers should engage in the discussion on stigma because if the public is misinformed about the causes of poverty, because of widespread stereotypes, than perhaps policy decisions should not be based on public support. In our government system, politicians are elected by the public to carry out what their constituents are particularly in favor of. As a result, legislation in favor of greater governmental support of the poor is never carried out in a transformative way because the majority of Americans disapprove of it. It is logical to assume that policy makers will not work on legislation that supports the very people whom most Americans believe to be undeserving of help and responsible for their own destitution because it would also impact their ability to get reelected.

Another obstacle to promoting policy that supports this stigmatized population is that the American poor have little power or voice in society, and would only cost the government additional money. There are few benefits given to politicians working to help the poor by the poor because they do not have high positions within corporations or society in general. While benefits for the poor over time would help to increase literacy rates and generate more productive citizens, and thus a stronger economy, politics is slow to take action on policy that costs money now for an unpredictable return generations later.

Impacts on the Nonprofit Sector

Intuitively, nonprofits supporting issues that the public inherently disapproves of will not be supported by private contributions either. It is logical that advocacy efforts in promotion of services for the American poor and any related nonprofits working to serve this population are perpetually underfunded or even stigmatized in the same way that the people are. In a sector that relies on convincing people of the worthiness of their cause, in order to generate enough money to operate, a further limited pool of prospective donors is never favorable. While this increases the likelihood that existing poverty-alleviation nonprofits will have a hard time surviving due to decreased public support, it also means that fewer nonprofits focused on poverty alleviation are likely to be started due to their high-risk nature.

Corporate funding and the blending of the private and nonprofit sector is becoming increasingly more commonplace, which is further disadvantaging the nonprofit sector's ability to assist in providing public services for the poor. Publicly accepted,

beloved, and trendy issues that have positive branding potential are those that Corporate Sponsors support because any association with stigmatized issues could negatively impact corporate revenues and reputation.

Stigmatization can also negatively impact this nation's wealth disparity and poverty rates. In the 1980's when AIDs was still widely stigmatized, the actual progress of the disease suffered. The research doctors unwilling to conduct research on it, the patients too ashamed to seek proper care for it, and society's unwillingness to donate private contributions to nonprofit organizations working to solve and advocate in favor of it, perpetuated its epidemic status. Deaths from and rates of AIDs were higher during its time of widespread, international stigmatization. The intangible existence of stigma can have real impacts on lives and the ability for an issue to be solved.

The nonprofit sector's ability to provide services and advocacy for stigmatized issues, specifically for the homeless and poor, is diminished by negative public perception.

Conclusion

Through researching and analyzing the differences in public perception of poverty around the world, it is apparent that the United States is one of the least sympathetic countries when it comes to perceptions of the poor. The highest disapproval of government support, even compared to other countries in North America, with similar poverty rates, development, Western-culture, and racial and ethnic makeup means that there is a fundamental difference in the American belief system at work and potentially responsible for these differences.

As seen through different media sources over generations and fundamental cultural pieces of literature, like the Horatio Alger children's stories that perfectly define the "American dream" belief system, there is a unique standard set in the US impacting public perceptions of those unable to succeed. Our unique preservation of the belief that effort and honest work ultimately lead to success, due to the very nature of our country and economic system, creates the stigmatization of economic failure. Americans look to other reasons as to why people cannot provide basic necessities for themselves, since it is inherent in our culture to not first blame external factors such as the government, educational system, or even the poor economic climate.

This unique set of beliefs is validated by one of the ISSP survey questions, in which the USA majority (61%) responded three-times higher than France (20%) and Poland (21%) that "people get rewarded for their effort" (Appendix J). While race and religion are not correlated to public perception, it is clear that spending on public

expenditures and this unique set of American values are directly and positively correlated with the heightened conflict between the rich and poor in this country.

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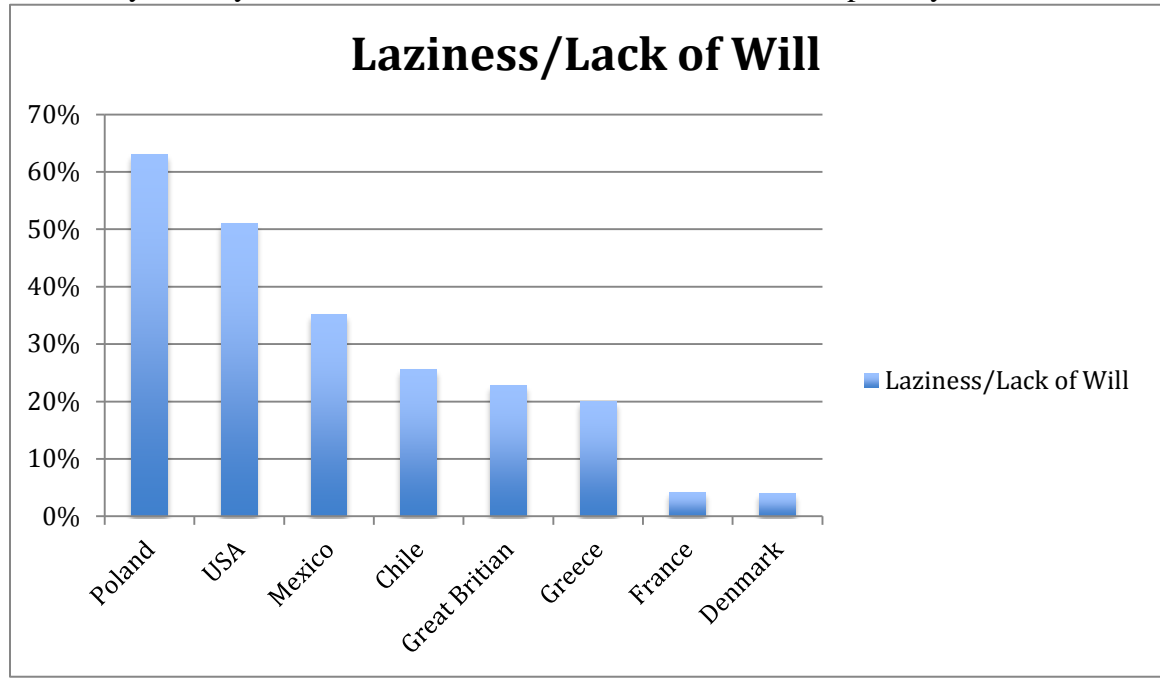
Appendices

Appendix A

| ISSP Countries: | Euro-barometer Countries: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Austria• Australia• Bulgaria• Brazil• Canada• Czech Republic• Chile• Switzerland• Germany• Hungary• Denmark• Spain• Israel• Japan• Latvia• Ireland• Netherlands• Norway• New Zealand• Poland• Philippines• Portugal• Russia• Sweden• Slovenia• USA | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greece• Finland• Luxembourg• Germany• Great Britain• Portugal• Italy• Spain• Belgium• Ireland• Norway• Netherlands• France• Denmark |

Appendix B

Results by country for “Laziness and Lack of Will” as a cause of poverty:

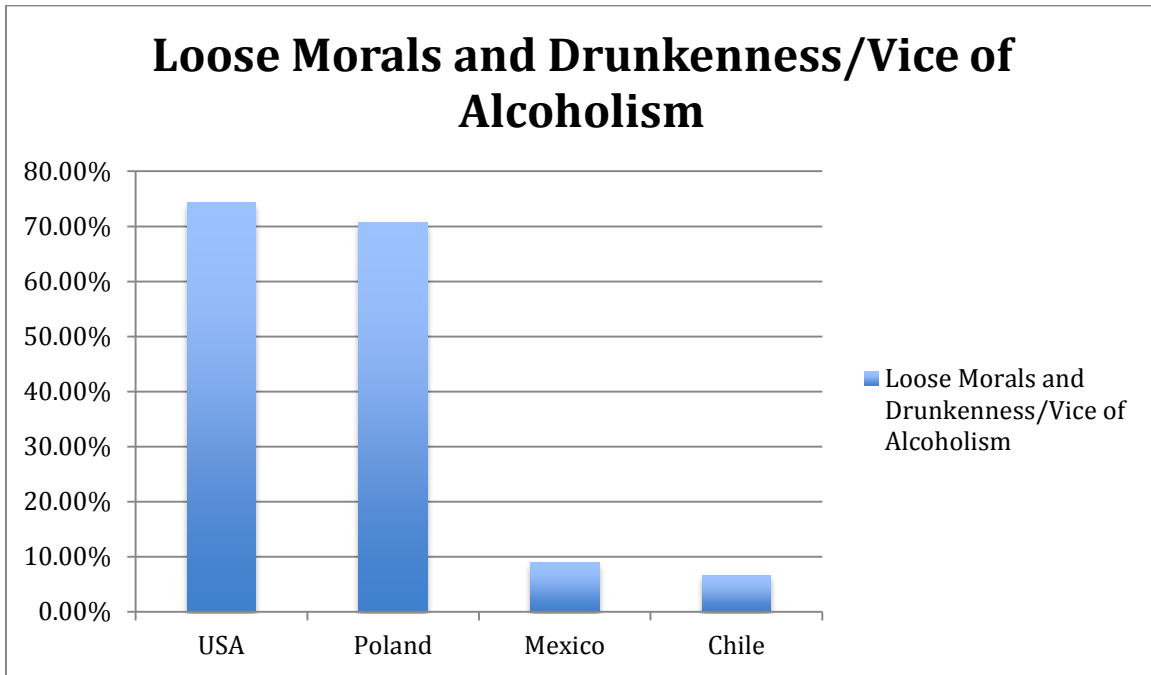


Euro-barometer Full Order of laziness as a cause of poverty

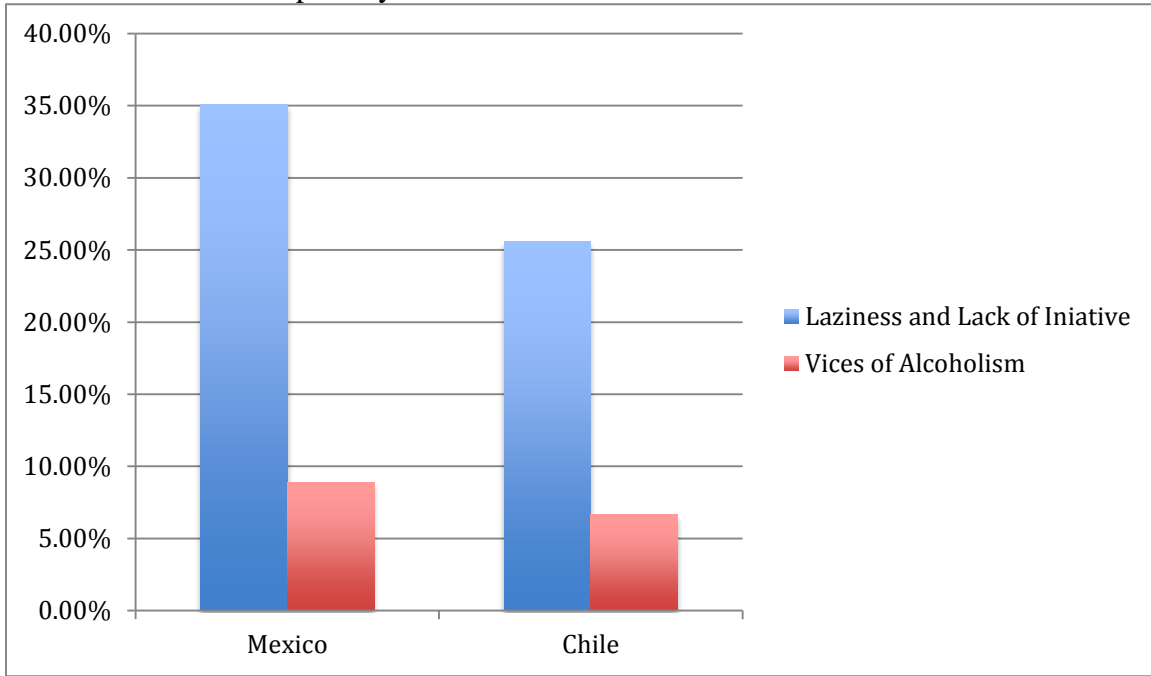
- **20% Greece**
- **16.9% Finland**
- **15.3%Luxembourg**
- **14.7% Germany**
- **9.3 Great Britain**
- **8.8% Portugal**
- **7.7% Italy**
- **7.6% Spain**
- **7.4% Belgium**
- **6.3% Ireland**
- **6% Norway**
- **5.9% Netherlands**
- **4.1% France**
- **3.9% Denmark**

Appendix C:

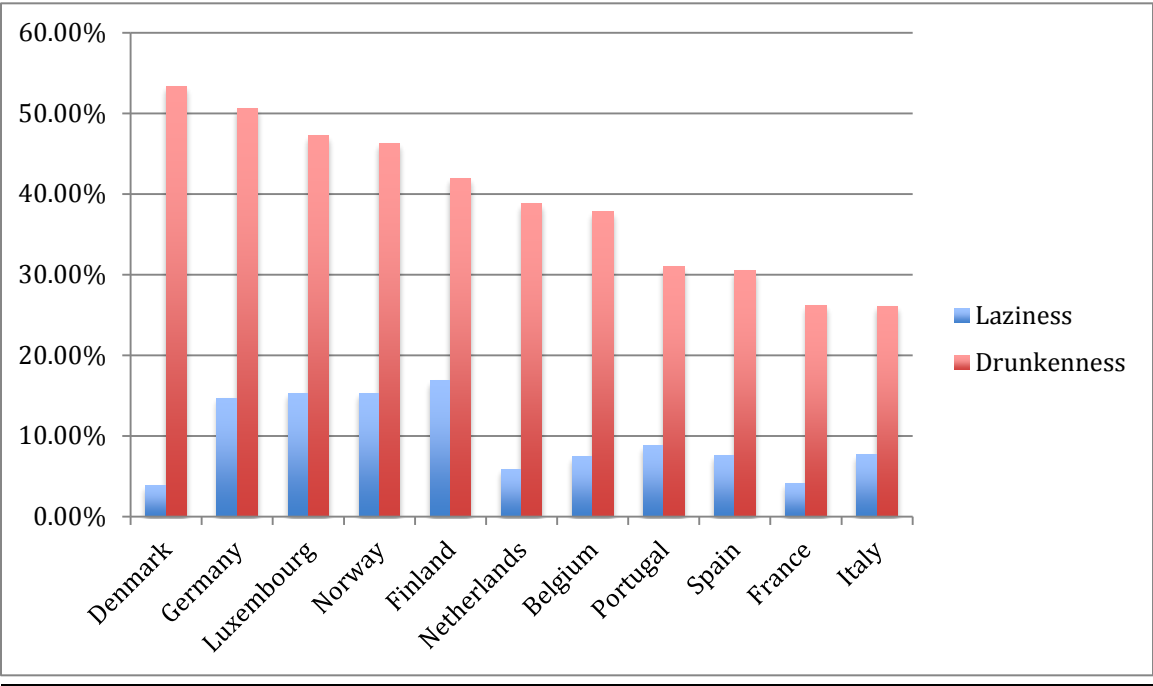
Results by country for “Drunkenness” as a cause of poverty:



Mexican and Chilean decreased numbers related to alcoholism, when compared to laziness as a cause for poverty:

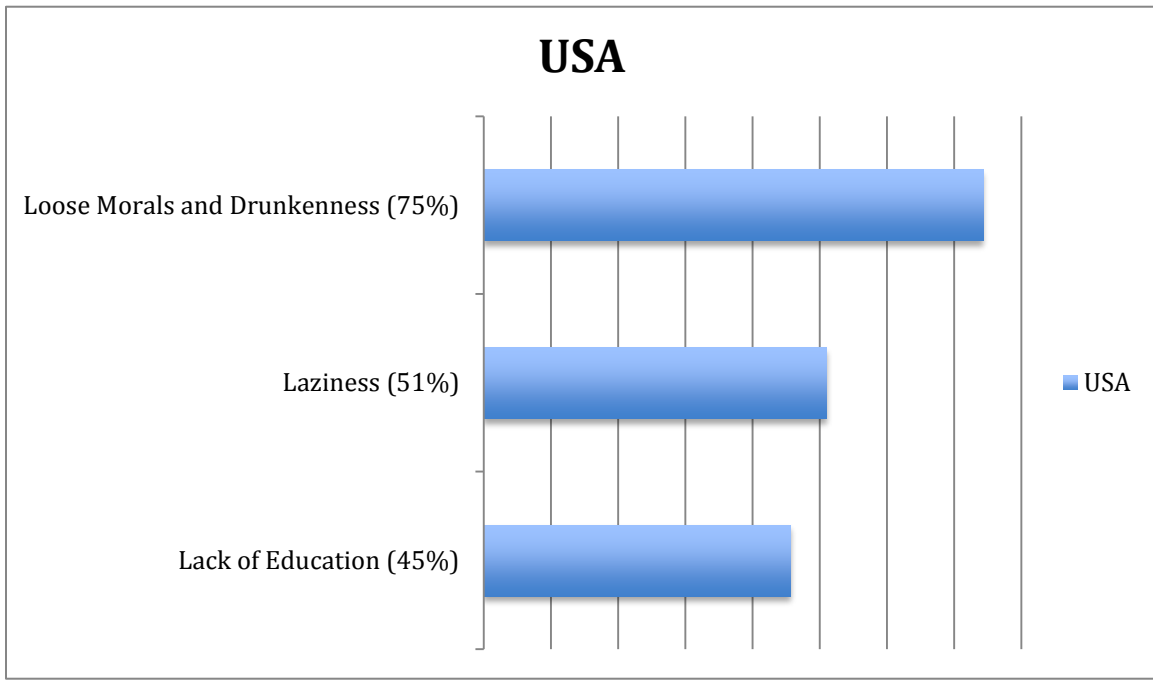


European heightened numbers related to alcoholism as a cause of poverty – Showing association of drunkenness with poverty



Appendix D:

The USA's responses for causes of poverty:



Appendix E:

Perceived conflict rankings:

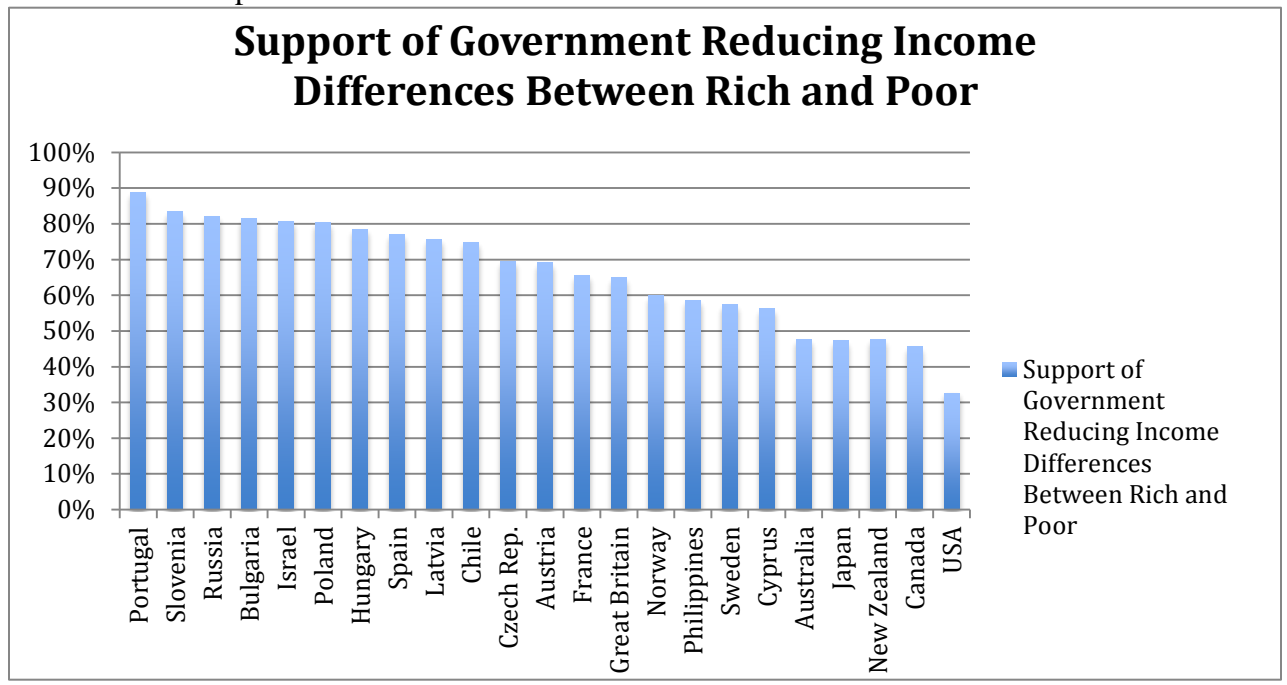
ISSP & Other Countries Combined

“Very Strong and Strong Conflict”

- **Chile 81.7%**
- **Hungary 77.3%**
- **Portugal 75.7%**
- **Russia 73.6%**
- **Philippines 63.9%**
- **USA 57.8%**
- **Latvia 58.2%**
- **Poland 56.9%**
- **Great Britain 49%**
- **New Zealand 43.7%**
- **Slovenia 38.3**

Appendix F:

Rankings by country in support of government taking action to reduce income differences between rich and poor:



Appendix G:

France as a comparator:

| | <u>France</u> | <u>USA</u> |
|--|----------------------|---------------------|
| <u>Laziness</u> | <u>4.3%</u> | <u>51%</u> |
| <u>Loose Morals & Drunkenness</u> | <u>26.2%</u> | <u>74.3%</u> |
| <u>Strong Conflict</u> | <u>27.2%</u> | <u>57.8%</u> |
| <u>Government Support</u> | <u>65.5%</u> | <u>32.6</u> |

Race by country (showing the top largest ethnic/racial group) in order of least homogenous to most:

| <u>Country</u> | <u>Mexico</u> | <u>USA</u> | <u>France</u> | <u>Great Britain</u> | <u>Chile</u> | <u>Poland</u> |
|---|---|--------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| <u>Largest Ethnic group by %</u> | <u>60% Amerindian- Spanish</u> | <u>79.96% White</u> | <u>N/A, estimated 85%</u> | <u>87.2% White</u> | <u>88.9% White and non- indigenous</u> | <u>96.9% Polish</u> |

Appendix H:

Top majority religious groups by country, in order of least homogenous to the most:

| USA | Great Britain | Chile | Mexico | France | Poland |
|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|----------------------|
| 51.3% Protestant; 23.9% Catholic; 12% Unaffiliated | 59.9% Christian; 7.2% Unaffiliated | 66.7% Catholic; 16.4% Protestant | 82.7% Roman Catholic; 4.7% unaffiliated | 88% Roman Catholic; 5-10% Unaffiliated | 89.8% Roman Catholic |

Appendix I:

Correlation between percent spent on Public Expenditures and conflict levels by country:
(shows that the more spent, the less conflict)

| Country | % GDP on Public Expenditures | % Perceiving Strong Conflict between rich and poor |
|---------------|------------------------------|--|
| Chile | 13.82% | 81.7% |
| USA | 28.87% | 57.8% |
| Poland | 25.27% | 56.9% |
| Great Britain | 27.73% | 49% |
| France | 32.05% | 27.2% |

| Country | % Below the Poverty Line | % Perceiving Strong Conflict between rich and poor |
|---------------|--------------------------|--|
| Chile | 15.1% | 81.7% |
| USA | 15.1% | 57.8% |
| Poland | 10.6% | 56.9% |
| Great Britain | 14% | 49% |
| France | 7.8% | 27.2% |

Appendix J:

Responses of strongly agree and agree to ISSP statement: “People get reward for their effort in this country”

| Country | % Believing in reward for effort | % Perceiving Strong Conflict between rich and poor |
|---------------|----------------------------------|--|
| USA | 60.7% | 57.8% |
| Chile | 37% | 81.7% |
| Great Britain | 32.6% | 49% |
| Poland | 21.8% | 56.9% |
| France | 20.3% | 27.2% |